

Doyle Center Coordinator discusses LGBTQ hate crime legislation

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Last spring, the *Exponent* published a series of interviews to honor Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights activists. This semester, we are continuing the series with interviews regarding the legacy of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student at the University of Wyoming who was the victim of hate crimes that, in the end, cost him his life. This week's interview was with Emily Stier, the coordinator of the Doyle Center for Gender and Sexuality.

What is your relationship with the Matthew Shepard case?

"It was a historic case that shaped the lens of people's understanding of compassion for the treatment of LGBTQ people, or specifically at that time for gay people. It happened in a rural area where folks were perhaps not always perceived as being inclusive and outwardly supportive.

After [Shepard's] murder, though, the nation really kind of woke up in regards to what it was going to look like moving forward with hate crimes that happened towards LGBTQ people. As it stands right now, that is a case-by-case basis. What I mean is that there is no national standard in regards to hate crimes for LGBTQ folks – it is up to the state's own jurisdiction.

Nonetheless, it did spark the idea that we could have hate crime laws in place for other identities and folks that are targeted, especially for violence. In [Shepard's] case, it was both violence and sexual harassment. How is that going to be viewed and treated? It was a national outcry for compassion and empathy."

What do you believe is left out of the conversation on Shepard's case?

"Something specific with the Shepard case is I don't feel like folks, to this day, know that crimes against LGBTQ people are not across the board considered hate crimes. There was so much momentum and encouraging things that happened with such a tragic event, but there are still misconceptions that come with legal things and laws that are not put in place for folks on the state level.

For example, in the state of Wisconsin, you can only be a victim of a hate crime for your sexual orientation. If I was gay and I was the victim of violence because of that, it would be considered a hate crime. This is not true for your gender identity, though. If I was transgender and a victim of violence, it would not be considered a hate crime. It's still violence against a person, but the state would not recognize it under hate crimes."

How does the Doyle Center embody Shepard's legacy?

"I think the important thing that came out of such a tragic event was the ability to build empathy and compassion for someone who was victimized in many ways. That, on a national level, is just not something that had happened to quite that extent before. We were just coming off the AIDS crisis of the late 80s early 90s. I think what the Doyle Center and the message we try to put out consistently is that everyone has a gender and sexuality. This is an identity that we all possess, even if you're straight or cisgender, it's not just an LGBTQ specific identity that we have to unpack, care for and respect. We all have these identities within ourselves. Providing that message wherever we can, which most heavily comes through at the educational events."

What is the Doyle Center and what resources does it offer?

"The Doyle Center is unique in that it is open to students, staff, faculty and the community at large. We are open to Platteville, Southwest Wisconsin and anywhere, really. We do programs and events to encompass a large and expansive population. The center most often sees students, but what the Doyle Center provides is an education in regards to gender and sexuality. Programs often get reduced to just LGBTQ folks, but I do want to make sure that folks know we do provide programming, and it is applicable to all identities.

At the center, we have a lounge with a TV and computer access, the resource library as well as things for students to relax and be productive.

We are the only location on campus to have a lactation room, so individuals nursing can come in with their child or alone and use that space. We also have the sexual violence victims advocate on campus, which is provided through family advocates. She serves eight hours a week here. With that, there is the support group for folks who have been a victim or have been impacted in some way by sexual violence. These are free and confidential services we brought [to campus] so it's a little more easily accessible."

What does the Doyle Center do to fight against LGBTQ hate crimes on campus?

"We don't have specific programs in regards to hate crimes, but we do provide education about LGBTQ identities and how to build empathy, understanding, and respect. We teach a proactive approach in order to prohibit those instances of bias and disrespect, and we do this in hopes of preventing something more serious, such as a hate crime.

The educational component focuses on combating bias and hate against LGBTQ folks. We provide the educational events and have a large resource library specific to LGBTQ identities that are housed in the center and is always open for folks that are looking to expand their knowledge outside of the programming events we offer."

What are some examples of some of the programs the Doyle Center hosts?

"One of the largest educational ones would be allied training, which provides folks basic knowledge in regards to gender and sexuality. That's a base level understanding of terminology and how to be more inclusive or even perhaps empathetic towards people who identify within the community. It also covers transgender topics, which is another training that explores a little bit more in-depth in transgender identity and gender identity as a whole.

In those training events, what we do is provide people some context of scope as to what are the laws in place for protecting LGBTQ folks? What is our current climate both at UW-Platteville specifically, and then as a state and as a nation, so people will have a better understanding of the lives and experiences every day for folks who identify within their community.

We also put on an annual conference, Rainbow Rave, which highlights not only students but other content experts to talk about LGBTQ topics. It is based on what the students need, and we work with The Alliance, the student group on campus to determine that."

What can students on campus do to help prevent stigmas?

"I would say first and foremost making sure that as individuals, their knowledge and competency are up-to-date, so if they're correcting their friend or saying, 'no, you should use this word', that they make sure they're sending the right messages, too.

It is also important to not be afraid to stand up to friends, professors, teammates or whoever it may be. Another way that seems really simple is including your pronouns on our email signature. That takes little to no effort, but it shows LGBTQ folks that you know how important pronouns are and must have some respect and understanding to identity.

I would also say wherever people post information about what they like and dislike, what their stances are – making sure if you're a supporter of LGBTQ folks that you are doing that as well. Whether it's what you share or like on social media, or maybe it's just the decorations in your residence hall or even a patch on your backpack. That is a small but inclusive way to show your support."



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