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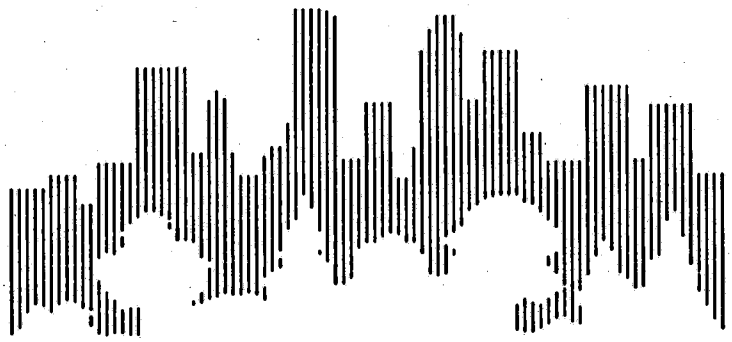

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# MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

**Jennifer E. Corniea**

**School Social Workers' Perceptions of Their Role in Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination Toward Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students**

**1995**

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# School Social Workers' Perceptions of Their Role in Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination Toward Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students

By

Jennifer E. Corniea

April, 1995

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

# SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN PREVENTING AND ELIMINATING DISCRIMINATION TOWARD GAY, LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS

JENNIFER E. CORNIEA

APRIL, 1995

The purpose of this research was to explore school social workers' perceptions of their role in advocating for and providing services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students. The focus of the research was on Minnesota school social workers who were working in a school(s) which served any grade between sixth and twelfth. The research design included both qualitative and quantitative methods. A survey was developed and distributed to 250 school social workers in Minnesota. Ninety-eight of those who were eligible for the research elected to participate. Findings indicate that school social workers assume a variety of roles within the school in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students. Implications for social work practice in the areas of advocacy and education are discussed, and recommendations for future practice, policy and research with gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are presented.

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
AUGSBURG COLLEGE
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*CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL*

*This is to certify that the Master's thesis of:*

Jennifer E. Correia

*has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirements for the Master of Social Work Degree.*

*Date of Oral Presentation:* April 19th, 1995

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# CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

## Statement of the Problem

This thesis presents the results of a study on school social workers' views regarding their perceptions of their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students. The results also provide information regarding the accessibility of services in schools for this population. This study is important not only because it raises awareness about the issues that are most critical to gay, lesbian and bisexual students, but also because it informs social work practice about the availability or lack of availability of services for these students in schools.

Many of us realize that it is unacceptable to use racial or ethnic slurs, and this ideology is specifically reinforced in our schools through the rules and guidelines that have been created in an attempt to foster a safe and respectful environment. Significant headway has taken place in the schools to address issues of diversity and racism. In the face of these positive changes, however, a single minority group of youth largely remains unprotected in schools. This group makes up an estimated 10% of the population (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin,1948), and is often the target of violence and harassment in schools (Hunter & Schaecher, 1987). The group that I am speaking of is the gay, lesbian and bisexual population, and the continued oppression of this group in schools is very real.

Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth experience and are at risk for a number of significant psychological and physical health factors including, depression, suicide, substance abuse, absenting, dropping out of school, prostitution, and AIDS (Remafedi,

1990). With statistics indicating that 30% of all teen suicides are accounted for by gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents (Dempsey, 1994), an estimated one-third to one-half of all homeless youth are gay (Sanford, 1989), and gay and lesbian youth are two to three times more likely to abuse substances than heterosexual youth (Sears, 1987), more emphasis needs to be placed on creating tolerance and educating adults and youth about the fact that homosexuality is a normal variation of human sexuality.

Schools have often been on the forefront of advocating against inhumane or discriminatory practices towards individuals or groups of individuals, but the gay, lesbian and bisexual population has not generally been the benefactor of these efforts. Historically, schools have not supported these youth (Dempsey, 1994), and this lack of support has led gay, lesbian and bisexual youth to feel as if they are outsiders in their own communities (Morrow, 1993). In response, organizations like PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), and support resources such as the Minnesota-based Lesbian and Gay Youth Together, have emerged in an attempt to educate and create a stronger support network for the gay, lesbian and bisexual community (Reynolds et al., 1993).

Most social workers see advocacy for individuals and families as important and necessary. While the role of a school social worker in the school system is one that is primarily defined by the school district, the educational system, and the individual, school social workers have a professional and ethical obligation to work toward the prevention of discrimination of any person or group of persons (NASW Code of Ethics, 1994). The NASW Delegate Assembly developed a public social policy adopted specifically around working with the homosexual community. The policy includes the following that affirms;

"...the right of all persons to define and express their own sexuality. In choosing their own lifestyles, all persons are to be encouraged to develop their individual potential to the fullest extent possible as long as they do not impinge upon the rights of others" (NASW Delegate Assembly, 1985).

This policy includes gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, and providing a safe and respectful environment for them is part of this obligation. Unfortunately in many schools today, school professionals, as well as students, remain a part of the perpetuation of the oppression of this youth.

## Research Purpose/Significance for Practice

The purpose of this research is two-fold. The first purpose is to examine literature related to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, with special attention paid to the role of the school environment in their development. The second purpose is to identify and clarify perceptions of Minnesota school social workers in the prevention and elimination of discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. The exploratory nature of this research should help to inform the practice of social workers working in a variety of settings, not only with youth, but with adults as well.

Physical, social and emotional issues related to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth have generally not received the attention that they deserve in research and in practice, and only within the past fifteen years has there been sufficient research published to help create a realistic awareness of what the issues are for these youth (Slater, 1988). Significant statistics related to suicide, violence and other psycho-social problems involving gay, lesbian and bisexual youth have now forced helping professions to take notice of the result of years of persistent and pervasive oppression and discrimination.

This researcher's concern for how services are provided to gay, lesbian and bisexual

youth in schools emanated out of an experience as a school social work intern in a public high school setting. Recognition within that setting that discrimination and homophobia created an unsafe and unsupportive environment for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth further developed into an interest regarding the availability of resources for gay, lesbian or bisexual youth in schools in Minnesota.

The literature review will highlight a number of psycho-social issues that many gay, lesbian and bisexual youth face, and will inform the reader by creating an even greater awareness of the severity and pervasiveness of these issues in our society and in our schools. In addition, the literature review discusses the presence of homophobic attitudes amongst social workers and others in the helping professions (Wisniewski & Toomey, 1987, Tate, 1991), and discusses the need in higher education courses for more effective training and education for professionals about gay, lesbian and bisexual issues (Tate, 1991, Humphreys, 1983).

## Research Question

The primary question for this research was: What are school social workers' perceptions of their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students? The research also sought to gain more information regarding the accessibility of services for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in schools.

In the following Chapter, the existing literature in relation to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in schools is discussed.

# CHAPTER II - LITERATURE REVIEW

In this Chapter, a review of the existing literature will be discussed according to three main topic areas: Identity development, Isolation, and Stigmatization. System Theory's relevance to Identity Development and Role Theory's relevance to Isolation will be examined. In addition, this Chapter will address proposals identified within the existing literature for supporting gay, lesbian and bisexual youth within schools. No previous studies addressing school social workers' perceptions related to gay, lesbian and bisexual students were found in the literature search, but research on social workers and homophobia was located and will be described. The Chapter closes with an examination of the gaps in the current literature.

Uribe and Harbeck (1993) report that childhood and adolescent homosexuality has remained a silent topic in the educational system due to pervasive homophobia, cultural taboos and a fear of controversy. Their statement highlights some of the primary areas that much of the reviewed literature identifies as part of the school's role in perpetuating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents, and which reinforces the need for more school-based interventions (Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Uribe & Harbeck, 1993; Morrow, 1993; Sullivan & Schneider, 1987; Dempsey, 1994; Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Whitlock, 1988).

## Identity Development

It is generally understood that adolescence, specifically teenage years, is a time to discover and develop one's identity, including sexual identity (Anderson, 1987; Dempsey, 1994; Sullivan & Schneider, 1987; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Zera, 1992).

There are several models of identity development, but the model that was most frequently cited in the literature (Dempsey, 1994; Uribe & Harbeck, 1993; Zera, 1992), which specifically examines homosexual identity development, was that of Troiden's (1988).

Troiden outlined four stages: "Sensitization, Identity Confusion, Identity Assumption and Commitment" (p. 105). These stages, which begin prior to puberty and continue on through early adulthood, outline a proposed process that many gay, lesbian and bisexual youth may go through. It is reported that on average, lesbian women first begin to become aware of their same-sex attractions between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, and, on average, they have their first homosexual experience at age twenty. Gay males first report becoming aware of their same-sex attractions at an average age of thirteen years, and the majority of gay males have had homosexual experiences by the time that they are fifteen years of age (Bell, Weinburg & Hammersmith, 1981). A goal of the identity development process comes in the evolvement of an individual's self-identity which includes acceptance and satisfaction in being homosexual (Troiden, 1988).

Unfortunately, schools are not generally supportive of gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents when they are in the process of identity development (Dempsey, 1994), and therefore, many adolescents find school a place that is isolating and stressful, where they feel they are outsiders in their own community (Morrow, 1993). Uribe & Harbeck (1993) note that adolescents who are not receiving support during identity development may be at a higher risk for dysfunction, especially if they are lacking adequate positive role models, lacking identification with a peer group, are experiencing negative pressures from society, or have a dependence on parents and educators who

may not be supportive of them. All of these factors can lead to internalized homophobia, which increases a homosexual youth's sense of being "different," as well as one's feelings of hopelessness and shame (Remafedi, 1990).

