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Literature Review

EDHP 552

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Addressing School Climate Needs for LGBTQ Students: A Literature Review

Homosexual adolescents are 3.5 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Hlavinka, 2018). Many of the factors associated with suicide that are also particularly prevalent in the LGBTQ community are bullying, harassment and abuse. Students in this population often live in hostile school climates and are unable to feel comfortable with their identities in school settings. Low academic achievement and mental health problems have become common among this student population, affecting school dropout rates and limited performance in work and school settings. LGBTQ discrimination continues to be widespread, and the need for equity and inclusion for this student population is critical in order to prevent serious negative outcomes for these students such as suicide, homelessness, and mental health issues. The goal of this literature review is to use presented journals of study and data to analyze the struggles that the LGBTQ student has, the factors that place these students in the at-risk category and assess recommendations to be addressed to create the ideal school climate for the target student population.

The LGBTQ School Experience

The National School Climate Survey done by GLSEN (2017) reported that nearly 60% of American LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school, 87.3% experienced harassment of their sexual orientation, and 62.2% of the students experienced LGBTQ-related discriminatory policies or practices at school (GLSEN, 2017). The student in the queer community who experiences any type of victimization is less likely than their heterosexual counterpart to feel safe at school and/or have higher levels of academic achievement. Gender expression and the individual's "coming out" is a crucial part of identity development. Additionally, "the use of labels during identity development helps adolescents view different facets of themselves as part of a coherent whole," promoting wellbeing through identity (Am J Community Psychol, p. 169, 2015).

> However, due to heteronormativity and the prominence of the gender binary in most schools, youth are generally expected to be both heterosexual and conform to gender norms. As such, many LGBT youth may feel discouraged from telling people about being LGBT and/or delay coming out (Am J Community Psychol, p. 169, 2015).

Many homosexual students conceal their sexual orientation and do not disclose to their friends and family for fear of stigmatization. The results often lead to social isolation and negative effects on overall physical and mental health. "Coming out" to a community for a LGBTQ person is an important wellness factor and studies have shown that individuals who were out exhibited higher levels of psychological wellbeing than those who were not (Lighthouse, 2018).

More than half of this student population experiences harassment or assault daily based on their sexual orientation or gender expression (70% experienced verbal harassment, 29% experienced physical harassment, and 49% experienced cyberbullying) (GLSEN, 2017). Even with these incidents, 60% of the affected students who reported it said that the school did not respond or have a call to action. The need for schools to adopt anti-discrimination policies and implement educator training would contribute to greater safety of the student body. The following study reports schools in the U.S. who have adopted these policies:

> In the state of Oregon, lesbian and gay high school students in counties where a larger number of districts had adopted enumerated policies reported fewer suicide attempts than those in counties where fewer districts had adopted these policies (Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013). Data from students across the state of California also suggest that sexual minority youth who attend schools with enumerated protective policies report greater perceptions of safety than youth in schools without these policies (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2004) (Cited in V. Paul Poteat et al, p. 288, 2014).

No matter how playful name-calling may be, homophobic language in schools perpetuate heterosexual culture among students, creating a hostile environment for LGBTQ students. Common words such as "fag," "dyke," and "homo," are just some of the few names that are targeted to these youth. In a 2015 study, intervention proven to be critical in teaching youth that homophobic name-calling is "not acceptable ways of showing authority, power, or masculinity" (Birkett, M., & Espelage, 2015). The study involved the evaluation of 493 fifth to eighth grade

students and the goal was to look at the formation of homophobia among these student groups. Through the use of administered surveys, it was found that students who use homophobic language have been victims of these names themselves. Additionally, male students with high masculinity attitudes also perpetuate homophobic language. This is most likely to assert dominance over others (Birkett, M., & Espelage, 2015). The findings of the study stress the importance of how educators can be role models to these student groups who are use homophobic name-calling to emasculate others. For students who have been victims of name-calling themselves, it is particularly important for interventions to occur at an early age before they participate in perpetuating the same cycle (Birkett, M., & Espelage). In addition to improving intervention on schools, it is recommended to address how school policy dress codes also do not discriminate against gender expression for LGBTQ students.

Student Academic Outcomes

The Journal of Research on Adolescence (2012) presents findings on how homophobic victimization is detrimental to academic outcomes. The study finds that "students who experienced homophobic victimization were 1.52 times as likely as non-victimized youth" to report C's and D's or below, and 2.52 times as likely to report truancy (Case et al, 2012). This type of victimization may also transition into chronic victimization among youth, leading to a rise in sexual orientation-based academic disparities (Case et al, p. 272, 2012). Not only does this victimization jeopardize the student's learning and testing performance, but it may be harder for these youth to recover. Diminished mental health and psychological wellbeing correlates to the educational outcomes in these students and increases risk for school dropout.

LGBTQ students are also more likely to miss school and have lower grade point averages due to homophobic victimization (GLSEN, 2017). These students were three times as likely to have missed school in 2012 (63.3%) than those who experienced lower levels (23.1%). The

target population of students are also less likely than the heterosexual student population to be as college and career ready with issues concerning drop-out and lack of post-secondary education plans. Inclusive curriculum is one way to destigmatize the LGBTQ minority student body as well as "normalize" the concept of homosexuality. Incorporating material in class lecture, homework, textbooks, and school marketing/public relations improve overall attitudes towards LGBTQ students and decrease internalized homophobia.

> Our limited knowledge of how to promote academic excellence among sexual minority and gender-variant youth underscores the need for researchers to consider more expansive resilience-based models that incorporate academic outcomes (V. Paul Poteat et al, p. 283, 2014).

