Comparing Factors Shaping Sexual Violence Perpetration for Sexual and Gender Minority Youth and Cisgender Heterosexual Youth

Ronita Nath,[1] iD **Michele Ybarra,[2]**
Margaret MacAulay,[1] Koby Oppenheim,[2]
Lauren Jackson,[2] Ida Frugård Strøm,[2] iD
Richard Sullivan,[1] Shannon Millar,[1]
and Elizabeth Saewyc[1]

Abstract

Sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth experience higher rates of sexual violence victimization than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts. Very little is known about how the minority status of SGM youth contextualizes their victimization and perpetration experiences. In one-on-one interviews with 39 SGM youth and 11 cisgender heterosexuals (non-SGM) youth, we compared the contextual factors shaping sexual violence victimization and perpetration between the two groups using a qualitative descriptive approach. Interviews highlighted how SGM youth continue to experience extensive discrimination that negatively impacts all aspects of their lives, while non-SGM youth do not discuss having to navigate stigma and discrimination in their lives. SGM youth pointed to a lack of understanding of sexual violence within the SGM community. Both groups believed that SGM perpetration was unlikely: while most SGM and non-SGM youth agreed that

[1]University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
[2]Center for Innovative Public Health Research, San Clemente, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Ronita Nath, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 2B5, Canada.
Email: ronita.nath@ubc.ca

sexual violence between youth was a problem, same-gender perpetration was seldom discussed. Unlike their non-SGM counterparts, SGM youth felt that they were targeted because of their sexual and gender identity. SGM youth also felt that they were more vulnerable to sexual violence because of how they physically looked, particularly if their gender expression did not match cis-normative expectations. SGM youth reported facing unique pressures when seeking support as a victim, particularly a fear of being outed or stigmatized as part of the process. They also conveyed that SGM people worried about being treated unfairly if they reported sexual violence to authorities. Findings suggest that stigma and concerns of discrimination are unique aspects of sexual violence for SGM compared to non-SGM youth. All youth need to have access to sexual violence prevention education that includes SGM and non-SGM youth as both victims and perpetrators to begin addressing these noted disparities in experiences.

Introduction

Sexual violence is a significant adolescent health issue associated with negative psychosocial and physical health concerns. Adolescents who have been victims of sexual violence report higher rates of negative emotional and physical health outcomes compared to nonvictims, including depression, suicide ideation and attempts, chronic inflammation, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and substance abuse (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Howard & Wang, 2005; Walsh et al., 2012). Victims of sexual violence also have reported poorer psychological functioning relative to nonvictims (Brown et al., 2009; Howard & Wang, 2005).

Sexual violence includes rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment (Basile & Saltzman, 2002) and is common in adolescence: A study by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in 2001 found that 81% of students were victims of some form of sexual harassment during their high school years (AAUW, 2001). More recently, data from a nationally representative online survey of approximately 2,000 adults found that 57% of women and 42% of men reported experiencing sexual harassment and assault by age 17 (Kearl, 2018). One's first victimization most frequently occurred between the ages of 14 and 17 (Kearl, 2018).

Rates of sexual violence perpetration are less commonly reported than sexual violence victimization, and far lower: The United States national Growing up with Media study ($n = 1,058$) found that nearly 1 in 10 youths reported some type of lifetime sexual violence perpetration, with 4% (39 males and 10 females) reporting attempted or completed rape (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2013). Given that sexual violence perpetration is considered unacceptable or even criminal behavior, young people engaging in such behavior may avoid reporting it because of social desirability bias or they may not recognize having done it.

Sexual violence victimization is particularly a concern for sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth. In the 2011 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2012), 64% of SGM youth reported being victims of sexual harassment; whereas in a survey of the general U.S. population, 48% of youth reported sexual harassment victimization (Hill & Kearl, 2011). The online Teen Health and Technology survey of 5,907 13 to 18-year-old internet users in the United States found that SGM students reported higher rates of sexual harassment victimization than their non-SGM peers (Mitchell et al., 2014). In this study, lesbian/queer girls reported the highest rates of past-year sexual harassment victimization (72%), followed by bisexual girls (66%) and gay/queer boys (66%). Heterosexual boys and girls reported the lowest rate of sexual harassment victimization (23% and 43%, respectively). The authors of this study suggested that sexual orientation and gender identity were key factors in understanding the risk for sexual harassment victimization in adolescence.

Some studies have also found that SGM youth experience higher rates of sexual assault victimization compared to their heterosexual counterparts. In a large university survey administered to 5,718 students, 40% of the SGM participants ($n = 158$) reported at least one of five types of sexual assault victimization compared to 24% ($n = 1,073$) of the heterosexual participants (DeKeseredy et al., 2017). Ford and Soto-Marquez's (2016) campus survey found that the rate of sexual assault victimization reported by gay men (24%) was nearly equal (24.7%) to that reported by heterosexual women in their sample, while bisexual college women experienced sexual assault victimization at a much higher rate (37.8%).

It is important to note that the aforementioned statistics do not distinguish between sexual violence experienced at the hands of a same-gender versus other-gender perpetrator. According to Clodfelter (2014), other-gender sexual violence has been more studied than same-gender sexual violence, and in fact, very little is known about the extent of same-gender sexual violence.