The following section discusses identity development within a system's perspective. This will further clarify the impact that discrimination has on gay, lesbian and bisexual youth.

## Systems Theory

Within a theoretical framework, a systems perspective focuses on the importance of interactions between systems from a micro to a macro level (Compton & Galloway, 1989). In relation to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, this perspective underscores the importance of the role of the school in the healthy development of gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents as it links micro and macro levels of interaction together (Morrow, 1993; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Schneider, 1991; Dempsey, 1994; Uribe & Harbeck, 1993).

A systems perspective offers a model for understanding how the perpetuation of discrimination toward this population can occur and how this discrimination impacts healthy identity development. For example, if a message of "non-acceptance" of the gay, lesbian and bisexual community is conveyed to the larger community by schools, preexisting, negative stereotypes and attitudes may be reinforced. Ultimately, this is reflected in the number of psychological and physical health concerns that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth encounter, which, in turn, becomes a larger, societal issue (Remafedi, et.al, 1991; Dempsey, 1994; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Whitlock, 1993).

A system's perspective also helps to identify a cycle in which discrimination and oppression of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in schools can develop into larger community issues, such as the increasing population of homeless gay, lesbian and bisexual youth (Sanford, 1989). In addition, this perspective discounts the "individual responsibility" argument for examination of psycho-social problems, and instead focuses on the role of various systems in relation to personal and societal issues.

Since many gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are isolated within systems, we turn to an examination of the isolation variable in research.

## Isolation

Much of the literature reviewed subscribes to an ideology which indicates that many of the psychological and physical health concerns that were discussed previously are magnified by the isolation that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth encounter (Sears, 1989; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Newman, 1989; Decter, 1993; Sullivan & Schneider, 1987; Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Anderson, 1987). Isolation is viewed by many as one of the most serious issues that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are faced with (Martin & Hertrick, 1988; Morrow, 1993; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Dempsey, 1994), and the social, emotional, and cognitive components of isolation (Martin and Hetrick, 1988) help to clarify it's role with gay, lesbian and bisexual youth.

Cognitive isolation addresses the lack of information available to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in society; social isolation reflects the discrimination and inferiority felt by many of these youth; and emotional isolation represents the feelings of loneliness, anger and confusion regarding the sense of being different that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth struggle with on an ongoing basis (Martin & Hetrick, 1988). Alone, or in

conjunction with one another, these three levels of isolation can lead to one or all of the following; poor self esteem, depression, self-defeating attitudes and self-abusive behaviors (Sanford, 1989, Dempsey, 1994, Martin & Hetrick, 1988, Remafedi, 1990). School social workers need to be on the forefront of examining their role in relationship to these students and then taking action to create an accepting and safe environment for these youth in schools in order to prevent these type of concerns.

To bring the effects of isolation into better focus, we turn to the components of role theory.

## Role Theory

The components of role theory, which provide a basis for which we can better understand the interworkings of social group functioning (Nichols & Schwartz, 1991), also aid us in better understanding the concept of isolation for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth (Martin & Hetrick, 1988). These components highlight the position of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in a society which is dominated by heterosexist views. They also aid in better understanding the struggle that these youth have in living with the fact that they are not a part of the majority culture and therefore do not fit in with the prescribed roles that society places them in.

"Role conflict" (Compton & Galloway, 1989, p. 133), which is one concept in role theory that attempts to explain how confusion or contradictory messages surrounding roles influence behavior, can take place with gay, lesbian and bisexual youth when expectations by parent(s), society, etc., conflict with the expectations of the roles that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth have for themselves. The role of the school in creating role conflict evidences itself in the manner in which certain traditional practices are

upheld (Hunter & Schaecher, 1987; Dempsey, 1994). For example, many schools deny gay, lesbian and bisexual youth the opportunity to participate in school activities, such as school dances. These youth are denied the right to be involved in a ritual that is considered to be one of great importance and one which seemingly creates an environment where safe and neutral interactions, including sexual interactions, between couples, peers, etc. can take place (Dempsey, 1994). As a result, many gay, lesbian and bisexual youth seek sexual gratification in higher risk situations (Dempsey, 1994).

**Stigmatization**

In an attempt to respond to areas of risk or special stressors that these adolescents may be confronted with, Sullivan & Schneider (1987) report that the role of teaching and helping professions is critical for depathologizing homosexuality and eliminating the stigma that gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents endure. Society as a whole tends to place stigma on individuals or groups of individuals that are somehow different than the majority. There are many ways in which gays, lesbians and bisexuals cope with stigma, and Troiden (1988) identified some of these ways as, "stigma-management strategies" (p. 110). These strategies include; affiliating strongly with the homosexual community, avoiding homosexual activity, leading a "double-life" (p. 110), or behaving in ways which may be considered stereotypical or "gender-inappropriate" (p. 110). Some adolescents also choose to stay away from school-supported social functions and extra-curricular activities because of peer harassment and rejection (Morrow, 1993). Remafedi (1990) noted that a number of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth react to being stigmatized by society by taking part in heterosexual dating, seeking counseling or denying their homosexuality.

Social workers also play a role in the stigmatization of gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents in maintaining and perpetuating heterosexist attitudes and beliefs. Some research suggests that social workers maintain homophobic attitudes (Tate, 1991; Wisniewski & Toomey, 1987), and also indicate that there is a reported hesitation of some professionals to take a stand against discrimination in the schools because of a fear of job security (Morrow, 1993). In Tate's study (1991), which looked at social workers attitudes and homophobia, a homophobia questionnaire was given to thirty rural and forty-one urban undergraduate social work students. Tate found that 17% of the respondents were "homophobic," but found no significant differences between the groups. A primary limitation of this study is the limited generalizability of the findings due to the relatively small sample size.

Wisniewski & Toomey (1987) also looked at homophobic attitudes among social workers. In their study, seventy-seven social workers in Columbus, Ohio were given the "Hudson's Index of Attitudes toward Homosexuals." Their results indicated that the sample did exhibit signs of homophobia, but the authors do point out that their results only lend preliminary support to this indication.

Humphreys (1983) conducted research with teaching faculty of California's graduate schools of social work. Eighty-eight faculty members responded to a survey which focused on attitudes towards homosexuality and on content on homosexuality in her/his school's curriculum. His findings indicate that while faculty perceive this content as being important, there is a perception among faculty that this content is "inadequately" (p. 58) represented in the curriculum. Humphreys goes on to discuss the need for social workers to be adequately trained and prepared to deal with issues surrounding homosexuality, which is a critical point when examining service provision.

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While the stigma that some social work professionals place on these youth may not be overt, the message is nonetheless communicated through a lack of advocacy and limited access to services for gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents. Morrow (1993) points out that school social workers have an ethical responsibility to play what many see as a pivotal role in the schools in the areas of advocacy and support for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. Sears (1989) reports that protecting and promoting the human and civil rights of all people, regardless of personal moral convictions, is the duty of professional educators and human service providers.

**Supportive Resources**

The literature discusses a number of ways in which social work professionals and other school personnel can create a safe and nurturing environment for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. Support groups, counseling, information, education, referral, advocacy, and employment are some of these areas, and a combination of a number of them is seen as critical in achieving this type of environment in schools (Zera, 1992; Dempsey, 1994; Remafedi, 1990; Morrow, 1993; Uribe & Harbeck, 1992; Schneider, 1991; Anderson, 1987). While the majority of this literature is based on philosophical and practice knowledge of the authors, Schneider (1991) did conduct research focused on identifying factors which aid in the coming-out process for adolescents. Sixty adolescents, between the ages of 15-22, were interviewed using a standardized interviewing guide. Results which were significant for identifying supportive resources reported that, "Contact with other lesbians or gays" (p. 144), was the most frequently reported event which led to positive feelings about being homosexual. "Support from heterosexuals (i.e. friends, teachers, adult role models)" (p. 144), also had a significant

impact on these adolescents in contributing to a positive identity. This research supports the importance of the development and availability of services, specifically in the areas of support groups, advocacy, and counseling. It also highlights the significance of creating a safe environment for adults who are gay, lesbian and bisexual so that mentoring relationships and other types of supportive relationships for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth can be available.

. Involvement of the family in the support that is rendered is also viewed as an important element for gay, lesbian bisexual youth (Remafedi, 1990, Dempsey, 1994, Morrow, 1993). Organizations such as PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), and local support networks for youth like the Minnesota-based Lesbian and Gay Youth Together and Teenage Gays of St. Paul, reach out and offer information and resources for individuals and their families (Reynolds et al., 1993).

**PROJECT 10**

PROJECT 10 was developed to provide in-school, supportive programming and education for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, and to heighten the awareness of students and staff to gay, lesbian and bisexual issues (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). As part of the program, which was piloted in Los Angeles, CA. in 1985-86, training was presented to a group of educators, counselors, administrators, etc.; information and counseling were openly publicized; and groups were established as a forum for discussion regarding gay, lesbian and bisexual youth.

