



LGBTQ Street Safety in Seattle: A Practicum Report

Christie Santos-Livengood

ABSTRACT: As an Intern at Seattle Neighborhood Greenways, Christie Santos-Livengood completed 11 information-gathering interviews with LGBT community stakeholders to identify community concerns and make recommendations to prevent and address anti-LGBT hate crimes in Seattle. The findings indicate that the LGBT community stakeholders are concerned with Gentrification and Newcomers, Mistrust of Police, Nightlife Culture and Hate Crimes. Recommendations are provided and include action items for the City, Business and Non-Profit Organizations and the LGBT Community.

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 3

Organization Profile and Analysis..... 3

Project Description—Assessment Project..... 4

Problem Statement.....4

Literature Review5

Community Concerns..... 8

Gentrification and Newcomers8

Mistrust of Police9

Nightlife Culture10

Hate Crimes10

Recommendations 11

Conclusion 13

References 14

Introduction

Seattle is a major metropolitan city, the largest city in the Pacific Northwest, and the place approximately 640,500 people call home (Seattle, 2013). Of Seattle residents, 13% identify as gay and lesbian (Turnbull, 2006). Because of the city's progressive politics and generally LGBT-positive climate, many LGBT people have made Seattle home. Despite the City's LGBT-positive reputation, anti-LGBT hate crimes are a serious public health issue in Seattle (Balk, 2014); anti-LGBTQ hate crimes rose from 6 in 2011 to 15 in 2012 (FBI, 1996-2013). As such, identifying community concerns and finding strategies to address them is essential to keeping LGBT people healthy, happy and safe. This report explores the background, methods and procedures of the LGBTQ Safe Streets Project at Seattle Neighborhood Greenways, discusses findings from informant interviews, and offers policy recommendations to reduce the risk of hate violence and hate crimes, and to address them appropriately if and when they occur.

Organization Profile and Analysis

Seattle Neighborhood Greenways (SNG) is a Seattle-based healthy and safe streets advocacy coalition. Christie Santos-Livengood worked under the direction of the SNG Executive Director Cathy Tuttle to complete her LGBTQ Safe Streets Project.

Seattle Neighborhood Greenways initiatives are driven by evidence. Their initiatives support priorities at the intersection of the built environment and public health, including curbing urban sprawl and new urbanism; capturing the character and beauty of our city's neighborhoods; and making streets safe and pleasant spaces to occupy (Dumbaugh, 2009; Talen, 2003). Increasing the number of and improving greenways has been shown to increase social cohesion (de Vries, 2013; Mass, 2009), reduce risk of injuries to cyclists (Teschke et al., 2012), increase physical activity (Pucher & Dijkstra, 2003),

contribute to mental health (Sullivan, 2011) and increase physical activity among community members (Heinrich, 2008; Sallis, 2011; Younger, Morrow-Almeida, Vindigni, & Dannenberg, 2008) increase safety (Hartig, 2014), reduce stress (de Vries, 2013; Hartig, 2014) and improve air quality in the community (Hartig, 2014) and can increase active transport and walking to transit (Besser, 2005). In addition to improving and increasing greenways, Seattle Neighborhood Greenways encourages student interns to incorporate their individual interests in its projects (Aboelata, 2011). Their evidenced-based endeavors, including installing benches for resting places, lengthening the amount of time that street crossings go, incorporating key features of walkable streets such as traffic reducing measures and ensuring that streets have cut corners to meet ADA accessibility standards, contribute to a growing number of greenways in Seattle, to “eyes on the street” (Brown, 2009) and to the health and street safety of citizens of all ages ((CDC), 2005; Feldman, 2003).

Project Description—Assessment Project

Problem Statement

Christie sincerely desired to complete a practicum that would combine her interests in the built environment and street safety for populations who have historically been and are currently systematically disenfranchised. Christie approached SNG because of its positive reputation in the community and with built environment scholars, and on her understanding of their strengths and successes as a high functioning collaborative despite limited funding. Under the direction of Cathy, the LGBTQ Safe Streets project developed over the period of 1 year. The LGBTQ Safe Streets project sought to find recommendations for the community and stakeholders for how to increase personal safety and reduce the upward trend of hate crimes (FBI, 1996-2013) in the Seattle Central Greenways area of Seattle. Central Seattle Greenways is SNG’s neighborhood group that advocates for street safety South of East Interlaken Boulevard and East Denny Way; East of the I-5 Freeway from the 520 East Exit to the I-

90 East; North of the I-90 Freeway; West of Lake Washington and 23rd Avenue East. This area generally encompasses the Capitol Hill, Central District, First Hill, Yesler Terrace, Atlantic and Madrona neighborhoods. The project's scope was narrowed to the two largest and most recognized neighborhoods in this area—Capitol Hill and the Central District. Through community-based interviews and a review of key pieces of hate crime literature from various disciplines, Christie has identified key recommendations by and for community members, businesses and non-profits, and the government of the City of Seattle. The project's key deliverable is an Infographic illustrating the findings of the LGBTQ Safe Streets Project.

