

**Episode 191 - Dr. Adrienne Dessel, Dr. Michael Woodford, and Kevin Goodman: LGBT Discrimination on Campus and Heterosexual Bystanders: Understanding the Intention to Intervene**

[00:00:08] Welcome to in social work the podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.insocialwork.org](http://www.insocialwork.org). We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of social work is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice research. We educate we connect. We care. We are in social work from Buffalo. The warmer weather means that Buffalo's vibrant musical scene is moving outdoors to local favorites like canalside the chips strip Allentown sunset Bay and all of our parks rock blues jazz alternative and classical that's all they're often free. I'm Peter Sobota there's little doubt that hostility discrimination and harassment of lesbian gay bisexual and transgender persons occurs on college campuses. It's hard to avoid ongoing discussions about campus climate and what universities and colleges can do to prevent these experiences when it does occur and people witness it. Who is likely to intervene and in what context. In this episode our guest Dr. Adrienne Dessel. Dr Michael Woodford and Kevin Goodman discuss their research exploring these questions and highlight the specific skills and attitudes that can be fostered to promote supportive heterosexual bystander involvement. Our guests provide guidance and recommendations for educators and practitioners interested in creating and promoting inclusive environments for LGBT persons. Adrienne Dessel Ph.D. LMSW is associate director of the program on intergroup relations a University of Michigan and lecturer at the School of Social Work. Her research focuses on attitudes and prejudice reduction most recently on topics of religion Arab Jewish conflict and sexual relational orientation.

[00:02:13] Michael Woodford Ph.D. is an associate professor with the pilot's home and faculty School of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario Canada. His research addresses the social exclusion and inclusion of lesbian gay bisexual transgender and queer people. Dr. Woodford also studies heterosexist attitudes. Support for LGBTQ civil rights LGBTQ ally hood and youth empowerment and faculty support for LGBTQ content in social work programs Kevin Goodman is a Ph.D. candidate in the departments of psychology and women's studies at the University of Michigan. With emphasis and social personality organizational and community psychology His research focuses on the experiences and methodological issues surrounding intersections of gender sexuality and racial identity especially in educational contexts. His research interests also include intergroup relations discrimination and sexual harassment diversity in higher education empowerment critical consciousness activism and social change. Our guests were interviewed in February of 2016 by Dr. Diane Elze associate professor here at the School of Social Work. Hello my name is Diane Elze and I am an associate professor and director of the MSW program at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. I am very excited to be talking today with Dr. Adrienne Dessel. Dr. Michael Woodford and Mr. Kevin Goodman about the recently published study on discrimination targeting lesbian gay bisexual transgender students on college campuses. Adrienne, Michael and Kevin thanks so very much for your willingness to be interviewed today. Why don't we start by each of you talking a little bit about how you became interested in this area of research. OK so I will start. This is Adrienne Dessel. And I can say that I became interested in this research based on previous research that I've done.

[00:04:27] I'm very interested in overall looking at prejudice reduction and bias reduction and in particular interacting bias and prejudice and harassment not only for LGBT populations but a number of different groups. And I'm also very interested in translational action oriented research. So how can research that we are doing. How can it inform practice. How can it in foreign policy

and I think we will probably talk about some of that at the end. And this is Michael here. So in terms of my interest in this topic my broader field of research looks at issues of discrimination and inclusion for sexual and gender minorities with a focus on students and the role of campus climate as campus crime has become a very big topic in recent years. And what I try to do in my work in the broader work is look at the nature of campus climate both behavioral or experiential and also psychological climate. But then most importantly looking at what the potential consequences are and what then institutions can do so drawing on the same sort of commitment to action. And what we can do about that is an interest in safe spaces and Ally hood. One of the things we know is that Ally programs are growing in popularity on college campuses but yet we don't know very much about the nature of of Ally hood. And really through this study trying to help close that gap somewhat. This is Kevin. So I think my interest in bystander intervention and campus climate research for marginalized students stems from my own experiences and scholarship thus far as a graduate student around intergroup relations and social justice education and college.