In order to evaluate the effects of the program, Uribe & Harbeck (1992), conducted a study. A sample of 500 high school students who had had the school-based intervention were given a questionnaire. Of the 342 returned questionnaires, 51% of the

respondents reported that PROJECT 10 had a "positive" (p. 24) effect on the school, and 56% knew a gay, lesbian or bisexual person and felt that there should be more efforts made to reach out to them in the school. Overall, the findings of this study highlighted the fact that education and awareness were two of the key pieces in minimizing homophobia and discrimination in the pilot school. This program may be an example of a concrete intervention which can take place in schools at a reported minimal cost (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992).

## Gaps and Limitations in the Literature

There has been limited literature published regarding gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. The majority of the articles were not research-based, and instead were based on the author's personal practice and/or philosophical knowledge. Most of the literature reviewed was published within the last fifteen years, therefore limiting the availability of information regarding this topic prior to 1984. Also, none of the reviewed literature was longitudinal in nature, and this has made it nearly impossible to learn the long-term effects of discrimination and oppression endured by these youth in schools.

In addition, gay, lesbian and bisexual youth of color appear to be under-represented in the literature, and demographic information on the whole is sparse and lacking (Uribe & Harbeck, 1993). This is especially disturbing when more recent statistics indicate that African American gay males are attempting and committing suicide at a higher rate than other gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. More efforts need to be made in this area in future research.

More research on social work professional's attitudes in relation to homosexuality is also needed, as well as a more in-depth examination of content related to gay, lesbian

and bisexual issues within the curriculum of degree programs. In the area of service provision, more reports on the effectiveness of certain interventions and practices would be helpful for service providers, especially for the creation of new support resources and the determination of the quality of existing resources.

## Summary of Literature Review

In this Chapter, I have discussed three main areas that are integral to understanding gay, lesbian and bisexual youth and the relationship that the school has in their development. The literature review begins to address the research question; What are school social workers' perceptions of their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students? It illustrates that discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual youth is an important social problem that not only impacts youth and families, but also the larger society as well. The literature also highlighted the role of the school in this problem, and suggested strategies for service providers in addressing the issue.

The review of the literature clarified the need for supportive resources in schools for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, and raised questions about the current level of service provision in schools for this population of youth. This research will begin to fill the gap in the literature regarding social workers attitudes on working with youth who are gay, lesbian and bisexual.

In the following Chapter, the methodology for the research will be discussed and key terms will be identified and defined.

# CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

## Research Design

This research is an exploratory study which utilizes a combination of quantitative and qualitative information to answer the research question. The purpose of the research was to answer the question: What are school social workers' perceptions of their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students. In addition to exploring this question, the research sought to identify current knowledge and information regarding the accessibility of services for gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

## Research Question

The research question for this study was: What are school social workers' perceptions of their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students?

## Operational Definitions

Key terms for this research are: school social worker, perceptions, role, prevention, elimination, discrimination, gay/lesbian and bisexual. These terms are defined as follows:

school social worker - An individual who is currently in the position of a school social worker in Minnesota, who serves any grade(s) between, and including, six through twelve, and who is currently a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association.

role - A school social worker's description of what kind of services that she/he performs in her/his position. Services may include, but are not limited to; counseling, referral, assessment, group work, consultation, advocacy, and/or training.

perceptions - Individual school social worker's personal and professional attitudes and beliefs surrounding the services that she/he performs in her/his position in relation to working with gay, lesbian and bisexual students. These beliefs are both cognitive and emotional in nature.

prevention - Action(s) taken by individual school social workers to keep discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students from occurring.

elimination - No reports of discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students that an individual school social worker is aware of.

discrimination - Action(s) which results in differential and/or negative treatment of individuals who are gay, lesbian or bisexual.

gay/lesbian - "A woman or man whose primary erotic, psychological, emotional, and social interest is in a member of her/his own gender" (MDE booklet, p. 35.).

bisexual - "A woman or man whose primary erotic, psychological, emotional, and social interest is in a member of either gender" (MDE booklet, p. 35).

## Subject Selection

The data were gathered through a sample of convenience which was obtained from a list generated through the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association. A letter of consent to conduct this research was obtained from a representative of the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association (See Appendix A). From the list obtained, the total sample consisted of 241 individuals. Eligibility for the study was determined from the

total sample at the beginning of the questionnaire. The number of the total sample (241) is approximately one-half of the total number of school social worker's in Minnesota (500) (MSSWA, 1994). Due to financial and time considerations, it was decided not to include those school social workers who were not members of the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association.

The units of analysis for the research consist of school social workers in Minnesota who fit the following criteria:

1. Individual must be currently employed as a school social worker in a school(s) in Minnesota which serves any grade between and including six through twelve, and;
2. Individual must be a current member of the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association.

An individual social worker's eligibility for the study was determined on the questionnaire. School social workers who were a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association were selected because of their accessibility. Prior to the initiation of this research, approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Augsburg College (Project Number 94/12/3).

## Instrument Design

Piloting of the questionnaire took place with three social work professionals, none of whom were eligible for this study. This process allowed the researcher to refine and clarify survey items, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the instrument. For example, through pre-testing, the researcher was able to identify a potential problem in the wording of the question that related to eligibility. This could have led respondents to

inaccurately answer this question, therefore making them ineligible, when in fact, they were eligible for the study.

The survey questionnaire was developed to increase the profession's understanding of the perceptions of school social worker's in relation to their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination, and in relation to the provision of services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students. The questionnaire consists of twenty, open-ended and closed-ended questions, with the majority of the questions being closed-ended (Appendix C).

Topic areas explored in the survey items include: A school social worker's perceptions and views on whether or not services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students should be provided in schools, and if she/he should be the one to provide such services; What services are, or are not, being currently offered in schools; What barriers there are to providing services in the schools; What role a school social worker takes in advocating for gay, lesbian and bisexual students; What policies and procedures are in place for addressing discrimination issues; and, Is there congruence in the views of school social workers and the views of the school(s) for which they are employed. Demographic information was also gathered in order to better define the population of the study, and to explore correlations such as the location of school and the availability of services.

**Subject Protection/Anonymity**

Respondents were assured anonymity in the completion of the survey. In the letter accompanying the survey, participation in the research was described as being completely voluntary, and it was reported that the data would remain confidential. Instructions on the survey indicated that the respondents should not place any

identifying information on the survey, and they were additionally informed that they did not have to answer any question(s) that they felt may threaten their anonymity. Consent was presumed by the return of the survey, and all returned data were kept in a locked file when it was not being reviewed. All data were destroyed at the end of the research project.

## Data Collection

Surveys were mailed out to the sample on January 5th, and were returned between January 7th and January 30th, 1995. No surveys returned after January 30th were considered eligible for the study. The number of returned questionnaires resulted in a total of 147 responses, or a 61% return rate. According to Rubin and Babbie (1989), "a response rate of at least 60% is good" (p. 340). Of the 147 returned surveys, 98 were eligible for the research. Due to time and financial considerations, no follow-up mailing was done with the sample population. Upon receipt of a returned survey, a number was assigned, which was used to identify a particular respondent throughout the analysis process.

## Data Analysis

The survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data, and findings are presented in narrative form and illustrated with tables and graphs in the following section. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data, selected variables were analyzed suing correlations, and a content analysis was conducted on each of the open-ended questions of the survey.

To conduct the content analysis, the responses for each of the open-ended questions were indexed and then subdivided according to key themes, patterns and categories that emerged from the data. Several of the respondents gave more than one answer to a question, and each of those responses were individually classified according to the key categories. The key categories were then further subdivided and reported on to account for the variety of reasons given within a response.

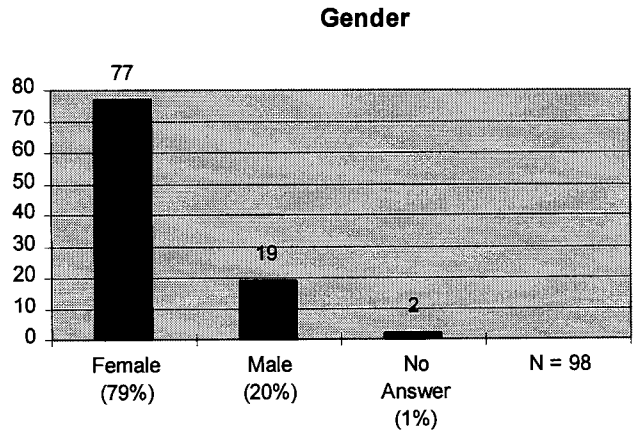
# CHAPTER IV - FINDINGS

Of the 241 surveys mailed out, 147 were returned, and 98 of those were eligible for the research. This resulted in an overall return rate of 61%, and a return rate of 41% for those who were eligible for the research. Of those surveys that were eligible for the research, some respondents chose not to answer one or more of the closed-ended questions. In addition, eighty-nine (89) of ninety-eight (98) respondents chose to answer the open-ended questions, and many of the questions were answered with more than one response. These responses were then categorized with care taken so as not to compromise the original intent of the response. Nine (9) respondents chose not to answer one or both of the open-ended questions. Findings will be presented by outlining demographics first, and then in the order that the questions were presented on the survey (See Appendix C).