Literature Review

Hate crimes—defined by Congress ““criminal offense[s] against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, ethnic origin or sexual orientation”” (FBI, 2015) are threatening to physical and mental health, and are an important public health issue. Hate crimes have persistent mental health consequences on the well being of survivors of these bias crimes (G. M. Herek, 2009; G. M. G. Herek, J. R.; Cogan, J. C., 1999; G. M. G. Herek, J. R.; Cogan, J. C.; Glunt, E. K., 1997). Survivors of a hate crime are more likely to suffer from depression and post-traumatic stress than survivors of a crime not motivated by hatred (G. M. G. Herek, J. R.; Cogan, J. C., 1999). Hate crimes are a serious concern for LGBT people; 20% of LGB people report surviving an anti-LGB crime (G. M. Herek, 2009) and among all hate crimes reported, LGBT people consistently report crimes against their person rather than crimes of property (Rubenstein, 2004). Little is known about the number of hate crimes experienced by trans* gender people because the Hate Crimes Statistics Act did not require data collection of hate crimes motivated by gender or gender identity until 2009 (FBI, 2010). However, research suggests that trans* gender people are at extremely high risk, particularly trans* gender women of color (Stotzer, 2008). Though survivors of anti-LGBT hate crimes report more often

than non-LGBT survivors (Rubenstein, 2004), underreporting continues to limit the ability for public health to truly understand the severity of this problem.

Underreporting is attributed to proximal factors—the fears of being forced out of the closet, police, and a legitimate concern that a jury’s bias would favor the perpetrator—that are symptoms of distal factors, including: a legacy of police brutality (Armstrong, 2007; Robinson, 2011), social stigma and isolation, and systematic oppression (Armstrong, 2007; Robinson, 2011; Rubenstein, 2004; SPLC, 2005). All of these factors are magnified for LGBT people with other intersecting identities (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Crenshaw, 1989). Further, hate crimes are surveilled by the FBI, but they depend on city and county police and sheriffs departments to report any local hate crimes that occur based on the Hate Crime Statistics Act (FBI, 2010); if a police department does not report hate crimes from their jurisdiction to the FBI, the FBI’s reports remain incomplete.

There is conflicting evidence regarding the locations of hate crimes incidents within a neighborhood. Stotzer identified that hate crimes occur in public places such as highways, streets, outside of gay-identified spaces such as gay bars, or near retail establishments where liquor is sold (Stotzer, 2008, 2010). Herek et al found that anti-LGBT crimes against a female-identified person were more likely to occur in a private residence, whereas crimes against male-identified persons were more likely to occur in public spaces. These conflicting data suggest that safety is relative and no place can ever be designated as safe, more data is needed to truly understand hate crimes against LGBT people, and that neighborhood and hate crimes should be examined.

There are very few studies that explore the relationship between neighborhoods and the health and safety of LGBT people in respect to hate crimes and other public health concerns. Rebecca Stotzer identified that hate crimes are concentrated in place recognized as places where LGBT people live and are, including San Francisco and West Hollywood (Stotzer, 2008, 2010), and that hate crimes rise in these places before and after Pride. Two studies conducted in Oregon and Boston, respectively, that

explored the relationship between neighborhood hate crimes and LGBTQ youth suicide found that in unsupportive neighborhoods (Hatzenbuehler, 2011) or neighborhoods with a higher prevalence of hate crimes against LGBT people (Duncan, 2014), LGBT teens are more likely to experience suicidality or suicide attempts. Using data from the aforementioned Boston study, Duncan, Hatzenbuehler and Johnson found a relationship between neighborhood-level hate crimes and illegal drug use among teens. These studies suggest that a neighborhood's climate affects the mental and physical safety of LGBT people.

