

Behavior Method Research Paper

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The general student population may experience difficult moments in school, but that is especially true for our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ (LGBTQ+) youth. LGBTQ reported higher levels of physical, verbal, sexual violence, and bullying than their identified straight peers (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018). Due to the lack of support and awareness on how to address LGBTQ students, many start to feel schools are unsafe and unsupportive. LGBTQ may also experience academic challenges, have a higher rate of school dropout rates and/or have lower aspiration for postsecondary education. These negative school experiences can affect LGBTQ+ youth as they transition into employment or University/ College. In an effort to motivate and encourage, this study will examine how high schools can implement a LGBTQ+ affirmative school climate and help bring equitable resources and opportunities for our LGBTQ youth who have been identified as at risk and victims of bullying.

It is a school counselor's professional and ethical responsibility to ensure a safe harassment- free learning environment and provide counseling services for all students in need of support (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018). School counselors can facilitate support groups specifically for LGBTQ students, allowing them to openly discuss their experience, process their thoughts, and develop coping strategies (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018). School counselors also need to have an understanding of issues that specifically affect LGBTQ students on an individual level. Educators should collaborate with the local LGBTQ community, participating in continuing education, reading latest research, and familiarizing themselves with legal and ethical mandates surrounding LGBTQ students (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018). Most importantly, school counselors and educators must participate in

ongoing self- examination of their own biases, stereotypes and blind spots concerning all students (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018).

In order to bring awareness to this topic, the first step in carrying out this plan is to conduct a needs and readiness assessment. This assessment will focus on evaluating the school's current climate related to LGBTQ students and the willingness of staff to make needed changes (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018). Collecting data through the assessments will help gather feedback from all stakeholders, create openness towards acceptance and making changes, as well as identifying the amount of education and training stakeholders will be required to attend. School counselors can also examine disparities and issues LGBTQ students face within the school (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018), such data may include behavior referrals, truancy rates, negative changes in grades and attitudes/ behaviors.

LGBTQ+ youth are at a greater risk of being bullied, harassed, threatened, and physically injured than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Many LGBTQ youth experience expressions of discrimination such as school policies that exclude LGBTQ topics from the curriculum, not calling students from their preferred pronouns, or allowing students to use homophobic terms. Educators may also overlook issues of verbal abuse towards LGBTQ+ students, seeing it as less harmful than instances of physical violence (Gower et al., 2018). Despite schools being legally required to protect all students, most schools continue to allow harm to be inflicted by students who identify as LGBTQ+.

Many of our LGBTQ youth feel unsafe in schools because educators ignore their cries for help. Some evidence suggests, school counselors rate relational bullying as less serious, report

less empathy for targets of relational bullying, and intervene less strongly for relational bullying compared to physical bullying (Gower et al., 2018). Youths who have disclosed bullying, harassment, or assault to school staff reported their reports were ignored (Roberto, McEachern, Hall, & Kenny, 2018). When these incidents were reported, LGBTQ students faced harsher discipline than their identified straight peers and were often blamed for their incidents (Roberto, McEachern, Hall, & Kenny, 2018). The lack of support from the school community can pose greater risk of victimization for LGBTQ students. By establishing an LGBTQ+ inclusive school climate, students will have a positive school experience, develop positive relationships with school staff, feel safer in their schools, experience less victimization, report greater psychological well-being, and have better academic outcomes (Kosciw & Singh, 2016).

To create situations that allow more empowerment, all students including LGBTQ students, administration, counselors, teachers, parents, and school staff must work together in order to create a positive LGBTQ affiliated school environment. One of the best ways to recognizing and supporting LGBTQ students is through the use of Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). GSAs are student-led groups made up of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students as well as their allies. Having a GSA in the school helps LGBTQ students find social support in the school, connects them to information and learn advocacy skills. Furthermore, educating staff and providing training for staff will be essential to better equip them to handle issues related to bullying, gender identity and sexual orientation. Also, improving access to LGBTQ-related resources and integrating LGBTQ topics into the school curriculum including relevant materials in school libraries and creating lesson plans through social emotional learning that are related to LGBTQ youth. School counselors also play a major role by offering

community support and providing information to students and families. For example, school counselors can offer a variety of support to increase families skills and knowledge around issues affecting LGBTQ youth including: workshops and individual guidance on helping parents and guardians through the coming out process, including referrals to support groups, school mental health support or community agencies.