In one of the few studies to assess the gender of the perpetrator of partner violence among youth, Jones and Raghavan (2012) found that 43.5% of SGM college students (n = 57) reported dating violence perpetration within the past 12 months. Literature addressing how this extends to sexual violence is lacking.

Studies have found that homophobic name-calling in adolescence contributes to an environment where sexual violence emerges (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010). Kimmel and Mahler (2003) and Marsden (2018) noted that among boys and young men whose masculinity had been compromised through homophobic name-calling, masculinity was something that could be reinstated through violent action. However, little research examines how stigma and discrimination against SGM youth contextualize sexual violence victimization and perpetration. According to the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), SGM youth face internal (e.g., identity concealment) and external (e.g., discrimination and rejection) stressors, which increases their risk for victimization and negatively impacts mental health and social relationships (Edwards, 2018; Meyer, 2003). It is important to understand how SGM youth and heterosexual cisgender youth experience and articulate their thoughts on sexual violence because differences in victimization between the two groups may be due to structural forces that encompass systems of hierarchy and inequity.

In short: Although sexual violence is a significant public health and adolescent health issue, and researchers continue to document endemic rates of sexual violence, little is known about how sexual violence is similar and different for SGM and non-SGM youth—particularly those who are younger than or outside a university setting. This is particularly true in terms of how the minority status of SGM youth frames their victimization and perpetration experiences. We endeavor to address these gaps with qualitative interviews from 60 youth living across the US who reported prior involvement in sexual violence.

Method

Our analysis is based on data collected as part of the Growing up with Media study, a quantitative, national longitudinal survey examining the emergence of sexual violence victimization and perpetration in adolescence in the United States. For the purposes of examining the contextual factors shaping sexual violence perpetration for SGM youth compared to self-identified heterosexual and cisgender youth (whom we will refer to as non-SGM youth), we interviewed 40 SGM youth and 20 non-SGM youth from the larger survey

cohort. Participants were purposefully sampled such that almost all of these participants self-reported sexual violence victimization and/or perpetration. The current analysis is based on interviews with 39 SGM youth and 11 non-SGM youth of various gender identities, sexual orientations, and race/ethnicity identities (Table 1). All of the participants reported sexual violence perpetration in the quantitative survey. Most reported both sexual violence perpetration and victimization (92%). Those who exclusively reported victimization were excluded ($n = 10$). Most participants were 14 or 15 years old, but ten participants were in their twenties. Although we recognize that participants in their twenties are developmentally different from participants who are 14 or 15, we included them because older youth sometimes have further insights as they think back on their previous experiences and are sometimes better able to articulate their thoughts than younger youth. All procedures were approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board in Canada and the Pearl Institutional Review Board in the United States.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants.

	Sexual and Gender Minority Youth ($n = 39$)	Exclusively Heterosexual and Cisgender Youth ($n = 11$)	All ($n = 50$)
Age			
<18 years	58%	22%	80%
≥ 18 years	20%	0%	20%
Gender identity			
boy or man	34%	14%	48%
girl or woman	26%	8%	34%
genderqueer/non-binary/pangender	8%	0%	8%
trans boy or trans man	4%	0%	4%
Other/decline to answer/unsure	6%	0%	6%
Sexual orientation	Sexual minority	Exclusively heterosexual	All
Bisexual	38%	0%	38%
Gay	36%	0%	36%
Straight/Heterosexual	6%	20%	26%

	Sexual and Gender Minority Youth (n = 39)	Exclusively Heterosexual and Cisgender Youth (n = 11)	All (n = 50)
Pansexual	20%	0%	20%
Questioning	18%	0%	18%
Queer	16%	0%	16%
Lesbian	6%	0%	6%
Asexual	6%	0%	6%
Unsure	2%	0%	2%
Victimization and perpetration			
Self-reported perpetration only	4%	4%	8%
Self-reported perpetration and victimization	74%	18%	92%

Participants

Participant recruitment and data collection took place from February 2018 to October 2019. To be eligible to participate, participants had to be between the ages of 14 and 26 years old, English-speaking, and U.S. residents who completed the Growing up with Media survey. We used a matrix sampling approach (Guest et al., 2006) to ensure maximal variation and information power (Malterud et al., 2016; Thorne, 2016). Maximum variation was sought in age, gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, and sexual violence victimization/perpetration status. Participants were provided a $40 incentive (USD) in the form of an Amazon.com gift card or a donation to a charity of their choice.

Data Collection

The study involved one-on-one semi-structured telephone (n = 48) or text message (n = 2) interviews with participants. While our initial design did not involve text message interviews, we amended it after some prospective participants reported that talking over the phone was a barrier to participation. We found that although conducting text message interviews were more time-consuming than one-hour telephone conversations (one lasted over three consecutive afternoons), the data were no less rich and this mode helped us recruit youth from harder to reach groups, particularly sexual minority boys.

The interviewer reviewed the consent form with the participant and obtained verbal or written consent prior to starting the interview. Telephone interviews typically lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and text message interviews typically lasted 3 to 6 hours. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In the interviews, youth were asked about their definition of sexual harassment and sexual violence, its causes, their main sources of information about sexual harassment, and their ideas for things that might help reduce sexual harassment and violence in the future. Specific questions they were asked include:

> When you hear the word sexual harassment, what do you think of? Do you think that the kinds of sexual harassment teens experience could be different depending if they're straight and cis versus if they're gay, bisexual or trans? Do you think that LGBTQ youth or teens can rape someone?