## Background Information of Study Participants

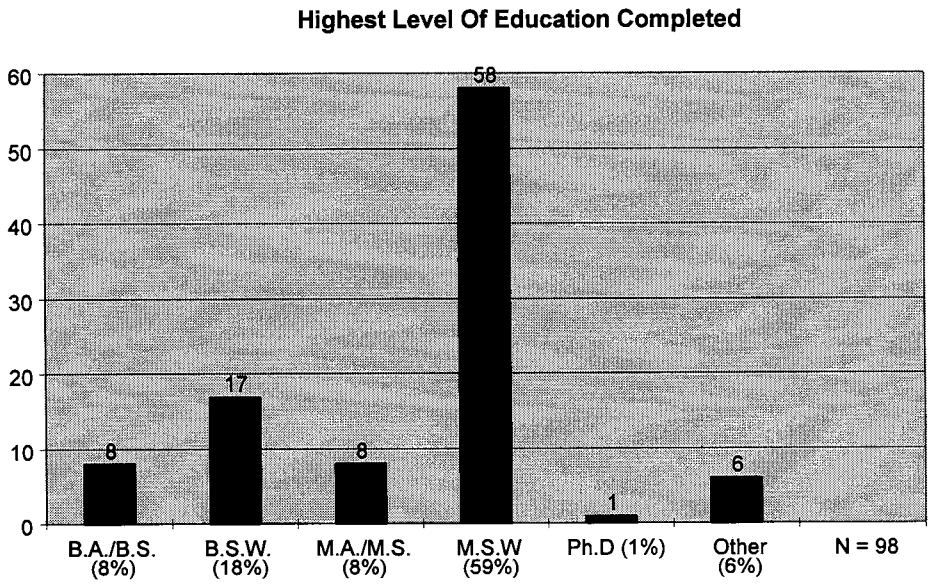
Respondents were asked six questions in relation to demographic information in an attempt to better describe and understand the survey population. The first question that was asked related to gender. 79% or seventy-seven of the respondents were female; 20% or nineteen identified as being male; and two individuals chose not to answer the question. Figure 1.

Figure 4.1



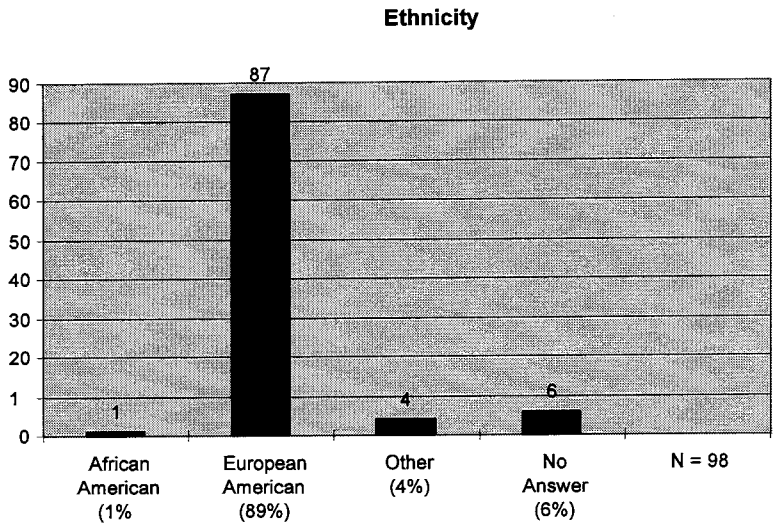

Respondents were then asked to identify their highest level of education. Five main categories were provided, as well as an "Other" category. As indicated in Figure 4.2, fifty-eight, or 59% of the respondents reported that they hold an M.S.W.; seventeen, or 18%, have a B.S.W.; eight, or 8% have an M.A./M.S. or a B.A./B.S.; and one, or 1% has a Ph.D. Six, or 6% reported, "Other," and those responses identified a combination of degrees (i.e. M.S.W./M.A.).

Figure 4.2



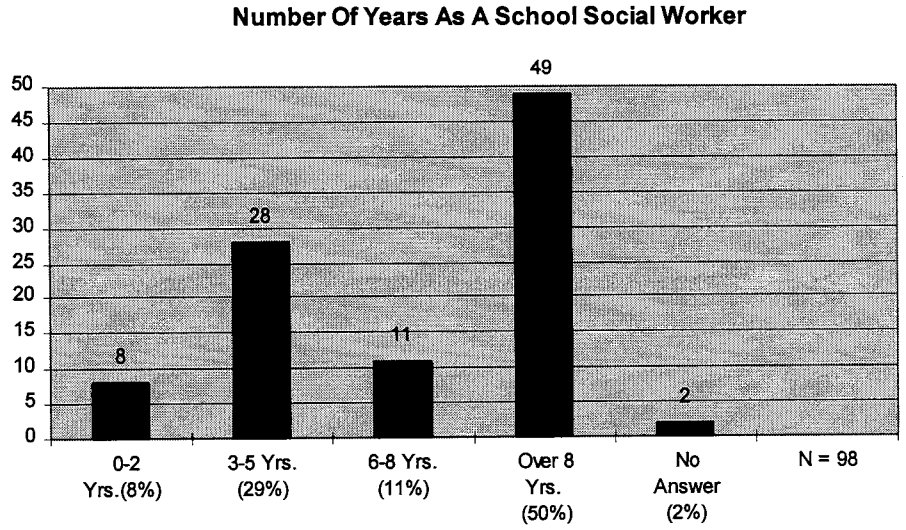
The third question related to the respondent's ethnicity. No categories were provided for this question and respondents were asked to fill in their responses. Figure 4.3 provides the racial/ethnic composition of study participants. Eighty-seven, or 89% identified themselves as being European American or Caucasian; one, or 1% identified as being African American; four, or 4% were "Other;" and six, or 6% chose not to answer the question.

Figure 4.3



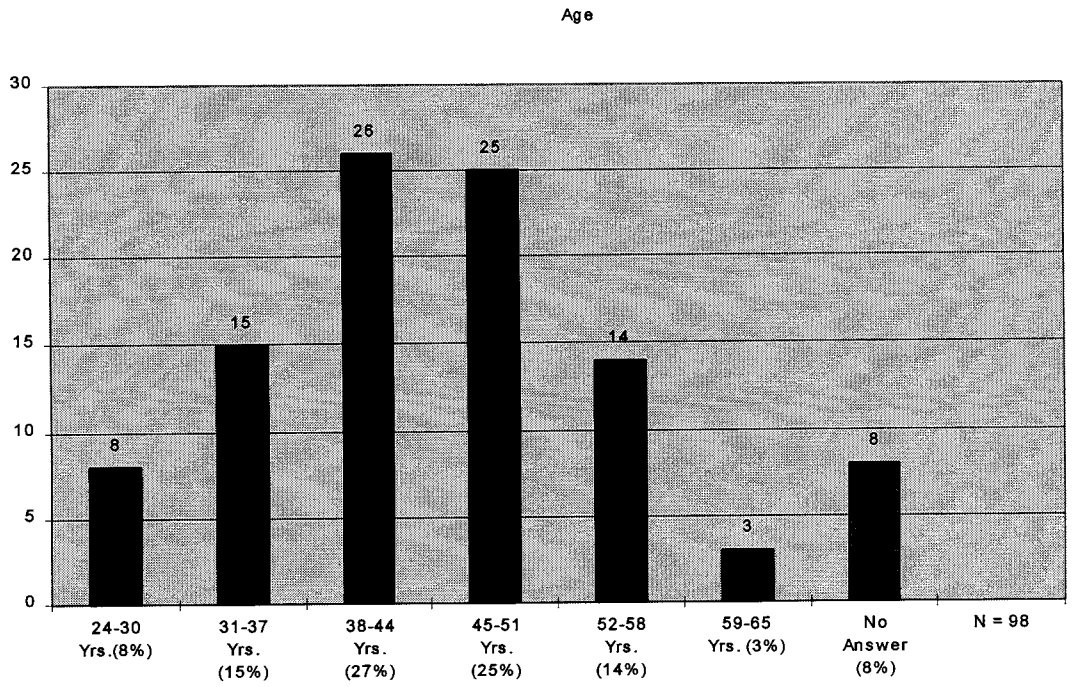

Number of years as a school social worker was the fourth question related to demographics. Four categories were provided. Figure 4.4 shows the education levels of the study sample. Forty-nine, or 50% of the respondents have been school social workers for over eight years; twenty-eight, or 29% have been school social workers for three-five years; eleven, or 11% for six-eight years; and eight, or 8% for zero-two years. Two, or 2% chose not to answer the question.

Figure 4.4




The age of the respondents was the fifth question. As indicated in Figure 4.5, twenty-six, or 27% are between the ages of 38-44; twenty-five, or 25% are between the ages of 45-51; fifteen, or 15% are 31-37 years of age; fourteen, or 14% are 52-58 years of age; eight, or 8% are between the ages of 24-30; and three, or 3% are 59-65 years of age. Eight, or 8% gave no answer.