Methods

Despite the research suggesting that hate crimes are on the rise in Seattle, no local studies have been conducted to find out what the community's concerns are regarding hate crimes and tangible ways to address these concerns, prevent hate crimes from happening, and address them appropriately when they do occur. In order to generate these recommendations, I conducted 12 informal interviews with 7 LGBT-identified residents of various ethnic identities, 1 white gay representative from the Greater Seattle Business Association (the LGBT Chamber of Commerce in Seattle), 1 white trans* gender Executive Director at an LGBT non-profit, 1 white queer member of Central Seattle Greenways group and 1 local white queer business owner, and 1 white police officer. Using a few general questions to guide our conversations, stakeholders described their experiences living and being in the study area (Central Seattle Greenways) and concerns about hate crimes and hate violence. Using my notes from these conversations I incorporated basic steps in qualitative analysis to determine community concerns upon which to generate recommendations.

I conducted the initial basic steps of qualitative research to interpret the information I generated from my conversations with community members (Ulin, 2005). To begin, I immersed myself in the information by reading and re-reading my notes from the interviews and conversations. Once I was familiar with the information, I used Ulin's evidence-based practices to index, or label, the

information based on the words used by the interviewees. After indexing the text, I combined indexes to generate categories (Saldaña, 2013). These categories are presented in the Infographic as the community concerns: Gentrification and Newcomers, Mistrust of Police, Nightlife Culture and Hate Crimes. The recommendations specifically targeted at LGBT people were generated from conversations with LGBT-identified interviewees. The information will not be formally analyzed using analysis software, as this project is not officially research, but rather an information-gathering project designed to generate recommendations based on community feedback regarding street safety for LGBT people in the Central Seattle Greenways area.

Community Concerns

Gentrification and Newcomers

Interviewees expressed concerns about the physical and social changes occurring in the Central Greenways area. Urban planners have identified that the built environment has an effect on social and economic climate in a neighborhood or city, and that ‘feelings’ of being unsafe are correlated with violent crime (Salesses, 2013). Thus, it is not surprising that interviewees expressed concern that the physical and social changes occurring in the Central Greenways area—attributable to gentrification and dramatic increases in rent—are having an effect on the social and economic climate, thus increasing anti-LGBT hate crimes in Central Greenways. A trans* woman shared a story of her and her friends being verbally attacked by some ‘outsider’ (newcomer) men in a pizza parlor in the Pike/Pine corridor, simply for being trans.

Key quotes

“The answer might be just to move, which is sad.” *–LGBTQ-identified community member*

“[Hate crimes] are a product of gentrification.” –*LGBTQ-identified community member*

“Minorities make things feel exciting; story of gentrification.” –*LGBTQ-identified community member and LGBT Chamber of Commerce employee*

“Used to feel that the neighborhood was safer, now its not.” –*LGBTQ-identified community member*

Mistrust of Police

Interviewees expressed concerns about the historical relationship between the LGBTQ community and the police. LGBTQ-identified interviewees shared that they, or someone they know, had experienced indifference, disrespect or violence from police officers in the past. Interviewees spoke generally about these experiences, and did not specifically identify that these instances had occurred in Seattle. Interviewees expressed that they would be afraid to report violence to the police because of their mistrust of officers individually and the justice system generally. The police officer that I interviewed shared that the community needs to understand the laws, training and norms for communicating with police officers, and that the community needs to report any violence it experiences so that it can truly understand the scope of the hate crime problem in Seattle.

Key quotes

“I’m vulnerable. Trans woman are vulnerable and have more to fear from the police than to trust them.” –*LGBTQ-identified community member*

“LGBT people need to feel that if and when problems happen they know who to turn to and they will be treated with respect and support. We need to know that authorities will respond in an effective way. There is a lot of fear in the trans community particularly that they will be addressed as who they are and treated accordingly. SPD is trying.” –*LGBTQ-identified community member and LGBT Chamber of Commerce employee*

“The department encourages people to report this; if not we can’t devote resources to the area.” –
Seattle Police Department Officer

“More police does not mean more safety.” –*Executive Director at LGBT-serving non-profit*

Nightlife Culture

Interviewees expressed concern about Nightlife in Central Greenways. Interviewees were generally concerned that the increase in bars, clubs and general ‘nightlife’ establishments on Capitol Hill is associated with the upward trend in hate crimes. They identified that outsiders—who range from being unfamiliar with the LGBTQ community to being openly anti-LGBT—are occupying traditionally LGBT centered spaces, which is causing tension between groups. Interviewees expressed that these ‘outsiders’ are rude, pejorative, loud, disrespectful and violent. The interviewee from the Greater Seattle Business Association identified that alcohol is fueling crimes against people and property on Capitol Hill, but that it is hard for him to understand whether the crimes are motivated by opportunity or hate.