Analysis

We undertook a qualitative descriptive approach to examine how the understanding of sexual violence among SGM participants compared to that of non-SGM participants. According to Sandelowski (2000), qualitative description is useful in uncovering essences of phenomena that have been incompletely conceptualized by prior research. Qualitative description does not demand a high level of inference (Sandelowski, 2000); rather the data are typically presented in the everyday language of the participants. The primary purpose is to produce a descriptive summary of an event, organized in a way that will be most relevant for the audience for which it is written.

In accordance with qualitative description, the transcripts were thoroughly read before coding began to gain an in-depth understanding of the interviews. We developed initial codes that closely reflected the spoken word of the participants. The codebook was continuously refined and altered as additional interviews were analyzed. Codes within each group of participants (SGM youth versus non-SGM youth) were studied separately for similarities, differences, and recurring patterns, such that themes reflecting a broader perspective or concept emerged. The themes were interpreted from participants' narratives and illustrated a shared meaning of experiences. The themes combined categories and brought together similar ideas or experiences. The themes recognized among the SGM youth group were then compared and contrasted to the themes among non-SGM youth. Memos written during the coding process were drawn upon for insights at this stage of the analysis. Abstract interpretation of the results was kept to a minimum. Co-authors RN

and SM analyzed a sample of 10 transcripts together to develop the initial codebook. They analyzed the remainder of the transcripts independently but came together to refine the list of themes. Preliminary findings were shared with other co-authors for feedback throughout the analytical process.

We used queer theory to frame the analysis and place results into context. Queer theory builds upon feminist theory, sexuality, and gay and lesbian studies (Seidman, 1994), identifying how social institutions such as the nuclear family, medicine, and the state privilege normative conceptions of sex and gender while punishing perceived transgressions (Rubin, 1984). Given our focus on understanding differences between SGM and non-SGM youth experiences, queer theory literature helped situate our findings.

Results

Participants drew from their lived experiences and social environments to offer insights into how stigma and discrimination contributed to the sexual violence victimization of SGM youth.

Stigma and Discrimination in the Daily Lives of SGM Youth

Given research that suggests non-inclusive environments may facilitate the emergence of sexual violence (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Marsden, 2018), an understanding of the living spaces that SGM and non-SGM are tasked to navigate each day will provide context for experiences with sexual violence.

SGM youth shared that, despite the increasing acceptance of SGM people, being a young person with a SGM identity was still challenging in a society largely oriented toward cisgender heterosexuality. SGM youth described experiencing stigma and discrimination by their peers and in their communities. Non-SGM youth did not speak of experiencing similar challenges, and mostly described for themselves, and believed that SGM youth had similar, positive experiences within their immediate and broader contexts.

Compared to non-SGM youth, SGM youth described feeling stigmatized and discriminated against by their peers in school. They reported a normalization and acceptance of SGM youth's subordinate status at school, which was reinforced by reports of severe hostility against SGM youth. Despite noting the presence of many other SGM students, one SGM participant reported "[hearing] the F slur everyday" and believed that some SGM students also experienced physical victimization. (Gender not disclosed, gay/bisexual/queer, Hispanic/Latino, age 15) Unsurprisingly, witnessing such stigma and discrimination also had a chilling effect on minority expression.

One participant who reported experiencing significant school-based bullying in the past for being perceived as gay cited it as a barrier for coming out. (Boy, gay, Black or African American, age 15)

SGM participants said that those whose gender identity or expression did not fit the status quo were even more vulnerable to being socially targeted. For instance, one SGM participant shared that her straight friends were accepting of her sexuality but not her gender identity: "Normally they're pretty accepting about, like, the whole pansexual thing and they understand it. It's not like anything I've really dealt with but it's more the genderqueer that I've gotten made fun…" (Genderqueer/non-binary/pangender, pansexual, mixed race, age 15) Thus, even in the most progressive circles where sexual orientation is embraced, gender is still heavily policed.

Set against a heteronormative context, we found that the visibility of sexual desire and attraction by SGM youth was subject to more pronounced stigmatization and discrimination. One SGM participant shared a story with us about how despite the ubiquity of heterosexual hand-holding at school ("the straight kids do it, like, they do way more than holding hands in the hallways"), his friend told him that teachers "immediately separated" him when he held his boyfriend's hand. (Boy, gay, mixed racial background, 15) When we asked another SGM participant who was in a romantic relationship if they ever publicly held hands with their partner at school, they said they did but recalled a student asking them why they were doing it. We followed up by asking if they would ever feel sufficiently comfortable to kiss their partner at school, to which they replied, "I have once, but it's really scary … nerve-wracking." (Gender not disclosed, gay, Hispanic/Latino, mixed race, age 15) Our participants' reports made it clear that when sexual and gender diversity are tolerated, it only happens so long as it does not interrupt the sustained privileging of cisgender heterosexuality.