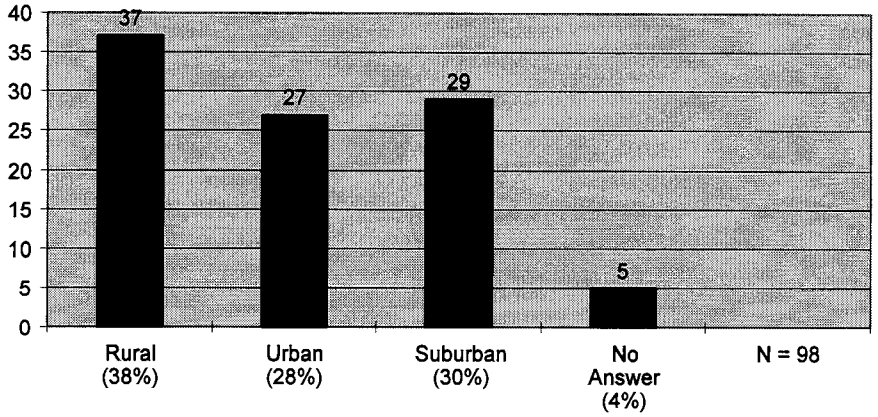
Figure 4.5




The final question in gathering demographic information asked the respondent to describe the area which best describes the location of her/his school(s). Three categories, rural, suburban, and urban, were provided. Figure 4.6 indicates that thirty-seven, or 38% identified the area as being "rural;" twenty-nine, or 30% as being, "suburban;" and twenty-seven, or 28% as being, "urban." Five, or 4% gave no response.

Figure 4.6

**Location Of School(s)**

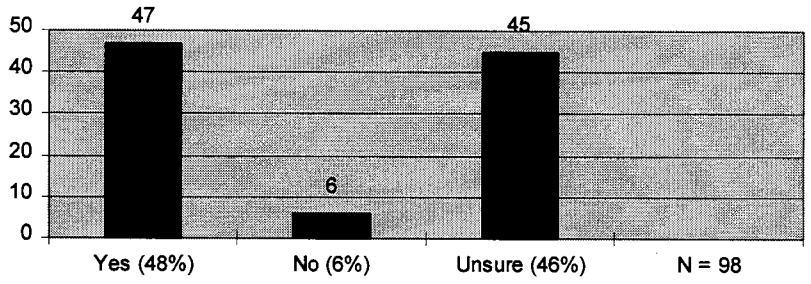



## Survey Questions - Closed-Ended

The first of the survey questions asked respondents, "Are there gay, lesbian or bisexual students in your school(s)?" Forty-seven, or 48% of the respondents reported that there were gay, lesbian and bisexual students in their school(s); forty-five, or 46% were unsure if there were gay, lesbian and bisexual students in their school(s); and six, or 6% did not believe that there were gay, lesbian and bisexual students in their school(s). All respondents answered the question. See Figure 4.7.

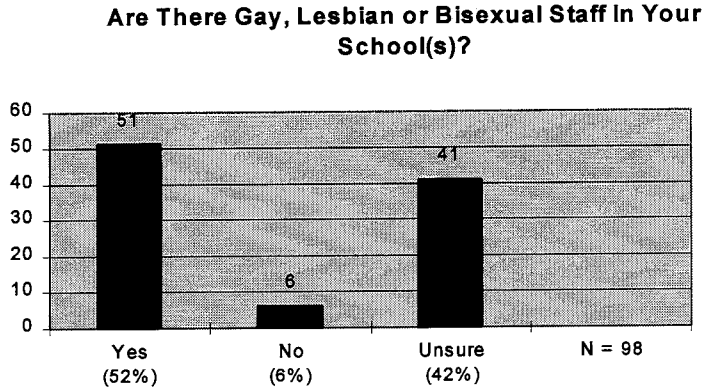
Figure 4.7

**Are There Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Students In Your School(s)?**



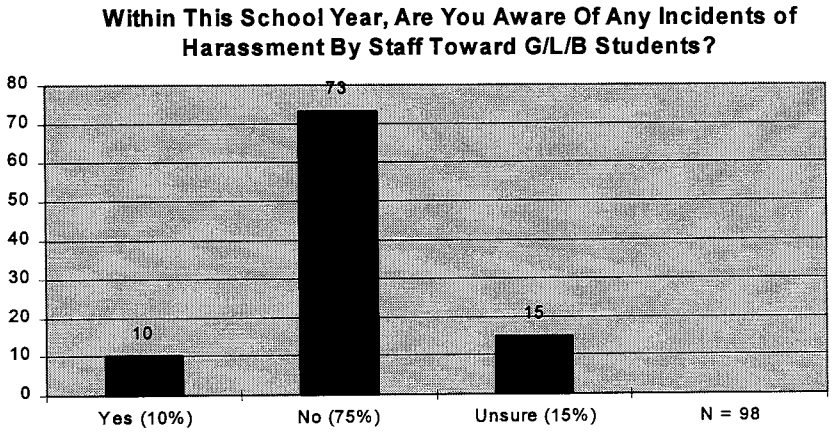
The second question asked, "Are there gay, lesbian or bisexual staff in your school(s)?" Fifty-one, or 52% said that there were; forty-one, or 42% said that they were unsure if there were gay, lesbian or bisexual staff; and six, or 6% reported that there were not gay, lesbian or bisexual staff in their school(s). All respondents answered the question. See Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8



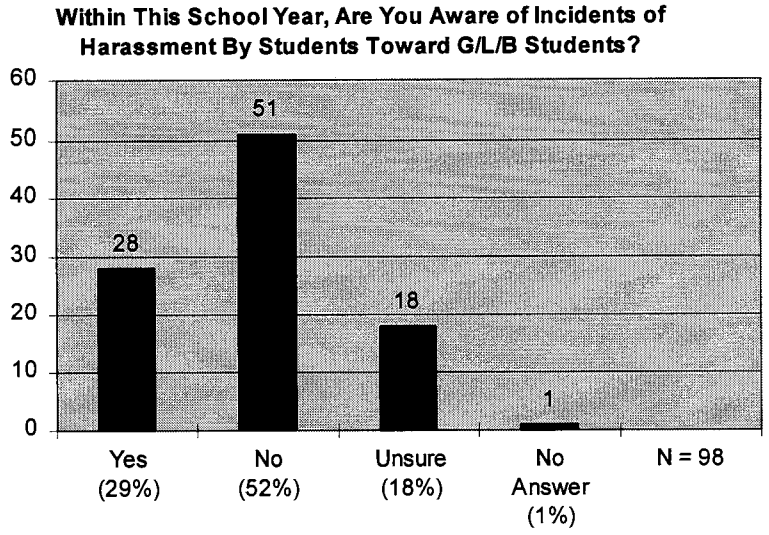

The next question asked, "Within this school year, are you aware of any incidents of harassment by staff toward gay, lesbian or bisexual students?" Seventy-three, or 75% reported "No;" fifteen, or 15% were "Unsure;" and ten, or 10% answered, "Yes." All respondents answered the question. See Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9




The fourth question asked, "Within this school year, are you aware of any incidents of harassment by students toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students?" Fifty, or 50% reported, "No;" twenty-eight, or 29% answered, "Yes;" and nineteen, or 19% said that they were, "Unsure." One, or 1% did not respond to the question. See Figure 4.10.

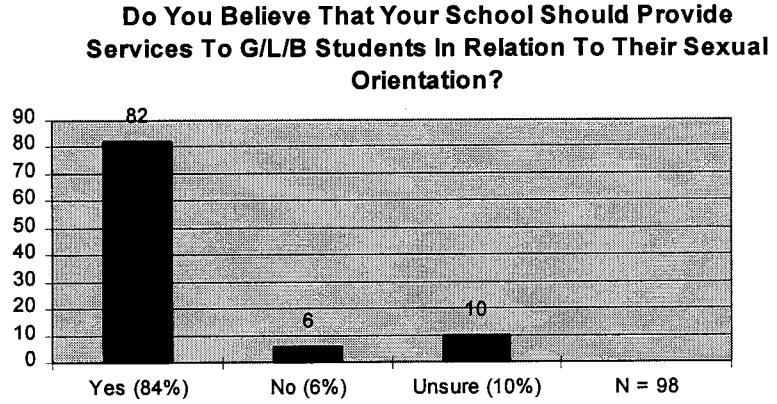
Figure 4.10




Question five was organized into two parts. The first part asked respondents if they believed that their school should provide services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students in

relation to their sexual orientation. Eighty-two, or 84% answered, "Yes;" ten, or 10% were, "Unsure;" and six, or 6% replied, "No." All respondents answered the question. See Figure 4.11.

Figure 4.11




The second part of question five asked, "If yes, what services should be provided." Respondents were directed to check all of the responses that apply. Of the eighty-two, or 84% who answered, "Yes," eighty-two, or 100% checked, "Referral to outside agencies/programs;" seventy-four, or 90% checked, "Individual counseling;" seventy-two, or 88% checked, "Staff trainings/in-services;" fifty-four, or 66% checked, "Support groups;" fifty-three, or 65% checked, "Student trainings/in-services;" twenty-five, or 31% checked, "Family counseling;" and, seven, or 9% checked, "Other." See Table 4.12.