[00:06:19] And I think specifically as a queer person of color who was bullied in my youth I understand the importance of a safe and Lockney campus climate and the importance of change and institutional level and working with students as a teacher working with students in conflict resolution and student housing. I've seen very chic factories in terms of people's sensitivity and empathy to marginalized experiences that weren't there at all. And this made me really interested in how to best support students who have potential to navigate their privilege in ways that make a positive influence on the environment around them. Thank you. Michael could you talk a little more about why you did this specific study and what is the current campus climate like for LGBT students in this country. So I'm going to start with your second question in terms of what the climate is like and when we think about what we know about climate for LGBTQ students that we would describe it as being on say hostile. Certainly issues of discrimination have been well documented and that discrimination has ranges from subtle forms of discrimination such as exposure to the phrase that's so gay being sort of a common phrase that we hear on college campuses in other school contexts as well to more blatant forms of discrimination. And we know that that that puts LGBTQ students at increased risk for negative outcomes such as you know mental health concerns depression suicidality leaving universities you know not doing as well academically as one could because of the additional stressors that one feels related to the experiences of of the campus.

[00:08:01] Certainly when we think about other contexts and comparisons such as you know the general community or the K to 12 system is that you know some people would say that hey it's universities it's you know it's a lot safer and you know we don't really know that we just know that there are still issues of discrimination and exclusion that happens. So in terms of this study we really wanted to move into. So how do we start addressing that. We have the discourse of allied programs and allies being so critical to interrupting discrimination. If the ranging from sexual assault and sexual violence and sexism on campuses and there's been more work around that particular area but really trying to understand well what are some of the factors that may foster prosocial. In other words sort of supportive interventions for students who are LGBTQ who are experiencing discrimination. So we really try to understand what some of those factors might be and thinking about how we could inform them policies and also interventions including training programs and that may be conducted on campuses to foster that prosocial LGBT ally hood. Adrienne could you talk about why this is important to social work so social workers happy not only a code of ethics but really a professional mandate to do some things that I think sometimes don't always get focused on enough or need to be included really across the board in social work education and saw the language in some of that round mandates and ethics has to do with eliminating domination eliminating exploitation and discrimination and pursuing social justice and I think related to what Michael was saying I think people sometimes don't recognize the scaffolding that can happen that there are comments that people can feel or seem to be innocuous that really can lead to much more serious consequences.

[00:10:05] And so it's important to recognize that progression of what can happen around bias and harassment and bullying on campuses and also that social workers in particular when they are working with populations on college campuses need to be thinking about how to really be thinking about intervention and addressing these serious issues. And what do we know about bystander intervention. So in doing this paper it was very interesting for me to read a little bit in the literature about some earlier studies that I think are still very relevant in terms of people who are witnessing harassment or bias going through a number of different stages. And I'll just try to summarize them. I think first people need to notice that this is happening and often in everyone's busy lives or you know thinking that this is not such a serious thing these kinds of statements that might be made are even more serious behaviors that they actually need to notice that and they need to interpret it as something that needs intervention. And they also need to be able to accept responsibility for intervening. And this was part of our study was trying to understand what are the different variables that affect whether someone would maybe have the intention to intervene. They also need to have skills bystanders need to know how to intervene and then they need to have the confidence or they might need other factors as we're going to talk about that really lead them to intervening. And so you know when we were looking at intention to intervene we were taking all of that into account in our variables that we were examining.