When educators do not respond to LGBTQ issues appropriately LGBTQ students may experience behavior and emotional difficulties including suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Roberto, McEachern, Hall, & Kenny, 2018). Even if a LGBTQ+ student has not directly been the victim of bullying or discrimination, they are likely receive homophobic and transphobic messages in the school setting. This can be extremely damaging to their well-being and make them feel unsupported within their school community. In order to promote well-being amongst LGBTQ+ youth, schools must create comprehensive programs to eliminate bullying, promote diversity, provide resources, and facilitate supportive communities. The goal is to help school staff, collaborate with LGBTQ communities, parents, and students to build a positive, supportive and healthy environment that promotes acceptance, allowing LGBTQ students to thrive as their true authentic selves (Roberto, McEachern, Hall, & Kenny, 2018). If the whole school community comes together to support students with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, student mental and physical health threats will diminish greatly, social, emotional, and academic outcomes will improve, and all students will have a safer environment in which they can learn and grow. From this project, I learned how important it is to create a welcoming learning environment for all students to be successful. As school counselors, we have the

opportunity to provide support for students, teachers, and parents as they navigate through this conversations.

This current study examines how school practices can create a supportive LGBTQ student climate related to students who have reported experiencing bullying. In the article, *School Practices to Foster LGBTQ- Supportive Climate: Association with Adolescent Bullying Involvement*, examined student data from 2013 Minnesota student survey, ninth and eleventh grade students reported on frequency of physical and relational bullying victimization and sexual orientation harassment (Gower et al., 2018). However, data also presented when school administrators showed willingness to creating a supportive LGBTQ school climate it included integrated sexual orientation specific content, provided a point person for LGBTQ student issues, created a gay- straight alliance, discussed bullying, and provided professional development around LGBTQ inclusion (Gower et al., 2018). When schools were successful with their integration program students reported feeling more support in their school environment. Reports demonstrated lower odds of relational bullying victimization, physical bullying perpetration, and sexual orientation harassment compared to students in schools with less supportive LGBTQ climates.(Gower et al., 2018). Findings support school-wide efforts to create supportive climates for LGBTQ youth as part of a larger bullying prevention strategy.

Research has shown that LGBTQ youth are disproportionately bullied, verbally, physically harassed, and assaulted in schools by peers and staff (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018).. When LGBTQ students experience such hostility and do not receive guidance many will be unmotivated to participate in school causing lower school performance, may experience

psychological and emotional distress including depression and anxiety. In the article, *Promoting LGBTQ students' Well-Being in Schools* discussed, interventions schools that addressed bullying and diversity have been linked effectively in promoting a more positive school environment for all students (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018). These interventions should include procedures and programming specific to the LGBTQ population, such as staff training on LGBTQ issues, multicultural awareness and response procedures regarding victimization of LGBTQ students(Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018). For example, at the high school level, counselors are forming LGBTQ support groups to provide outlets for these students to discuss specific issues and concerns (Roberto, McEachern, Hall , & Kenny, 2018). When educators take the time to learn about this demographic students will start to feel that they are valued and that their voices are important.

Work Citations

Gower, A. L., Forster, M., Gloppen, K., Johnson, A. Z., Eisenberg, M. E., Connett, J. E., & Borowsky, I. W. (2018). School Practices to Foster LGBT-Supportive Climate: Associations with Adolescent Bullying Involvement. *Prevention Science, 19*(6), 813–821. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-017-0847-4>Citations

Kosciw, J. G., Diaz, E. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2008). 2007 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

Roberto , A. L., McEachern, A. G., Hall , J. G., & Kenny , M. C. (2018, October 2). *Promoting LGBTQ students' well-being in schools*. Counseling Today. <https://ct.counseling.org/2018/10/promoting-lgbtq-students-well-being-in-schools/>.