

Raising Voices
Strategies to Understand, Respect, and Make Heard the Experiences and Perspectives of
LGBTQA+ Marginalized Youth

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Abstract

The Prism Youth Community, a youth-led organization of/for LGBTQ kids from south central Indiana, engages in cultural competency trainings for educators and other youth-serving professionals. The Education and Training Committee of Prism is responsible for preparing, planning and delivering a variety of educational trainings related to the needs and experiences of queer youth. The youth-educators draw on their own experiences and engage in their own reviews of the literature in order to create the trainings. There is current need for more trainings and materials relevant to the experiences and needs of youngsters marginalized within the LGBTQ community, for example, transgender kids in foster care. Prism's E&T committee is interested in conducting interviews and focus groups with more vulnerable members of the larger LGBTQ community. This research would be used for purposes of creating authentic and valid materials that the youth educators can share through their educational trainings and potentially on the web. The E&T committee has already been working with IU scholars, Barbara and Suraj, to evaluate their trainings. The proposed project would draw on this relationship as it prepares youth to engage in direct research aimed at sharing the un-voiced experiences of marginalized youth with social workers, psychologists, teachers, and others involved with youth. Our proposed budget is \$5,000 with much of that money allocated to pay Prism E&T members as Research Assistants. These assistants will become research leaders in the community. At last, the materials created will be shared for the first time at a community-wide education event hosted by Prism E&T.

Proposal Narrative

Prism Youth Community is a non-profit LGBTQIA+ youth-led organization serving south central Indiana. The community itself has several active committees, one of which is the Education and Training (E&T) Committee. Beginning fall 2015, Prism's E&T committee has conducted cultural competency trainings for educators and other youth-serving professionals by drawing on their own experiences and a review of current research. The trainings foster dialogue, commitment, and competence in serving LGBTQIA+ youth. The E&T committee, in collaboration with grant applicants, has been actively involved in a study of outcomes of its trainings. Data, thus far, indicate that 88% of the participants say they took something positive away from the experience. Participants consistently report valuing that the youth are doing the educating. Recently, the youth have recently been approached to conduct trainings on an ever-expanding array of important topics relevant to LGBTQIA+ youngsters and teens. This coincides nicely with some of the feedback received on evaluation forms. For example, one participant wrote, "While your experiences are valid, they are not representative of the harsher realities of queer youth experience." The participant went on to comment that the youth involved were privileged and were not able to share experiences of those who are in sex work, have HIV/AIDS, experience mental illness and so on. Prism youth speak from the authority of their own experiences and perspectives. They do not engage in the risky business of speaking *for* others. One of the important messages of their work is that there is validity and knowledge in their own experiences that can and should be valued by educators. Ultimately, youth serving professionals should turn to those they are serving and listen to what they have to say (Adams & Carson 2006). An increased interest in hearing from queer youth who are more vulnerable and disadvantaged than those typically involved in Prism has inspired E&T to figure out ways that their work can be more inclusive. This research project is an opportunity to authentically develop educational materials grounded in the perspectives and experiences of youth who are not currently members of the Prism community such as homeless and fostered youth, youth of color, and youth in the criminal justice system. Drawing on Critical Participatory Action Research principles (following the work of Michelle Fine and others), we (Barbara and Suraj) will work with the Prism E&T committee to engage in qualitative local research to hear from under-represented queer youth about their socio-educational needs, experiences, and perspectives in order to create authentic educational materials relevant to those perspectives and experiences (see Payne and Smith 2013 for more on the need). The purposes of the proposed project include:

- To establish successful ways to connect with underrepresented queer youth, drawing on informal networks and snowballing techniques;
- To conduct a series of interviews and focus groups with invited youth with the idea that these perspectives will be put into dialogue and will not be taken as representative of entire subgroups of the LGBTQIA+ community; and
- To create resources informed by these youth's experiences and needs (and reviewed by them) while critically evaluating and reconsidering what it means to speak "on behalf" of others' experiences.

The created materials will be piloted at a community-wide education event sponsored by Prism's E&T committee.

Need

According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey, anti-GLBT bullying is declining. This is good news overall. However, the rates are still high and the link to LGBTQIA+ teen suicides remains strong[i]. That national survey indicated that safe climates for GLBT secondary school youth involved “the availability of LGBT school-based resources and support, including Gay-Straight Alliances, inclusive curriculum, supportive school staff and comprehensive anti-bullying policies” (<http://www.glsen.org/learn/research/national-school-climate-survey?state=research&type=research>. Accessed December 7, 2013). The situation is worse than we know if at least 50% of youth claimed that they did not report harassment to the educators at their schools. Most students who did report bullying to their school teachers and administrators said that nothing was done in response to their reports. Friedman et al (2006) found that bullying mediates the relationship between gender non-conformity and suicidality. Since the 2016 US election hate crimes at schools targeting LGBTQIA+ perceived kids has increased. There is a need to provide training and support for educators working with youth so that we can create safer, more affirming educational contexts for our gender and sexual non-conforming kids (Hudnell 2014, Eckstein 2013). Though is difficult with marginalized communities to bring everyone visibly into the community, understanding the edge is crucial methodologically and substantively (Dennis 2009). Many of the most vulnerable members of the LGBTQIA+ under-20 community cannot reasonably take on the risk, time or energy to be actively involved in the training of youth-serving professionals (Fine et al 2010). The E&T committee seeks to find authentic ways to expand its educational resources to include the experiences of queer kids who are multiply marginalized and whose life stories are rarely told (Fine 1992). Gamarel et al (2014) concluded that LGBTQIA+ youth who were disconnected from supportive institutions through their enhanced marginality were less likely to be involved in protective health practices. Myriad of studies speak to this problem (see Fine et al 2010, Hatzenbuehler 2011, Gamarel et al 2014 as examples).