[00:11:53] I know that in your study you were interested in looking at the peer familiarity context who is involved in the situation. And does the nature of the likelihood of intervening vary depending upon the peer context. Kevin could you talk more about the peer familiarity context what you all mean by that and how you assessed it. Absolutely. So in terms of pure familiarity context we understand that college students are very social creatures. So we understood that there was likely fear just asking students to tell us whether or not they would intervene that it would depend on a lot of contextual situations. But it's particularly important for us to think about how people are intervening with people that they know around them as well as in situations where everyone is strangers to them and that they are just kind of happening upon this kind of behavior. And so we assessed peer familiarity context looking at four different contexts in these hypothetical scenarios of discrimination and so we asked them about their intention to intervene when knowing no one in the scenario where knowing only the witnesses or the target of the discrimination in the scenario knowing only the perpetrator of the discrimination in the scenario and also their intention to intervene when they knew everyone present. And so we assess their intention to intervene on a scale of 1 to 7 in three different and yet situations that they were reading one vignette discussed overhearing gaged hoax or negative comments being said. Another scenario was witnessing unfair treatment of someone who is hypothetically perceived to be LGBT or witnessing verbal harassment. So using antigay pejoratives against someone perceived to be LGBT.

[00:13:49] And so we asked their intention to intervene in these scenarios across these four different peer familiarity contexts knowing no one and then the other context with degrees of knowing people in the scenario and what were your main hypotheses. So we want to look at both the student's individual differences so their student inputs as well as students kind of collective experiences on campus and so we assess students you know demographic their gender their race their religion their age we assess their self-esteem and their attitudes towards LGBT people and we also assess collective experiences so having LGBT friends and acquaintances whether or not they've taken coursework that has a focus on social justice content or LGBT content as well as their perceptions and experiences of the campus climate for LGBT people. And so our main hypotheses were that intentions to intervene would be higher among students who are women who are Whyte's those who are non-religious. Those with higher self-esteem and more affirming LGBT attitudes and liberal political ideology would be more likely to intervene. And we also thought that those with LGBT acquaintances and friends who had taken more courses with social justice and LGBT content would be more likely to intervene. We didn't have a hypothesis for campus climate and to be clear

we measured campus climate by whether or not they perceived the university as being welcoming of LGBT students to be open about their identity. We assess their personal experiences of identity neutral treatment such as experiencing physical threats on campus as well as witnessing heterosexual harassment on campus so you know witnessing someone saying that's so gay for example and the inclusion of these variables was exploratory so we didn't have any specific hypotheses for those. Did you find any differences on intentions to intervene based on peer familiarity context. Absolutely.

[00:16:02] We found overall that students were less likely to intervene when they knew no one and this peer familiar context was significantly different and intention to intervene as compared to the other three contexts which had varying levels of familiarity. And so what that suggests overall is that knowing no one in the situation represents a higher risk context for intervening and in the other contexts students are much more likely to intervene suggesting that with higher levels of familiarity. Bystander intervention becomes a bit more easy to occur and what are your overall conclusions from your study. So we found that older female interestingly Students who identified as conservative Christian and Pakistan students who had reported higher self-esteem and reported more affirming attitudes were for higher intention to intervene. We also found a positive association between LGBT attitudes and all outcomes that was our largest impact size. We found a positive association between self-esteem and intention to intervene across all outcomes and as I mentioned interestingly for religion compared to secular students conservative Christian students were more likely to report intention to intervene when knowing the witness their target and knowing the perpetrator. We also found some important differences when it related to respect to gender and how that played out differently in various peer familiarity contexts. So females indicated higher intentions to intervene than their male peers. In three of the peer familiarity contexts in which they had medium or high level whereas the opposite was observed when knowing no one.

[00:18:00] So which helps us understand that as Kevin was talking about sort of the nature of the risk that may be involved and may be for male students that they may not feel that there's so much at risk intervening when they don't know anyone and some existing research helps to support that as well. We also found that the experience or the context really matters also. So across all of our different peer familiarity contexts so each of those four contexts that students who had Elgie Q friends so having at least one friend increased the likelihood that somebody reported that they were going to intervene. So that really says to us that intergroup contact and those relationships are important as well. And finally we found some important differences by pure familiarity contexts when considering campus climate. In terms of student experiences in context where they knew no one in the scenario having a perception of a positive campus climate for LGBT folks was actually negatively associated with intentions to intervene. So this suggests that blindness to the school's culture of heterosexism towards LGBT students may lessen their intention to intervene. They may think that it's not as big of a deal and that they may not need to intervene as much and so more work needs to be done in terms of raising awareness about negative campus climate particularly for those that the negative LGBT climate doesn't affect namely heterosexual students and also in the peer familiarity context of knowing witnesses or the target. It was found that witnessing heterosexism around you not directly experiencing it was negatively associated with intention to intervene.