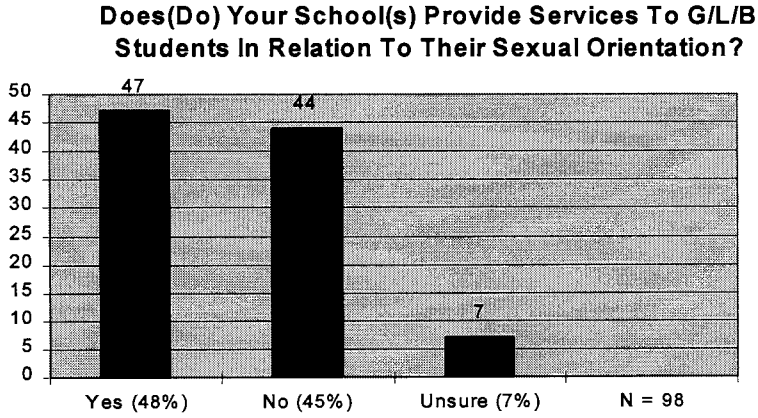
**Table 4.12**
**What Service(s) Should Be Provided In Your School(s)?**
**(N = 82)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Referral To Outside Programs | (82) | 100% |
| Individual Counseling | (74) | 90% |
| Staff Trainings/In-Services | (72) | 88% |
| Support Groups | (54) | 66% |
| Student Trainings/In-Services | (53) | 65% |
| Family Counseling | (25) | 31% |
| Other | (7) | 9% |

The following is a list of those comments made by the respondents who checked, "Other," on survey question #5: "Any service necessary or pertinent to the individual;" "Get 'Right Wing' political groups out of the equation (RSVP, etc.);" "Whatever is needed;" "Communication with and support for families of G/L/B students;" "Posters, pamphlets;" "Crisis intervention - my students are young (7th & 8th grade);" and "Training with students to educate students."

Question six was also a two-part question. The first part of the question asked the sample, "Does(do) your school(s) provide services (i.e. counseling, support groups, referral) to gay, lesbian and bisexual students in relation to their sexual orientation?" Forty-seven, or 48% of the respondents answered, "Yes;" forty-four, or 45% of them responded, "No;" and seven, or 7% were, "Unsure," if their schools provided services. All respondents answered the question. See Figure 4.13.

Figure 4.13




Part two of question six asked, "If yes, please specify what services are available in your school(s)." Seven categories were provided, which included an "Other" category, and respondents were asked to check all the responses that apply. Forty-five, or 98% checked, "Referral to outside agencies/programs;" forty-three, or 92% checked, "Individual counseling;" thirteen, or 28% checked, "Staff trainings/in-services;" eight, or 17% checked, "Family counseling;" eight, or 17% checked, "Support groups;" five, or 11% checked, "Other;" and three, or 6% checked, "Student trainings/in-services." See Table 4.14.

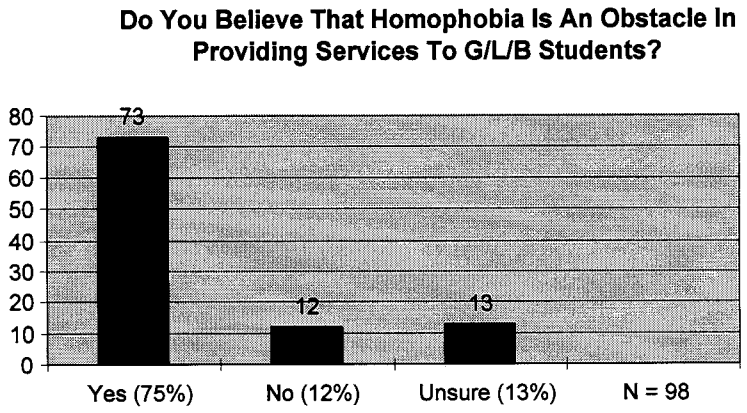
**Table 4.14**
**What Service(s) Are Being Provided In Your School(s)?**
**(N = 47)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Referral To Outside Programs | 98% | (45) |
| Individual Counseling | 92% | (43) |
| Staff Trainings/In-Services | 28% | (13) |
| Family Counseling | 17% | (8) |
| Support Groups | 17% | (8) |
| Other | 11% | (5) |
| Student Trainings/In-Services | 6% | (3) |

The following is a list of those comments made by respondents who checked, "Other," on survey question #6: "Consistent messages to staff and students that harassment of any nature will absolutely not be tolerated. The student handbook discusses this issue and all students are informed about the district harassment policy and sign forms to that effect;" "Some training for students regarding sexual harassment;" "Other school social worker is out and talks to classes;" "Some are offered at high school level;" and, "As a school social worker, I educate students on homosexuality and sexual harassment."

Question seven asked, "Do you believe that homophobia, or the irrational fear of sexual orientation other than heterosexuality, is an obstacle in providing services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students?" Seventy-three, or 75% replied, "Yes;" thirteen, or 13% answered, "No;" and twelve, or 12% answered, "Unsure." All respondents answered the question. See Figure 4.15.

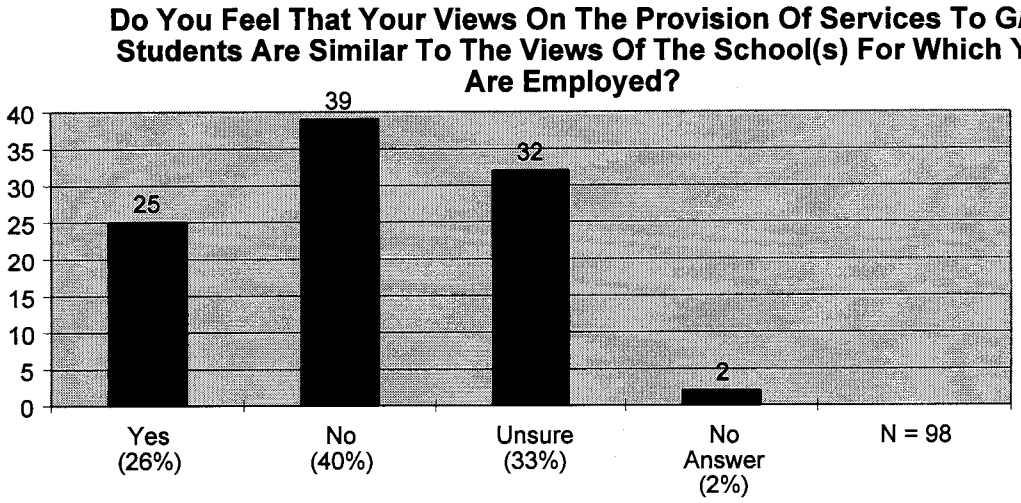
Figure 4.15




The eighth question asked respondents, "Do you feel that your views on the provision of services to gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents in the schools are similar to the views of the school(s) for which you are employed?" Thirty-nine, or 40% of the respondents

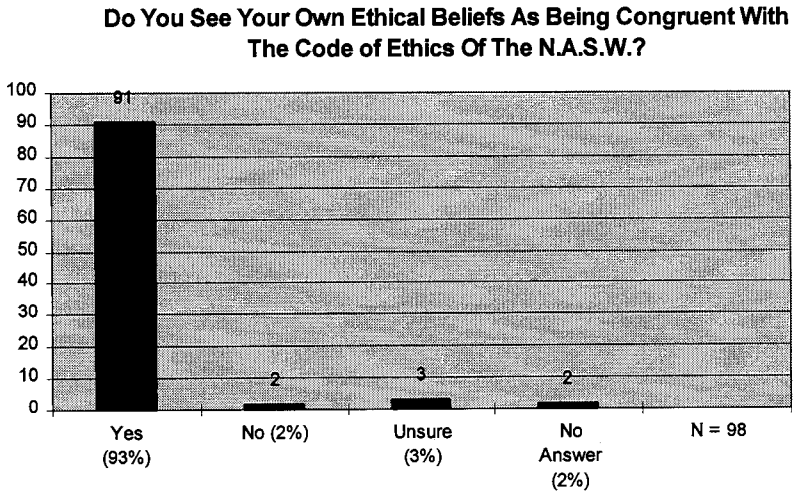
answered, "No;" thirty-two, or 33% were, "Unsure;" and twenty-five, or 26% responded, "Yes." Two, or 2% chose not to answer the question. See Figure 4.16.

Figure 4.16




The next question asked, "Do you see your own ethical beliefs as being congruent with the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers?" Ninety-one, or 93% answered, "Yes;" three, or 3% were, "Unsure;" and two, or 2% answered, "No." Another two, or 2% chose not to answer the question. See Figure 4.17.

Figure 4.17




Question ten asked respondents, "In what ways, if any, have you advocated for the prevention and elimination of discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual students?" Seven categories were provided, and respondents were asked to check all that apply. Seventy-three, or 75% of the respondents checked, "Confront others who make homophobic jokes or remarks;" sixty-one, or 62% checked, "Speak up in defense of and in support of students and staff who are gay, lesbian or bisexual;" twenty-nine, or 30% checked, "Other;" twenty-five, or 26% checked, "Put up awareness posters reflecting sexual orientation issues;" twenty-two, or 23% checked, "Be a part of a policy-making body which prohibits discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual staff and students;" eight, or 8% checked, "None;" and six, or 6% checked, "Start a school support group." See Table 4.18.