The E&T committee would like to interview and conduct focus groups with marginalized members of the LGBTQIA+ youth community in Indiana in order to authentically include their experiences in the Prism educational trainings and outreach activities. Toward this end, we will (1) consult with and train the E&T committee (with whom there is an established relationship) through a series of three workshops (held once a month in summer 2017), (2) facilitate the recruitment of participants with Research Assistants, (3) work with Research Assistants to conduct at least 10 interviews and/or up to 3 focus groups with 15 participants who identify as LGBTQIA+ members of under-studied, vulnerable groups (Freeman 2013), (4) critically analyze the data (Carspecken 1995), (5) host 1 workshops with E&T committee to create educational materials, and (6) share the newly created materials at a community-wide education event sponsored by Prism.

We (Suraj and Barbara) have already been working with the E&T committee on evaluating its trainings. Three Prism youth have been directly involved in transcribing observations and interviews that we have collected. We have an established orientation toward research which will form the basis for the successful implementation of the proposed project.

Entity

Prism Youth Community is “an inclusive social group for youth [ages 12 – 20] celebrating all sexual orientations and gender identities and gender expressions” (see <http://www.bloomingtonpride.org/prism-youth-community.html>). The E&T Committee of Prism

(numbering 10 predominately white 14-20 year olds) have dedicated themselves to hosting community education events and cultural competency trainings focused on basic knowledge about gender and sexual variation as well as the way youth experience can inform educational practices and the work of youth-serving professionals. Thus far, the youth have delivered these trainings to over 1000 people in Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan through over 15 sessions/events. The trainings have been oriented toward helping create more inclusive, safe, and positive environments for gender non-conforming, gay, lesbian and bi-sexual students. These trainings are youth led and developed. The group has received several awards in the past year such as “The Leading Light Educators of the Year” from the Bloomington Chamber of Commerce and the “Be More Award” from the Bloomington Volunteer Network. These awards attest to the exemplary status of youth’s work. Recently there have been increased calls for Prism to offer trainings which extend beyond the experiential expertise of the group, for example to talk about the needs and experiences of queer youth of color, or LGBTQIA+ youth in the foster care system. The group would like to expand its capacity to authentically include the voices and experiences of marginalized youth within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Outcomes

As a result of conducting the study, the E&T committee will be able to produce materials that are more broadly inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ youth community for educational purposes while not speaking for those youth. The goal is to create opportunities to speak with those experiences are not well-reflected in the LGBTQIA+ scholarship or through the membership of the Prism community. Prism regularly sponsors community-wide events through which the created materials can be shared. It is our goal that a community-wide even held in May 2018 will be the first place these materials are shared.