In contrast to SGM youth, most non-SGM youths believed that their schools were very accepting of different people, including SGM people. For instance, one non-SGM participant reported that despite the existence of peer-based harassment, their school was very "welcoming:"

> Our school's really, really diverse so I feel like it's just welcoming to people even, like, with the, like, abuse and stuff like that. It's still—I feel like it's still welcoming.… Yeah, starting, I think, two years ago our school started—we have like now gender-neutral bathrooms. We have more like LGBTQ+ like resources and stuff like that. (Girl, straight/heterosexual, mixed race, age 15)

Another non-SGM participant reported that despite his school's perceived absence of SGM students at his school, students were accepting of SGM people:

> I don't want to generalize, but those kind of students—I haven't really seen those kind of, you know, gay-lesbian students in the school that often…. But in general, like, the ones that I have seen, everyone accepts them and treats them as normal students. (Boy, straight/heterosexual, Asian, age 14)

However, it is important to note that at least two non-SGM participants reported hearing peers to use the term "gay" pejoratively. (Girl, straight/heterosexual, White, age 15; boy, straight/heterosexual, mixed race, age 15) This suggests that some students may be willing to accept the *idea* of supporting SGM youth more than the *reality* of supporting them.

SGM youth discussed experiencing stigma and discrimination in their communities in both subtle and overt ways because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. For example, one SGM participant shared his experience being denied a bed in a hotel because he intended to share it with his partner:

> I was traveling recently with my partner and the hotels did not want to give me a room with one bed. They didn't feel okay with that. They wanted us to have separate beds. I asked her why they didn't want me to have the bed. And I asked, like, are you out of beds? Is there an issue with, like, your one bed? Is that why—so they at least—she either had to explain that why she didn't want to give me the one bed or give me the one bed. And she decided to just give me the bed. (Man, gay, White, age 25)

Another SGM participant shared their experiences of being openly harassed by those who questioned the validity of their gender: "People come up to me, call me things or tell me that, like, I have like gender dysphoria and I just don't understand who I am." (Genderqueer/non-binary/pangender, pansexual, mixed racial background, age 15) Several SGM youth expressed that their communities' level of acceptance regarding SGM people was related to the level of societal conservativism or religiosity. SGM youth who perceived their communities as discriminating against SGM people frequently described them as "close-minded," "religious" and "conservative" about "gender and that sort of stuff." (Boy, gay/bisexual, White, age 15) One participant also expressed that there was "not a whole lot of acceptance" (Girl, gay/lesbian, White, age 14) of SGM people in her majority-Mormon and Catholic community.

In contrast, most non-SGM youths believed their communities were generally accepting of people with different backgrounds. One non-SGM youth described his community as diverse and said that the people there were "caring" and "nice to talk to." (Boy, heterosexual, Black or African American, age 14) Another non-SGM youth pointed to an instance where people rallied

behind a trans person after another person was unkind about that person's gender identity:

> There's not many people of that—of those choices and such. I have one friend in school that is trying and—is going—is trans, and she is transferring into a he.… There's a lot of people that are supportive of her. There's only been one person that said anything bad about it, and they were pretty—they were kind of bashed for that opinion. (Boy, heterosexual, mixed racial background, age 15)

One non-SGM youth said that they lived in a diverse town and people "don't really care [if you're different] unless they have a problem with the person." (Boy, heterosexual, Asian, age 14)

Different Explanations for Sexual Violence Against SGM Youth Compared to Non-SGM Youth

Facing an especially hard time getting social recognition within their families, neighborhoods, or schools, many SGM youth believed that the daily stigma and discrimination they encountered made them more susceptible to sexual violence. Although both SGM and non-SGM youth considered sexual violence among teens a problem, key group-level differences were noted in how they understood sexual violence and its contexts.

SGM youth are targeted based on their sexuality and gender identity.
Overall, non-SGM youth did not provide elaborate understandings of sexual violence in general. Several non-SGM youths believed that sexual harassment was partly explained by sexual interest "because people just can't get control of their self," (Boy, heterosexual, Black or African American, age 15) or due to "sexual tension, I guess, people want to experiment and such." (Boy, heterosexual, mixed racial background, age 15) Similarly, reasons non-SGM youth noted for the perpetration of rape included "People, like, get—they just want sex" (Boy, heterosexual, Black or African American, age 14) or "Just like sexual harassment, it's for pleasure." (Boy, heterosexual, White, age 15) Other non-SGM participants shared a more nuanced understanding as they discussed the lack of consent in these circumstances. For instance, one non-SGM participant said, "I think [rape] happens because certain people will want to have sex with someone else and they'd say no." (Girl, heterosexual, mixed racial background, age 15)

In contrast, SGM youth felt that SGM people were targeted specifically based on their sexuality and gender identity. Several SGM youth shared instances of being sexually harassed because of their sexuality, with a few

SGM girls conveying their experience of being sexual objectified by boys/ men. For example, one participant talked about how sexual harassment was different for lesbian women compared to gay men because "women are objectified more in society" and as such there are "different stereotypes associated with gay men versus lesbian women." (Genderqueer/non-binary/pangender, gay/bisexual/queer, Asian, age 15) Another participant elaborated on this and told us about being objectified after coming out as a bisexual:

> [W]hen I came out to people in my life, like the jokes about, like, does that mean I get a threesome kind of thing. So I think people think bisexuality is, like, basically just so you can have threesomes. So I've gotten a lot of those comments from guys. Or, like, I want to see you two kiss kind of thing. So I think that that specific, like, those comments are super specific to being bi. (Girl, bisexual, White, age 15)