Just as homophobic language places students of LGBTQ communities in subordinate positions, so do some extracurricular activities on campus. In a study done by "Factors Affecting Academic Achievement" for LGBTQ students, discrimination and prejudice towards queer students are evident in organized sports and clubs, depriving these students from participating in them. Some examples are males who are involved in sports, or stereotypical female-oriented activities (cheerleading) which may lead to pressure for sexual minority students to conform to heterosexual norms, causing them to hide their identities (Birkett and Espelage, 2015). Extracurricular activities are meant to promote well-being and positive academic outcomes and should not be a barrier to students who identify at LGBTQ. More attention should be given on extracurricular involvement for queer students. GLSEN recommends schools to start student support clubs for these students, as well as provide training for school staff to improve interventions (GLSEN, 2017).

At-Risk Factors

Given the fact that the LGBTQ student may be discouraged from coming out and/or fearing of being victimized, many at-risk factors are present. Findings in a 1998 school-based sample makes the following statement on issues with gender expression:

> Homosexual, bisexual, and other adolescents confronting issues of sexual expression or orientation have been identified as facing stresses including emotional isolation, social rejection, and lowered self-esteem. The complex components of sexual orientation, including fantasies, feelings, behaviors, attractions, and cultural affiliations, often are quite difficult to manage. According to estimates, at least 1 in 10 teenagers struggles with issues regarding sexual orientation (Garofalo, 1998).

Results from a study done in a 1995 Youth and Risk Behavior Survey show that LGBTQ youth "were more likely than their peers to have been victimized and threatened and to have been engaged in a variety of risk behaviors including suicidal ideation and attempts, multiple substance use, and sexual risk behaviors" (Garofalo, 1995).

Gay youth are 2 to 3 more times more likely to attempt suicide than other young people, making this population necessary to have interventions needed to increase their protective factors (Russell, 2003). The article cited highlights the lack of attention and research to challenges for LGBTQ minority. Reports in this same study also indicate how hostile school and peer environment increase risk for suicidality (Russell, p. 1247, 2003). Most of these youth turn to substance abuse and suicide due to depression and declining mental and emotional states.

LGBT youth also are also 120 percent more likely to end up on the streets than their heterosexual counterparts (Silva, 2017). The Ali Forney Center (AFC) in New York City is the largest community center for LGBT homeless youth. The United Nations reports that there is an estimated 500,000 homeless youth in the U.S., 40 percent of which identify as LGBTQ (United Nations, 2017). In just New York City alone, AFC assists 1,400 youths annually (The Ali Forney Center, 2019). Simply due to their sexual identity, this population continues to fall victim to unjust conditions leaving them vulnerable to homelessness and abandoned relationships. Given the circumstances that these students are kicked out of their homes due to family abandonment, the schools can and should be treated as a safe space for them.

Many success stories at Ali Forney reveal how the power of an inclusive learning environment can directly influence the student in taking steps to the right path. The center has many of their young clients involved in programs such as LEAP, group-service learning projects, summer employment programs, and internship opportunities. If not already, K-12 schools should have these types of resources available for all students. During the coming out and gay-identification period, the student will need the most support, and without it, they are more likely to succumb to one of the at-risk factors discussed. The suicide of a sexual minority student should not be turning page for schools to start facilitating change. Just as counselors are trained to be culturally competent, schools can adopt trainings/workshops on school sites that focus on the wellbeing of LGBTQ students. Suicide ideation can be prevented along with decreased stigma with the right support from school communities.

Discussion

First using a feminist pedagogy approach, we must look at the oppressed LGBTQ student population and how schools can use the school culture and climate to transform and empower the individuals who need support as a queer. Advocating for change in school policy would support efforts needed to increase gender equity and inclusion. Only 10.6% of LGBTQ students report that their school district had official policies or guidelines to support transgender or gender nonconforming students (GLSEN, 2017).

School and institutional policy, specifically nondiscrimination statements need to be changed and evaluated for transgender-inclusive protection reasons. A higher education study on a Texas university presents efforts that the school used in order to break down barriers for obstacles for the transgender person. Faculty and students got involved by incorporating transgender reading materials and discussions into curriculum, as well as making formal

presentations to class and university committees in order to highlight gender equity supported

with the university's mission statement (Case et al., p. 155, 2012). Arguably, using the frame of

oppressed versus oppressor to shift the culture and promote LGBTQ inclusion is one way to

challenge power and privilege.

> Publicly asserting the injustice present on campus and asking for inclusion from those who held power and authority on campus was made more palatable by the teams' conscious use of the privilege that the oppressive structure bestowed upon the members. In addition, it should be known that any efforts to reduce discrimination, harassment, and rejection were contextualized in an effort to first educate the oppressor (Case et al. p. 159, 2012).

Education does not to be one of the barriers of oppression for the LGBTQ student. In a

supportive queer community, LGBTQ students can thrive academically. Educators need to be

role models and foster positive self-perception for all students. Data from the GLSEN 2017 study

report that students in schools with comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies that

included protections for sexual orientation and gender identity/expression received lower

incidents of homophobic remarks, as well as greater frequency of school staff intervention

(GLSEN, p. 133, 2017).

Implementing school policies to have inclusive LGBTQ educational materials, strict

anti-discrimination and harassment guidelines, extracurricular clubs and dress codes that allow

gender expression, would ensure feelings of safety and belonging for this student population.

Role models are needed in educators. This can be done by providing sensitivity training that

increases competency in all school staff. Lastly, campuses need to adopt LGBTQ interventions

to allow students to have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school regardless of their sexual

orientation.

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