[00:19:50] And so this kind of points the importance of addressing heterosexism in the campus climate because students that are witnessing more on that than had less likelihood of intending to intervene suggesting that this may seem more normal to them and is there any other implications of your study that any of you would like to mention or have you mentioned all of them. I would add that we need educational programs specifically around attitudes so improving student attitudes in terms of inclusion of sexual minority people on campuses. The implication for self-esteem was an interesting one. I mean I think we always want to foster student self-esteem. But clearly the more students were feeling good about themselves the more they were interested in helping others. I

would also add as we think about the findings related to gender obviously we look at these high risk situations and the finding that male students are more likely to report intentions to intervene when they don't know anyone. Clearly there's something that's happening there that we really need to try to understand more and try to address and so maybe some programming needs to specifically engage female students and explore their intentions to intervene and their actual maybe providing some additional tools that may be helpful in intervening in these kinds of situations. And the fact that we find that the environment really matters in terms of who you know and it's a complicated situation it's a bit of a Catch 22 and that you know we find that knowing more LGBTQ people or knowing LGBTQ people helps to foster one's intentions to intervene across all of the peer contacts. Great but yet if we're in a hostile environment where people are not intervening then how likely is it that somebody may be out as a sexual or gender minority and then how do we create those opportunities. So it really highlights the fact that we need to be addressing the climate and really fostering that. I think both prevention and intervention when a hostile climate is occurring.

[00:22:02] So that would be some of the things that I think are really salient takeaways from our study as well. So what recommendations would you make to colleges and universities around programming. Okay I'll jump in on this one. My programming should first of all be thinking about addressing attitudes and again biased attitudes or misinformation that people may have about LGBT populations also thinking as we mentioned earlier about prosocial bystander intervention and how that relates to gender how that relates to self-esteem interventions and programming should also foster intergroup contact and personal relationship building through things such as intergroup dialogue courses social justice course content should also be promoted on college campuses as we found that to be a significant variable and then thinking again about what are the motivators for students and what are the barriers in terms of other types of research that might need to happen. And I think I think as Adrienne just said and that we we want to think about Ally programs and what can be done there but also so many of these implications go beyond allied programs. It's about the what we're teaching in our classes and evenly idea that I could start to develop a relationship with somebody who identifies as LGBT and but yet we have this sort of contradiction of classes of 300 people so intimate relationships personal relationships friendships aren't necessarily going to develop. So what can we do through extracurricular activities and such to be able to foster that so it feels like such a complicated situation in a way the system is being set up so that individuals are not necessarily having those opportunities.

[00:24:01] So again how do we go beyond ally programs how do we integrate discussions of biases into other courses. How do we integrate it into extracurricular activities but also how we give students feedback so that we're fostering a positive sense of who they are and all of these things that potentially have positive implications for prosocial ally intervention. Adrian you mentioned just a few moments ago you mentioned intergroup dialogues. Could you just briefly define what intergroup dialogues are so that our listeners will now. Sure so intergroup dialogue the way that we work on the program on intergroup relations at Michigan. These are face to face facilitated by peers in our program courses that happen between roughly equal numbers of members of two or more social identity groups. So we offer no dialogue courses on race gender sexual orientation ability and so on that are between groups that have a history of conflict and social inequality and the purpose of intergroup dialogue courses is to number one raise consciousness about social inequality. Number two to learn specific communication methods to talk across social differences in inequality to build relationships so that we actually can get to know each other across these divides and then to strengthen individual and collective capacity for social justice. Great. That sounds like a wonderful topic for a future podcast. So what other research is needed around college and university climates for LGBTQ students. I guess I'll take this as Kevin.