Similarly, one SGM participant said, "Or it could take the form of, like, men who think, you know, like, all lesbians are hot or whatever and try to make stuff happen that way," (Woman, questioning, White, age 21) implying that this fetishization could result in sexual assault. Along those lines, a participant shared that his female SGM friends experienced more sexual assault: "Most of the LGBT friends I have that are female and are bisexual or lesbian sexuality … they're the friends that I have who've been sexually harassed or assaulted and stuff like that. Most of them have experienced that from men." (Boy, bisexual/questioning, mixed race, 15)

Other SGM participants attributed the sexual victimization of gay boys and young men to their gender presentation. For instance, some believed they were more targeted because "when they present more feminine, I guess, they can get harassed more because it's, like, out in the open." (Girl, questioning/ queer/unsure, White, age 14) Similarly, another participant elaborated that femme-presenting people may be more likely to experience sexual violence because they are

> viewed as weak or—especially when it comes to gay men or transgender women, like, effeminate.… And so when people see that it's, like, oh, I can do whatever I want to this person. They're weak and they can't fight back. I'm sure they wouldn't tell anyone. (Boy, bisexual/questioning, mixed race, age 15)

Straight people seek to punish SGM youth through sexual violence.
Several SGM youth believed straight people committed sexual violence against SGM people to punish them for violating traditional sexual and gender norms. For instance, one SGM participant conveyed sexual violence took the "purpose of bullying" and straight people would take out their animosity

on SGM people "in sickening ways in the form of sexual violence on them." (Woman, questioning, White, age 21) Another SGM youth elaborated:

> That with, like, straight people that [sexual violence] would be like just a thing of like someone just being awful and doing something. But with gay people it's that but with an added thing of like people trying to like [inaudible] you or punish you or something—like something—like a homophobic or transphobic like crime. (Genderqueer/non-binary/pangender, lesbian/bisexual/questioning, White, age 15)

To this effect, some SGM youth said SGM people were vulnerable to corrective rape, a term used to describe "sexual violence perpetrated for the purpose of supposedly 'curing' a person of their real or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity" (Isaack, 2007):

> I think it's important to remember that LGBT youth also run the risk of corrective sexual violence and sexual violence in the form of people harassing them for their normal healthy expressions of their sexuality. Which obviously straight youth don't have to deal with. (Woman, bisexual, White, age 25)

SGM youth face unique pressures.
Many SGM youth described unique pressures that make SGM people more vulnerable to sexual violence. SGM youth suggested that the invisibility and silence surrounding sexual violence against SGM people adds to the pressure not to report sexual violence when it happens to them, and additionally contributes to the pressure to tolerate unwelcomed sexual advances.

SGM youth said that the fear of being outed and stigmatized, in addition to the possibility of not receiving fair treatment, has made many SGM people reluctant to report their experiences of sexual violence. Because their sexual orientation or gender identity is "not necessarily accepted in the overall community … they might feel that they don't want to say that they were victimized." (Man, gay, White, age 25) When the voices of SGM people are silenced, their experience of sexual violence is more complicated compared to non-SGM people, particularly with respect to reporting: "[T]here is more silence within the LGBT community. And LGBT people are more silenced by the broader community.… [P]eople who are closeted might not want to come forward about sexual harassment because they might also be outing themselves in the process." (Girl-to-Boy/Transgender boy/Trans man, bisexual, White, age 15) Some SGM youth thought that it might be difficult to access support if they were to report their experiences of sexual violence. For instance, one SGM participant spoke about how the justice system treated SGM people unfairly, which made reporting difficult:

And I think that reporting may be different amongst different groups because I know a lot in the queer community don't want…. Because the justice system is so much harsher on queer people and people of color, especially trans people of color, I think that reporting would be very different. (Girl, queer, White, age 24)

Sexual violence perpetration by SGM people.
SGM youth spoke about the pressure SGM people face to endure sexual acts both from those who do not know about their sexuality or gender identity and from romantic and sexual partners. As one participant told us, an instance may arise because SGM people feel they have "to hide their sexuality," and this can lead to "a lot of situations where they want to say no to somebody who's not a member of their preferred gender but they feel like they have to in order to keep rumors down." (Woman, bisexual, White, age 25) In the other instance, SGM youth reported that SGM people might feel pressured to engage in certain sexual activities because they do not understand what sexual violence and consent looks like in the SGM context:

I think it's—'cause I feel that because it's not discussed enough I feel that there's even less knowledge in understanding both parties or what it means to have—to properly treat a partner. Especially in, like, a same-sex relationship or a gender-nonconforming relationship. (Genderqueer/non-binary/pangender, gay/bisexual/queer, Asian, age 15)

Similarly, another SGM participant elaborated on the pressure an SGM person might feel from a sexual partner:

Like, when they are gay, they might be pressured into doing things that straight people wouldn't be pressured to do. Like, for example, a man might be pressured into trying anal sex or they might—doing this and that or like someone who's a lesbian would be—you should do this and do that when they don't really know what that is or they don't understand it. (Boy, gay, White, age 15)

A few SGM youth spoke about sexual violence perpetration by SGM people and suggested that queer and trans perpetrators may be capitalizing on the silence experienced by SGM people "because they would think or assume that others would not speak out due to their stigmatized status." (Girl-to-Boy/Transgender boy/Trans man, bisexual, White, age 15)