Key quote

“With Capitol Hill becoming a center of nightlife, I think there’s just more people and not everyone is used to being around different segments of the population... [Outsiders] don’t see themselves as anti-gay but don’t necessarily see what they are doing when they are drunk.”

–*LGBT-identified community member and LGBT Chamber of Commerce employee*

Hate Crimes

Hate crimes and safety are a major concern for interviewees. LGBTQ interviewees expressed concern for their personal safety, the safety of their friends, and the safety of their property, and the safety of their community. Interviewees were particularly concerned with safety after dark, vulnerability to hate crimes and generally feeling unsafe in the study area. Most interviewees shared

that Central Greenways was once a safer place than it is now, and that the rise in hate crimes is a salient concern for themselves as individuals, and for the collective LGBTQ community. Interviewees shared their or their friends' personal experiences of being attacked.

Key Quotes

"A member of ours 2 summers ago was chased down the street and beaten w/ a skateboard. He wasn't aware of his surroundings, wasn't in a good state, you don't know [if it was a hate crime] but he had just come out of a gay bar. Those are the things that terrify people...Pike and Pine are well lit and well traveled, but a few blocks north and south are very dark, lots of places to hide... Four stabbings in front of my door in two weeks at 2 [o'clock] in the morning."

–LGBTQ-identified community member and LGBT Chamber of Commerce employee

"I don't feel safe in my neighborhood and that has been very disempowering and stressful...I was drugged at R place." –LGBTQ-identified community member

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on reviews of the built environment and anti-LGBTQ hate crime literatures, and the information shared by community interviewees. Public health knows that policy and protocol change at the systems level, rather than at the individual level, has far reaching potential to reduce health disparities. As such, the first recommendation of each section is the most impactful and its implementation should be prioritized. All recommendations are tangible suggestions for ways to improve the lives of all Central Seattle Greenways residents, visitors and friends.

For City Government

- 1. Implement comprehensive rent control to mitigate the increase in violence that occurs as a result of gentrification*

2. *Host community forums before (May) and after (July) Pride Month to share concerns, identify preventive measures and generate action-oriented solutions to mitigate hate violence*
 - a. *Require key government officials to be present for forums—Councilmembers, Legislators who serve Seattle and the Seattle Police Department*
 - b. *Invite **mainstream** media outlets to forums*

For the Seattle Police Department

1. *Track police enforcement of anti-LGBT crimes.*
2. *Train all first responders (e.g. beat police, 911 dispatchers) to greet community members involved using gender-neutral language, (e.g. “Good afternoon.” instead of “Good afternoon, Ma’am.”), ask for the pronoun they use (e.g. “Which pronoun do you use?”) and adhere to their pronoun throughout incident reporting, addressing and post-report data analysis.*
3. *Compile a quarterly report that tracks all anti-LGBT incidents including the date, time, location and context of the incident, to be in alignment with transparency goals*

For Businesses, Organizations and Employers

1. *Remove required education from job descriptions and use measurable skills to replace this gatekeeping hiring practice that reduces the ability for LGBTQ people, people of color and individuals with multiple identities from accessing jobs*
2. *Place rainbow stickers, flags, and LGBT-themed art (e.g. two women kissing) in storefront windows to remind the community know that they belong, and to let ‘outsiders’ know that they are in an LGBT-affirming space*

For the LGBTQ Community

1. *Advocate and lobby City and State legislators for policy change to mitigate anti-hate violence, create sustainable rent control, establish equitable employment hiring practices*

2. *Collaborate with community organizations like Entre Hermanos, Gender Justice League, API Chaya, Center for Multicultural Health, Gay City, Ingersoll Gender Cente and The NW Network to build bridges and create community-centered solutions to LGBT-phobia and anti-LGBT hate violence and crimes*
3. *Continue to create, flourish, live and celebrate our community to resist oppression and communicate confidence*
4. *Report hate violence to advocates and allies at the NW Network 206-214-9834, a Seattle LGBT anti-violence organization*
5. *Trust your intuition*

Conclusion

Hate crimes against LGBTQ people in Seattle are a public health and urban planning issue that must be addressed. This information-gathering project offers insight of the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and their stakeholders in Seattle, and identifies concerns of individuals who have a vested interest in serving the LGBTQ community. It is imperative that the City of Seattle, businesses and the LGBTQ community implement these recommendations; they have the potential to truly impact the health and well being of LGBTQ people, and the entire Seattle community.

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