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Exploring the climate for LGBTQ2S+ students in science

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Findings Summary

This study explored the campus climate for LGBTQ2S+ students in science-related fields. We interviewed 44 stakeholders (30 students, 14 professors/staff) who identified with various gender identities and sexualities and had a variety of functional backgrounds (e.g., computer science, biology, chemistry). Subsequently, we analyzed the data using reflexive thematic analysis, which involved categorizing participants' quotes into categories, themes, and subthemes. Overall, the campus climate for LGBTQ2S+ students in science-related disciplines was perceived as welcoming and inclusive. Members of the LGBTQ2S+ community appeared to be supported through both interpersonal conversations, subtle acts of inclusion (e.g., listing pronouns on email signatures) and institutional initiatives (LGBTQ2S+ focused events). These positive experiences and/or behaviours were perceived to enhance LGBTQ2S+ perceptions of comfort and promote meaningful conversations about sexuality and gender. Unfortunately, however, participants also perceived the climate to be very work-focused in nature and have toxic qualities. Specifically, participants recalled various microaggressions and overt discrimination directed toward members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Participants perceived these negative experiences/behaviours to change academic relationships and result in LGBTQ+ students seeking social support. Importantly, however, participants highlighted that the amount of social support someone has, personal characteristics (e.g., ethnicity), and environmental factors (e.g., departmental microclimates) have the potential to alter how climate affects someone's experiences and perceptions of comfort.