Relatedly, some SGM participants explained that sexual harassment perpetration by and victimization of SGM people was almost perceived as normal by both SGM and non-SGM people. For instance, one SGM youth shared

her belief that sexual harassment was normalized within the SGM community: "I think some LGBT look at it as the norm. That, oh, you had your ass slapped by a gay man. You should take it as a compliment." (Woman, bisexual/questioning, White, age 22) Other SGM youth shared that non-SGM people considered some forms of sexual harassment to be normal or even desired in the SGM community: "[P]eople would think, okay, well, they're dressing like that, they obviously want attention. So that's why I feel like they're more subject to it." (Woman, bisexual, White, age 24) Another participant suggested that it might be expected within SGM couples as well:

> I think that sexual harassment for LGBTQ is viewed differently. It's kind of like—I mean, when you think of sexual harassment you think of a guy and a girl. But then when there's two girls or two guys people just think, oh, that's part of the relationship. Doesn't matter. (Girl, gay/lesbian, White, age 14)

Some asserted sexual violence experiences are the same for SGM and non-SGM youth.

It is important to note that some SGM youth, mostly SGM boys, believed there was no difference in how sexual violence was experienced by SGM youth compared to non-SGM youth because "sexual harassment is still sexual harassment no matter what relationship you're in" (Boy, gay/bisexual, White, age 15) and because "everyone's been sexually harassed. It doesn't matter, like, what group you're in. I feel like everyone can relate to what's happened." (Boy, gay, mixed racial background, age 15) Similarly, another SGM boy conveyed that sexuality and gender were not motives for sexual violence: "When someone abused someone, they don't care about your sexuality. They don't care about your gender. They don't care about anything. They just want to get into you." (Boy, unsure, Asian, age 14) To this effect, an SGM girl expressed that sexual violence would not differ between SGM and non-SGM people because it happens randomly:

> I feel like that stuff happens, like, in a—either—I feel like sexual violence happens, like, on such a whim or, like, on such a non-personal circumstance that sometimes that it would just happen whether—it wouldn't happen if you had a certain sexual orientation, it would just happen. (Girl, bisexual, White, age 15)

Several non-SGM youths held similarly egalitarian views. Non-SGM youths' explanations for the lack of difference in perpetration experiences were centered around the mechanism in which rape was committed: "I think the sexual approach is going to be pretty straightforward. There's only certain parts of a person's body that you can be sexually appealed to. It doesn't

matter what part it is." (Boy, heterosexual, mixed racial background, 15) The idea that the perpetrator could be anyone, which would make the experience among everyone the same, was also expressed: "Because I feel like anyone is capable of it and like I said, people don't—it depends on people's upbringing, so I feel like anyone can do it so the rape may be the same." (Girl, heterosexual, mixed racial background, 15)

Discussion

This study, based upon interviews with SGM and non-SGM youth across the United States who all reported some type of sexual violence perpetration, suggests that stigma and discrimination against SGM youth contribute to their sexual victimization and perpetration vulnerabilities and experiences. We also found that many youths were unable to articulate scenarios of violence in same-gender relationships. Furthermore, non-SGM youth were less likely to perceive SGM-focused discrimination in their communities, and as a result, less likely to articulate ways in which sexual violence may be different for SGM than non-SGM youth. Given that these observations were from young people who themselves had done something sexual that was unwanted by another person, there is an urgent need for more inclusive and effective sexual education for all youth.

How SGM Youth Form Understandings of Sexual Violence

Most SGM youth reported facing some type of stigma and discrimination in their lives, including outright homophobic or transphobic remarks. This isolation and exclusion often left SGM youth carrying considerable social stress that their non-SMG counterparts did not have to shoulder (Hafeez et al., 2017). Youth feeling a lack of safety or social support must learn how to navigate various social settings safely and determine when and where to share parts of their identity in ways that non-SGM youth did not. These findings line up with the minority stress model, which asserts that there are unique stressors experienced by SGM people (Meyer, 2003). Additionally, research has found that lifetime discrimination based on sexual minority status was related to intimate partner violence perpetration among sexual minority youth (Edwards & Sylaska, 2013). It follows, then, that the stressors reported by the SGM youth in this sample may contextualize their own perpetration of sexual violence.

Although there has been considerable movement in the acceptance of the SGM people in the United States, social institutions and policies continue to be set up and implemented through a heteronormative lens (Bain & Podmore,

2020). Worthen (2016) describes "hetero-cis-normativity" as "a hierarchical system of prejudice in which cisgender individuals are privileged above non-cisgender individuals but also, negativity, prejudice, and discrimination may be directed toward anyone perceived as non-cisgender and/or non-heterosexual." This concept allows us to branch out from classifying the stigma and discrimination experienced by SGM youth as transphobic or homophobic, which infers a sense of individual vulnerabilities versus the systemic barriers facing SGM youth. Hetero-cis-normativity is engrained into institutions like schools and often perpetuates stigma and discrimination against SGM youth (Bauer et al., 2009).

The SGM youth who were interviewed pointed to a lack of understanding of sexual violence within the SGM community. Most of the youth who were interviewed assumed that by and large, sexual violence happened to SGM people and was perpetrated by straight people. Some of the youth thought that it was committed by heterosexual people as a means of either a punishment or a 'cure' for their SGM identity. Given the amount of stigma and discrimination facing SGM youth generally, it is understandable that many felt like this discrimination would spill over into areas like sexual violence. The youth framed their SGM status as an individual vulnerability that was targeted by homophobic or transphobic individuals. This is extremely problematic because it frames the perpetrator of an SGM victim as always straight and cisgender, perpetuating the idea that SGM youth cannot be perpetrators of sexual violence, and by extension, that sexual violence does not happen within same-gender relationships.