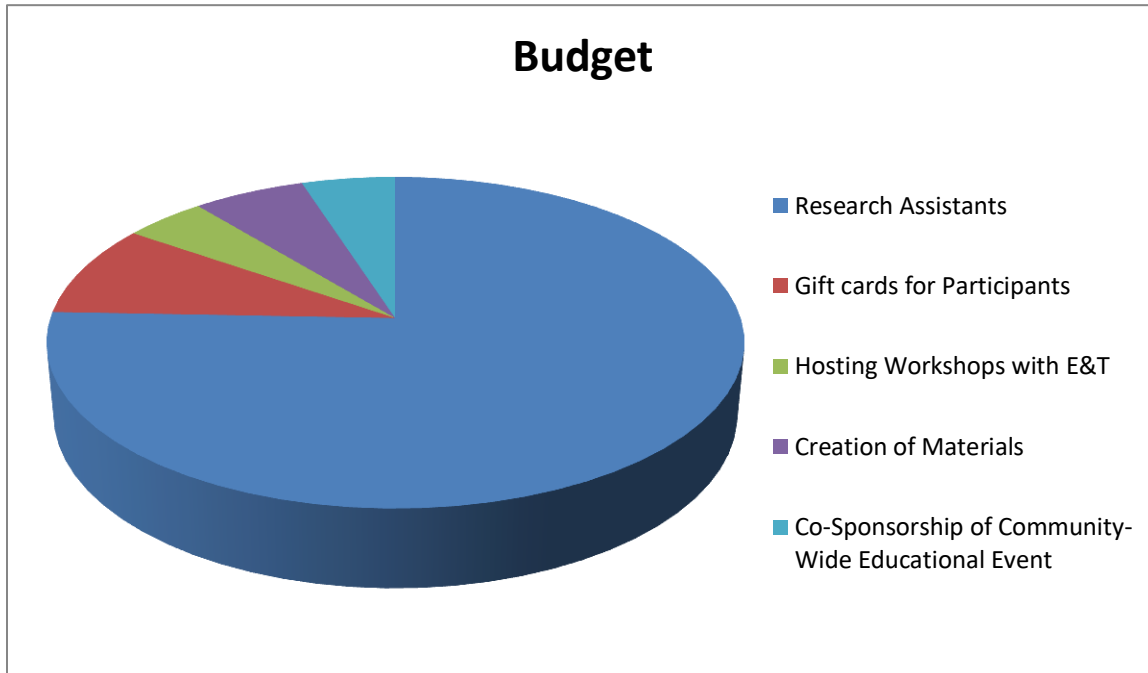
Schedule

This is a one-year proposal beginning June 2017.

Dates	Activities in Consultation with IU Scholars
June 2017 – August 2017	Led by IU scholars in conjunction with Prism E&T committee (across 3 workshops): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and preparation to conduct the study. • Recruitment plan developed. • Dialogue on research ethics, particularly relational ethics. • IRB completed.
September 2017 – October 2017	Research Assistants in consultation with IU scholars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews. • Conduct focus groups. • Transcribe data.
December 2017 – February 2018	Conducted by IU scholars in consultation with Research Assistants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the data. • Conduct member checks.
March 2018 - May 2018	Prism E&T committee with support from IU scholars (across 2 workshops): Create educational resource materials. Disseminate educational resource materials through community-side educational event.

Budget

We are requesting \$5,000.00. The bulk of the grant money will be used to hire 3 Research Assistants who are members of the Prism community. Other budget items include providing research participants with gift cards, hosting 4 workshops with E&T, covering the costs of material development, and contributing to the sponsorship of a community-wide education event in May 2018. We already have transcription software, recording devices and other technology that will be used to gather data.



Research Assistants

We pay Research Assistants \$15.00 hour. At this rate we are proposing to pay 3 students each for an average of 8 hours a week for 10 weeks (4 in September, 4 in October, 2 in November) and 1 additional week in December to consult on analysis.

Research Assistant 1	8 hours x 10 weeks x \$15/hour 4 hours x 1 week @ 15.00/hour	\$1,200 \$60.00
Research Assistant 2	8 hours x 10 weeks x \$15/hour 4 hours x 1 week @ 15.00/hour	\$1,200 \$60.00
Research Assistant 3	8 hours x 10 weeks x \$15/hour 4 hours x 1 week @ 15.00/hour	\$1,200 \$60.00
TOTAL		\$3,780

The three **Research Assistants** will work together on the following tasks, averaging 8 hours a week each:

Week One: Recruiting Participants and Arranging focus group and individual interviews

Week Two: Recruiting Participants and Arranging focus group and individual interviews

Week Three: Conducting up to 3 individual interviews (2 research assistants per interview)

Week Four: Conducting up to 3 individual interviews (2 research assistants per interview)

Week Five: Conduct up to 2 focus group interviews (3 research assistants per focus group). Recruit any additional participants needed for interviews.

Week Six: Conduct any remaining interviews.

Week Seven: Transcribe and embed field notes

Week Eight: Transcribe and embed field notes

Week Nine: Transcribe and embed field notes

Week Ten: Transcribe and embed field notes

One week Research Assistants will work 4 hours each consulting on Analysis

Week Eleven: Analysis

Research Participants

We intend to provide \$15.00 amazon gift card each for each participant's engagement of time (each interview or focus group is expected to be one hour) and member check is expected to take one hour.

Expected N of Participants	Expected Hours of Engagement	\$15 Amazon Card per hour	Total Budget Allotment
15	2	2 cards per person	\$450.00

E&T Workshops

Throughout the project, we will host a total of 4 3-hour workshops with members of the E&T committee. We have budgeted to provide drinks and snacks and workshop materials. For each workshop we anticipate spending approximately \$55.00 each for a total of \$220.00

Creation of Materials

We have allotted \$300.00 for use in development of either paper materials and/or web-based materials.

Co-Sponsoring Community-Wide Educational Event

Prism sponsors 2 Community-Wide Educational Events a year. We will work with Prism to add one community-wide event for May 2018 in which the new educational materials can be shared. The event will be organized by the E&T committee, which is typical, and will cover topics inclusive of the research findings. The money will be used to cover transportation for any guest speakers, snacks and beverages, and photocopying of materials. We allocated \$250.00 to co-sponsor this event.

Total Budget Requested = \$5,000.00

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[i] In the national survey 8 out of 10 LGBT identified youth reported having been bullied in the most recent school year for their sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2011) – that rate is 90% in Indiana according to a 2013 GLSEN report.