[00:25:58] So in terms of research needed in the future we didn't more research that is assessing actual intervention behaviors so kind of a limitation of our own research right that we're looking at

people's intention to intervene but we don't know much about how that actually plays out on the ground or about really how people would be intervening and the impact of that intervention on the space. We also need a better understanding about the relationship between attitudes intentions and actual behavior but also distinguishing among the sexual orientation and gender identity of the targets of discrimination. So our research talked about LGBT jokes and talked about there being someone who is perceived to be LGBT but we didn't really talk very specifically about who this person is what they look like how they act whether or not they are gender conforming and that may impact people's intention to intervene. We also need more research with a wider range of geographic diversity. Heterosexual college students. Most research tends to function in more liberal larger institutional settings and also looking at other predictors and mediators on interventions such as as eijun mentioned earlier confidence and skills to intervene. Looking at social desirability identity impression management and other barriers to intervening. It's also important to look at sexual minorities a willingness to intervene and LGBTQ bias incidents. So expanding our conceptualizations of Ally hood and looking at how such minority students perceive their own agency on improving their own campus climate and making contact safer for LGBT students and for the wider population more generally. I also think that personally that other research needs to examine campus climate across multiple intersections of inequality that would make sure that we are looking to the margins looking at people that negotiate multiple stigmatize and marginalized experiences. For example you know heterosexism and homophobia with racism and sexism for example as Michael mentioned earlier are thinking about sexual assault and harassment in relation to homophobia and heterosexism. You know this is really an opportunity to researchers.

[00:28:23] If we understand what best supports those who are most at risk we can create a more accessible and inclusive and equitable environment for everyone. I was curious about whether you think your study has implications for research and interventions aimed at understanding and reducing racism on college campuses. No and you just mentioned Kevin intersectionality. So I don't know is there anything else that you would like to say about that. Well I think in terms of this study we looked at students that identified as completely heterosexual and in this particular context they may struggle with Ally hood because intervening could call into question their own sexuality or heterosexuality. But the bias bystander intervention around issues of race had different costs and benefits and it would of course differ if they were white students or students of color. Whether or not that kind of racism was about a specific group or more generally I think we would still expect consistent patterns in terms of the importance of attitudes towards marginalized groups. You know the importance of intergroup friendships and strong relationships having high self-esteem. But if we were to think about this in terms of racism we would probably want to think about racism in more modern and microaggression kind of inform and racist discrimination. People are very keen not to look racist especially when the racism is explicitly and overtly derogatory and harming as in our scenarios. So you know in order to assess that you would probably be looking at a different kind of scenarios and then yes and the ones that we assessed rather than just you know replacing LGBT with racial minority. Right. Okay thank you.

[00:30:14] Well I think we may be at the end. Is there anything that you would like to add Adrienne. Michael Kevin there was a couple of things I was just thinking of as you were discussing the sort of future research and I guess one of the areas also is the effectiveness of training. And so when we have programs how effective are they. And I think part of that also means building on this were to look at. Are there other barriers that we just don't understand yet. I think that's an important area for us to move into. And one of the sort of things I also want us to think about and I think especially as a social workers and people doing social justice work is that how do we really create safe spaces. And so we're talking about intervening in these situations when discrimination happens. But yet how do we stop discrimination from happening. That's I think a grand challenge for social work. How do we continue that when we look at universities and campuses have policies in place but yet discrimination still happens. So how do we really change how do we change hearts so that

you know we don't need to have this conversation 10 15 years from now. OK. Well thank you. Thank you all so much. You're all for having us. Thank you. Diane that was great you've been listening to Dr. Adrienne Dessel, Dr. Michael Woodford and Kevin Goodman discuss heterosexual bystander's intention to intervene with LGBT discrimination on college campuses and in social work. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work.

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