It should be noted that some SGM youth acknowledged that sexual violence is perpetrated by SGM people and that particularly sexual harassment perpetration might be perceived as almost normal by both SGM and non-SGM people. Other SGM participants noted a lack of understanding about consent and boundaries in the community, potentially contributing to a higher vulnerability of sexual violence within same-gender relationships. This counter-narrative to the "perpetrator = heterosexual" opens the door for conversations within the SGM community about sexual violence that is happening in same-gender relationships. It also highlights the need for inclusive sex education that emphasizes the need for consent in all relationships.

In another study using the same qualitative sample (MacAulay et al., 2021), most of the SGM youth reported that they did not have access to any formal sex education; those who did have access reported that the sexual education did not include an SGM component. They also talked about a dearth of SGM sexual content being modeled in the media. As such, there is a lack of resources about what sexual violence can look like in a same-gender relationship. It is not surprising, therefore, that many SGM youth had no idea

that they could be victims of sexual violence within a same-gender relationship. There was no way for them to know what it looked like to be a victim or perpetrator of sexual violence within an SGM context. Unfortunately, this means that SGM youth are largely on their own when it comes to navigating the world of consent and healthy boundaries specifically within same-gender relationships.

Similarities and Differences Between SGM and Non-SGM Youths' Narratives

While most SGM and non-SGM youth agreed that sexual violence between youth was a problem, same-gender perpetration was not discussed as much. The stigma and discrimination SGM youth experience are so pervasive that it may make it difficult for them to acknowledge moments of their own complicity. Non-SGM youth did not seem to have a clear understanding of sexual violence and had difficulty articulating why sexual violence occurs whereas SGM youth were more easily able to article what sexual violence was. Most non-SGM youths felt that the majority of perpetrators were motivated by sexual interest and pleasure while SGM youth were frequently able to context it to a power imbalance.

There were many notable differences in the contextual factors shaping sexual violence for SGM youth compared to non-SGM youth. Unlike their non-SGM counterparts, SGM youth felt that they were targeted based on their sexual and gender identity. In general, SGM youth tend to face more harassment in heteronormative environments compared to social environments where they were accepted and supported by others in the SGM community (Higa et al., 2014). One study found bisexual, gay, and lesbian youth were 20% more likely to attempt suicide in a community environment unsupportive of SGM people (Hatzenbuehler, 2011). These hetero-cis-normative practices and behaviors are not always overt and often are embedded into institutions such as schools, religion, families, and communities and create environments leading SGM youth to feel unsafe and vulnerable to sexual violence. As per the queer theory, these hetero-cis-normative practices and behaviors institutionalize and legitimize certain forms and expressions of sexuality and gender while stigmatizing others (Seidman, 1994), and form the context in which oppression and violence take place (Berila, 2016).

SGM youth also felt that they were more vulnerable to sexual violence because of their gender and sexual presentation, particularly if their gender expression did not match cis-normative standards. And as mentioned earlier in the discussion, many also felt that the straight community sought to punish

SGM individuals through sexual violence, making their physical appearance a serious vulnerability. Transgender and other-gender diverse youth are targeted not only on their physical appearance, but also their presumed sexual minority status as well (Hatchel et al., 2019). Some SGM youth also mentioned the fetishization of lesbians and bisexual girls as a reason SGM people are targeted, and this is a common narrative in the hetero-centered media. The heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1993) renders queer women visible when they are seen as sexually desirable and available to men. These negative stereotypes associated with being queer are a form of social stigma (Poon & Ho, 2008), which as participants said, make them targets of sexual violence. In addition, participants in our study shared that sexual harassment of SGM people was often perceived as normal by both SGM and non-SGM people. The hypersexualization of SGM people by the media could be one reason why sexual violence toward SGM people is often normalized by both SGM and non-SGM communities. Sexual harassment may also be accepted as the norm in SGM communities because of the internalized shame experienced by SGM people—that they are somehow "more deserving" of sexual violence than others. Studies have found positive associations between internalized homophobia (negative thoughts and ideas against one's own marginalized sexual identity), and intimate partner violence perpetration in sexual minority populations (Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Edwards et al., 2015).

Along with the specific contextual factors shaping sexual violence for them, SGM youth reported facing unique pressures when seeking support as a victim. They suggested that SGM people might be fearful of being outed or stigmatized if they sought help and that this could result in not feeling safe to ask their family or friends for support. SGM participants also said that SGM people might be worried about not receiving fair treatment if they reported the assault given the negative relationship SGM people have historically had with the police and the hetero-cis-normative environments embedded in law enforcement institutions. They felt this resulted in many SGM people remaining silent out of fear that they would not be believed or that they would have to out themselves in environments that could lead to further harassment. Those who do not adhere to cis-heteronormativity often receive fewer resources or protections and may be actively punished for not conforming to societal expectations (Bermea, 2019).

Most non-SGM youths did not believe that victimization was experienced differently by SGM and non-SGM people, nor did they think that victimization rates were different between the two groups. This is because, as several non-SGM youths stated, that sexuality and gender were factors that were not considered by perpetrators and some even believed that sexual violence occurred randomly.