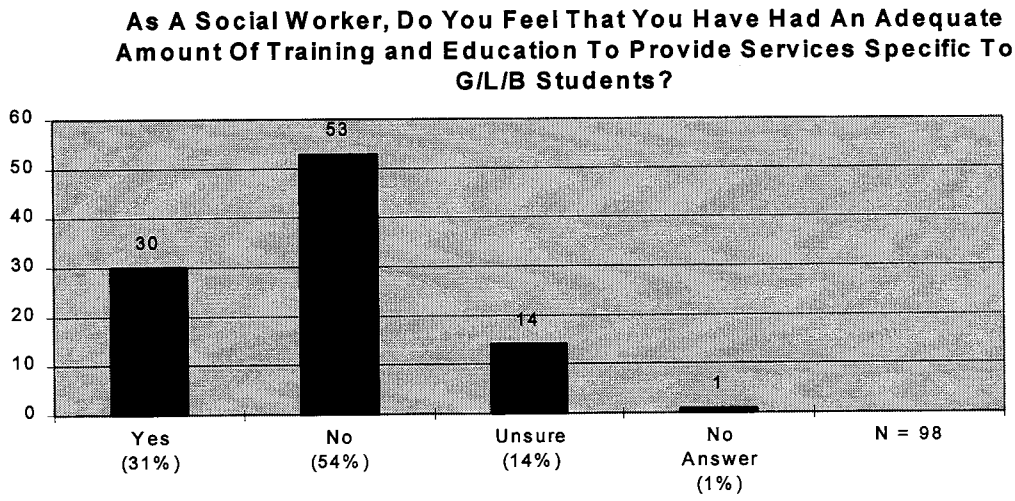
**Table 4.18**
**In What Ways Have You Have Advocated For G/L/B Students?**
**(N = 98)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Confront Others | (73) | 75% |
| Speak Up/Defend | (61) | 62% |
| Other | (29) | 30% |
| Put Up Awareness Posters | (25) | 26% |
| Be A Part Of Policy-Making | (22) | 23% |
| None | (8) | 8% |
| Start A Support Group | (6) | 6% |

For a list of responses from the "Other" category, see Appendix D.

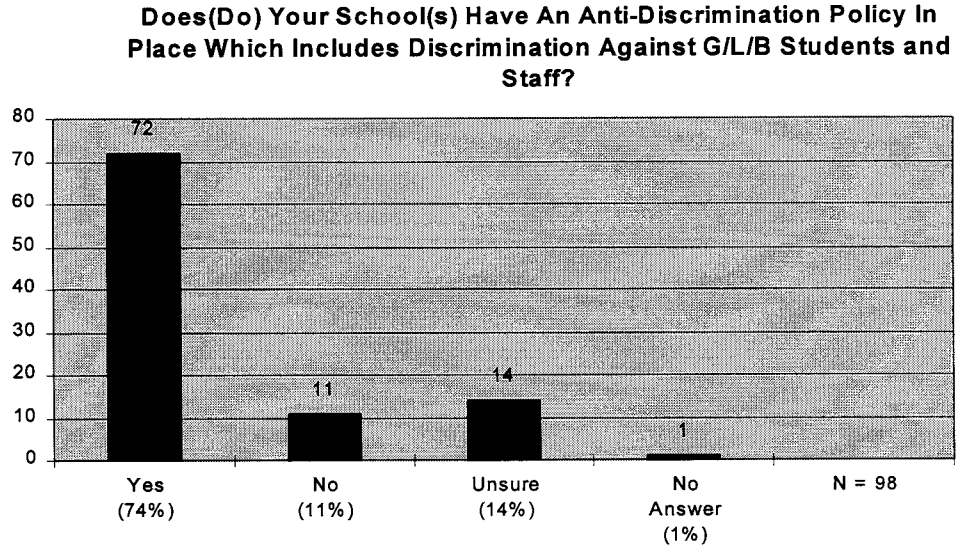
The eleventh question asked, "As a school social worker, do you feel that you have had an adequate amount of training and education to provide services specific to gay, lesbian and bisexual students?" Fifty-three, or 54% answered, "No;" thirty, or 31% responded, "Yes;" and fourteen, or 14% were, "Unsure." One, or 1% chose not to answer the question. See Figure 4.19.

Figure 4.19




The last closed-ended question asked respondents, "Does(do) your school(s) have an anti-discrimination policy in place which includes discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual students and staff?" Seventy-two, or 74% answered, "Yes;" fourteen, or 14% answered, "Unsure;" and eleven, or 11% checked, "No." One, or 1% chose not to answer the question. See Figure 4.20.

Figure 4.20



**Survey Questions - Open-Ended**

The first open-ended question asked, "What barrier(s), if any, are there to providing services in schools to gay, lesbian and bisexual students?" Of the 98 completed surveys, 89 respondents answered this question. Major themes or categories emerged from the data, and Table 4.21 represents the seven most frequently cited barriers to providing services in schools.

**Table 4.21**
**Barrier(s) To Providing Services In Schools For G/L/B Students**
**(N = 89)**

Fear

Conservatism/Homophobia

Identification of G/L/B Students

Time/Resources

Age of Students

Lack of Training/Knowledge

None

There were seven different types of reasons given for citing "fear" as a barrier for service. The first was a fear of community backlash. Examples of answers given by respondents are as follows; "Fear of religious/political opposition...Fear of community backlash...Fear of alienating 'right wing' families." Another reason was a fear for the safety of G/L/B students, where one respondent noted, "...youth identified thru a group would be targeted for even more harassment." Another remarked, "...fear by students of attending [groups] due to fears of harassment." Fear of generating controversy within the

community, fear by some who hold the perception that G/L/B staff will recruit, model, and abuse students, and fear of family reactions to accepting their child's sexual orientation, were other areas identified under this concept.

Comments regarding "homophobia/conservatism" were most frequently directed toward the community. One respondent remarked, "I believe the greatest barrier is the community's attitude. This is a very conservative area and the general population would be against services." Another said, "Homophobic attitudes of school board members, administrators, staff, and community. It is doubtful that services offered specifically for gay, lesbian, or bisexual students would be allowed in my schools..." Finally, another respondent said, "I live in a conservative community where tolerating, condoning or standing up for personal choices may strongly be seen as interfering with 'their' (majority of parents) religious beliefs."

Other respondents felt that a significant barrier was the identification of gay, lesbian and bisexual students for services. One respondent explained, "Students don't let anyone know if they are gay, lesbian or bisexual. I believe they're afraid of being harassed by students, therefore, they don't tell anyone, including counseling staff." Several other respondents indicated that they are not aware of any gay, lesbian or bisexual students needing services. The following comments made by respondents reflect this perception; "No one has made known to the social worker of any needs...No identified population in school to serve...Unidentified population at this time."

The lack of sufficient time and/or resources within the school was also cited as a barrier. One respondent stated, "Not enough counselors/social workers to have different

groups/services which are specific to all students needs," and another commented, "Lack of local resources - we are in a rural farm area."

Another reported barrier was that of the age of the students. One respondent stated, "In my experience as an elementary social worker, students haven't identified their sexual orientation," and another said, "I work in a K-6 elementary school - not so sure how parents would respond if they found out I was offering a support group for gay, lesbian or bisexual students."

The final barrier reported was the lack of knowledge/training in providing services. As one respondent explained, there is a, "Lack of information and understanding of what the issues are for students of gay, lesbian and bisexual orientation and the kind of support and help they want or need." Other responses reflecting this barrier indicated; "Lack of qualified personnel...Lack of personal knowledge...Lack of training/understanding."

Six of the respondents said that there were no barriers to providing services in their school(s). One respondent stated, "I don't believe that there are any barriers in our school district, but there isn't any support either." Another respondent simply indicated, "We don't have any that I am aware of."

The second open-ended question asked respondents, "As a school social worker, what role, if any do you feel that you play in preventing and eliminating discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual students?" Of the 98 completed surveys, 89 respondents answered this question. Five major categories or themes emerged from the data, and Table 4.22 summarizes those five primary roles that school social workers see themselves

playing in the prevention and elimination of discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

**Table 4.22**
**Roles That School Social Workers Play In Eliminating Discrimination**
**(N = 89)**

Educator/Trainer

Advocate

Role Model

Service Provider

None/Very Limited

Several of the respondents indicated that being an educator/trainer is one of the primary roles that school social workers play in preventing and eliminating discrimination within the school. One respondent noted that her/his role is, "Educating other students who use homophobic remarks as to why it is wrong. Educating staff who feel uncomfortable with aspects of homosexuality." Another said, "I have used teasing situations as an opportunity to mention that homosexuality is not wrong, it's just a difference from the norm." Still other respondents felt that educating others was the one thing that they could do in the face of a resistant or conservative school district. For example, one respondent remarked that the role she/he plays is to, "Educate at this point. Our school system is in a political vice in the community..."

Advocating for equal rights and treatment of gay, lesbian and bisexual students and staff was another role that school social workers saw themselves playing. One respondent said that she/he could, "Be known as someone who advocates for gay and

lesbian youth and staff." One person felt that, "It is my job to step in," and another said, "I challenge the system...I see myself as an advocate."

Modeling acceptance and creating an atmosphere where there is no tolerance for discrimination was yet another role accepted by many of the respondents. One respondent indicated that, "I won't tolerate homophobic comments or behavior by students or staff. I call people on this. I model open-mindedness and compassion in my own department." Another respondent felt that this was her/his most important role, and said, "I see my primary role as being a positive role model by being accepting of all students..."