Limitations

A limitation worth noting is that the age range between the two groups was not the same. While most participants in both groups were 14 or 15 years old, there were 10 SGM participants who were in their twenties. Some of the differences in the understanding of sexual violence could be due to a difference in age, as both experience and maturation can impact the understandings of concepts like sexual violence. Older participants provided more elaborate understandings of sexual violence, and experience seemed to be an indicator of sexual violence competency. Many of the 10 older SGM participants mentioned sexual education they were able to access in college. Several of the older SGM youth had also moved to larger cities that were more SGM friendly to attend college and they perhaps received additional peer-to-peer education in these settings. That said, younger and older SGM youth shared similar views on several topics, unlike SGM youth and non-SGM youth. This study shows how important early intervention is for younger SGM youth because they do not have the same amount of words and personal experiences to draw from.

Recommendations

Boyd et al. (2020) recently wrote: "Obfuscating the role of racism in driving racial health inequities also gives frames such as implicit bias undue traction." We echo their call to better articulate the role racism, and in the current study, sexism and genderism have on health disparities. Implicit bias in the current study, whereby most non-SGM youths demurred that SGM people in their communities faced stigma and discrimination, parallels implicit bias held by White people as compared to non-White people. Because White people are not racially targeted, many have understood the criminal justice system to be fair and racism a thing of the past. Here, non-SGM youth believed that their communities and schools were accepting of SGM youth; while at the same time, SGM youth provided a multitude of examples of how discrimination and stigma were infused in these environments. Not being direct targets themselves, non-SGM youth appeared to be unable to recognize the explicit and implicit bias SGM youth must navigate daily. Acknowledging the experiences of SGM youth would require the teens in this study to both be informed about how SGM identity shapes everyday life and acknowledge that SGM people are not seen as the same as themselves. And it is this implicit bias that may be driving the disparities of sexual violence involvement for SGM and non-SGM youth. Across stigmatized groups, those who are normative struggle to see the challenges that those

who are 'othered' experience. If we are to reduce health disparities across youth, adolescent health researchers and others working with youth need to continue to discuss this perception disparity.

Given the higher rates of sexual violence among SGM youth compared to non-SGM youth referenced in the Introduction, sexual violence perpetration in this group needs to be directly addressed in prevention programs. Our findings point to the need for better sex education and specifically SGM-focused content that emphasizes the unique needs and experiences of youth with different gender and sexual orientations. Consent is an important issue for all youth, and the current findings highlight that this is no less true in same-gender relationships. It also is important to push against stereotypes that present the cisgender, heterosexual male as the perpetrator and the cisgender heterosexual female as the victim. Sexual violence prevention programs need to acknowledge that anyone can play either role; and that no matter who the perpetrator is, it is important for the victim to reach out for help. This type of programming would fill the knowledge gaps that most of the youth had around understanding concepts like sexual violence and would challenge the typical hetero-cis-normative environment that most schools and other institutions perpetuate. Beyond sexual education, school-based and community-based efforts that promote tolerance and support could decrease the stigma and discrimination faced by SGM youth.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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ORCID iDs

Ronita Nath https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3630-7915
Ida Frugård Strøm https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2413-4014

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Author Biographies

Ronita Nath, PhD, is the Managing Director at the Stigma and Resilience among Vulnerable Youth Centre and conducts mix-methods research aimed at understanding the factors impacting the health of marginalized adolescents. Her previous research has focused on the drivers of the syphilis epidemic in British Columbia, and the efficacy of drop-in interventions for children living on the streets in India.

Michele Ybarra, PhD, is a recognized Researcher in technology-related health issues for young people. She has published extensively in the areas of youth violence, particularly internet harassment and other types of online victimization, as well as sexual violence and dating abuse. She also is known for her contributions to research methodology as it relates to technology.

Margaret MacAulay, PhD, is a qualitative Communication Researcher interested in health, sexuality, and new media. She has authored several manuscripts on sexual and gender minority health in areas such as HIV prevention and gender-affirming care. She is currently leading a comparative study examining the role of the chief medical officer in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jay (Koby) Oppenheim holds a PhD in Sociology from The Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Lauren Jackson, MPhil, is a Project Coordinator for the Growing up with Media study, a longitudinal survey examining the emergence of various forms of violence in adolescence. Her research interests focus on the contextualization of sexual violence victimization and perpetration. She is interested in examining qualitative narratives that contribute to our understanding of sexual violence.

Ida Frugård Strøm, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Center for Innovative Public Health Research. Her research is focused on the individual, relational, and contextual factors that contribute to our understanding of the etiology and life trajectories of violence-exposed individuals.

Richard Sullivan, PhD, is a Social Worker with over 40 years of experience in child and family services and child welfare practice and research. He is Associate Professor emeritus with the UBC School of Social Work. Some of his current research focuses on service strategies and decision-making in public sector child welfare.

Shannon Millar, MA, is currently working as a Research Coordinator at the Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre. Her research interests include gender and sexuality, health inequalities, and access to care.

Elizabeth Saewyc, PhD, RN, Professor and Director of the University of British Columbia School of Nursing in Vancouver, also leads the Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre. For 25+ years, her research has focused on how stigma and violence influence adolescents' health and coping, and protective factors that foster resilience and health equity for adolescents, particularly LGBTQ2S+ youth.