Another primary role that was discussed by the respondents was that of a service provider. Several of the respondents saw this as being a role that represents a range of services including; support, referral, groups and individual counseling. Specifically, one respondent said that while society is very oppressive to this group, "We can still provide good counseling, support, and referral services." The majority of the responses were representative of the following response; "I provide support to all students by counseling and providing information...regardless of race, creed, or sexual preference."

There were some respondents who felt that they did not currently have a role, or had a very limited role, in the prevention and elimination of discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students. One respondent noted, "At this time, I have never had to deal with any issues in regard to g/l/b students. We have a policy that any kind of discriminatory complaints be referred to our vice-principal." Another simply said, "None at present."

**Comments/Suggestions**

The final section of the survey asked respondents for any additional comments or suggestions. Twenty-two respondents did offer comments and/or suggestions. Several of the respondents kindly expressed support and encouragement for the research, and other individuals stated that they would like to have the results of the survey published in the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association newsletter. A sample of the comments or suggestions that were offered on the surveys is as follows:

> "In order to be effective on this issue I believe it is essential to have the backing from State Laws, Dept. of Education, administration and the school board. Once this is established it will allow me to be more effective in the schools."
>
> "This issue does not come out very often in our rural communities. When it does, lots of subtle and not so subtle messages are communicated to the person - negative reactions. It must be very difficult for adolescents to keep all this inside and yet it seems it would be even harder to come out with it and receive so much negative public reaction when they feel so unsure of themselves anyway as adolescents."
>
> "At our high school, the social worker has started an unadvertised support group for gay and lesbian youth. The kids are attending, they're talking, it attracts both males and females!"
>
> "My district is ahead of many, but we social workers have been cautioned about how open we are with students. For instance, we can counsel 1:1, but are not encouraged to do a group."
>
> "Other school social workers that I have contact with in our very rural area agree that we need more education on how to begin programs for g/l/b students. Even how to identify them to give services."

**Correlations**

Variables were selected and analyzed for correlations using the nonparametric test known as the Pearson Chi-Square statistical test. Certain variables were selected to be tested for correlation based on the researcher's perception that they would yield the most

information, especially for the purpose of strengthening or challenging current or commonly-held beliefs in our society. This test was chosen because the variables being examined are nominal-level data. The level of significance selected for this research is $P<.05$. All statistical tests were conducted via the computerized Mystat Statistical Package.

The first set of variables which were analyzed included the location of the respondents' school(s) and the question of whether or not services should be provided to gay, lesbian and bisexual students in relation to their sexual orientation. The test determined that the probability was .873, in other words there was an 80% possibility that the relationship between the variables was due to chance, not due to a correlation. This is not statistically significant.

The next set of variables involved the question of whether there are gay, lesbian or bisexual students in the respondents' school(s), and if the respondents' schools are providing services to gay, lesbian or bisexual students in relation to their sexual orientation. The test reported a probability of .013, which is statistically significant.

The survey questions asking if schools should provide services and if schools are providing services, make up the next set of variables. The reported probability was .057, which is not statistically significant as if falls just outside of the "critical region" (Rubin & Babbie, 1993, p. 483).

The final set of variables that were examined for this research included the location of the respondent's school and the question asking if the respondent felt that her/his views were similar to the views of the school(s) for which she/he was employed. A probability of .230 was determined for this set of variables, which is not statistically significant.

In the following Chapter, a discussion of the findings in relationship to the research question and the literature review will take place. In addition, limitations of the research will be highlighted and examined.

# CHAPTER V - DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In this Chapter, the researcher will summarize, highlight and discuss the key findings in the research. In addition, a comparison of the findings with the literature review will take place, as well as a discussion of the limitations of the study, and an examination of the finding's relevance to the research question.

## Key Findings

A somewhat surprising finding of the research was that the majority (52%) of school social workers were not sure, or did not believe, that there were gay, lesbian or bisexual students in her/his school(s). These perceptions, if they accurately reflect the percent of students who are gay, lesbian or bisexual, are not consistent with research (Kinsey, 1948) that suggests that 10% of the population is homosexual. Comments made by some respondents indicating that gay, lesbian and bisexual students are an unidentified population in school reflects the 52% of school social workers who do not believe, or are not sure if there are gay, lesbian and bisexual students in their schools. This reflection is somewhat concerning as it suggests that it is the responsibility of the student to openly identify oneself as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Openly identifying oneself cannot be an expectation of these youth. As adults and professionals, it is our responsibility to create an environment in schools that is safe and respectful. If schools offered a safe environment that was inclusive of services specifically for gay, lesbian and bisexual students, there would likely be no problem identifying a population to serve.

This study's research suggests that while the majority of school social workers clearly believe that services should be provided to gay, lesbian and bisexual students in relation

to their sexual orientation, only about half of the respondents indicated that there were services available in their school(s). Of those school(s) that did provide services, the services that were identified were most often services that were provided on a one to one basis, or were off-site from the school (individual counseling and referral out to other programs/agencies). A lack of time and resources may be one explanation why other types of services such as family counseling, staff/student trainings, and support groups are not as common. The unwillingness of the school to recognize these student's needs may be another explanation. These findings do make it clear that a significant number of gay, lesbian and bisexual students in Minnesota are not receiving supportive services from their school(s) in relation to their sexual orientation. Therefore, many gay, lesbian and bisexual students continue to be ignored and discriminated against in schools.

A disturbing finding in relation to harassment toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students was that 29% of school social workers were aware of harassment by students within this school year, and 10% of school social workers were aware of harassment by staff toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students within this school year. These findings become even more of a concern when three-quarters of the respondents reported that there was an anti-discrimination policy in place that includes discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students and staff. It does not appear that existing anti-discrimination policies are effectively being enforced in ending harassment and violence toward gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. These results also seem to indicate that a number of school(s) are not a safe place for gay, lesbian and bisexual students, and more education and effective enforcement of discrimination policies needs to take place.

It was not surprising that the majority (77%) of school social workers held either a M.S.W. or a B.S.W. as their highest degree. Yet a significant number (68%) of the respondents indicated that they were unsure of, or did not have, an adequate amount of training and education to provide services specific to gay, lesbian and bisexual students. This finding would suggest that schools of social work, both graduate and undergraduate, should reexamine the content of their curriculum to ensure that information and training is included that is related to service provision to individuals who are gay, lesbian or bisexual. Another possible explanation for this finding is that school social workers are lacking direct experience with gay, lesbian and bisexual students, or are lacking an evaluation of current services with gay, lesbian and bisexual students, in order for them to feel confident in their service provision.

Another interesting finding was that 73% of respondents were unsure if, or did not believe that, their views on the provision of services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students were similar to the views of the school(s) for which they were employed. Since the majority of respondents feel that services should be provided to these students, these results may suggest that school social workers are primarily in support of services, but may be working within a system that is not as supportive. This implies that school social workers may be more effective in advocating and supporting these students on more of a micro level, which may be another explanation why services such as individual counseling and referral out to other agencies/programs were most often identified as being viable.

Survey results indicated that the majority of the perceived barriers to providing services in schools were related to parental/community opposition and homophobia. This suggests that advocacy and education by school social workers on both a macro and a micro level

is needed. In addition, a number of school social workers reported that they play a significant role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students. As one respondent stated, "I see myself as an organizer, informer, 'pusher,' and advocate." A limited amount of time appeared to be one of the major considerations for many social workers in clarifying their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination, as well as a very conservative environment/community in which they are working.

While the correlation between the location of the sample's school(s) and the question of whether of not services should be provided did not prove to be statistically significant, this indication of no difference is interesting in itself. This result runs contrary to a stereotype held by many individuals that social workers in more rural or suburban areas maintain more conservative values than social workers in more urban areas.

The correlation between the questions asking if there are gay, lesbian and bisexual students in schools, and if services are currently being provided that are specific to gay, lesbian and bisexual students was statistically significant. It was difficult to discern what factors created this significance, but a large number of school social workers that reported that there are gay, lesbian and bisexual students in their schools also reported that there were services available for these students. Perhaps this indicates that an increased level of recognition of these students in schools increases the school's ability to provide services to them, or on the other hand, an availability of services raises awareness of need.

Overall, the findings offered insight and information into the perceptions of school social workers in Minnesota and what they believe their role is in preventing and eliminating

discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students. Through the findings of this research, it became obvious that school social workers in Minnesota are generally supportive of providing services that are specific to gay, lesbian and bisexual students, but face significant barriers within the school and the community in attempting to provide such services. In addition, school social workers assume a variety of roles, including those of an advocate, educator, and service provider, in working toward preventing and eliminating discrimination of gay, lesbian and bisexual students in Minnesota schools. A better understanding of the sample population was attained through the demographic information, and an increased awareness of the general climate of schools in Minnesota was attained through the findings.

## Comparison of Findings with Literature Review

The survey findings are consistent with the literature which indicates that gay, lesbian and bisexual students continue to be a minority group in schools that is not receiving the amount of support or service that they need. While the majority of school social workers (84%) surveyed were supportive of service provision to gay, lesbian and bisexual students, less than half (48%) of the workers indicated that services were being provided.

These findings are also consistent with what the literature outlines as the roles that school personnel could play in supporting gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. While not necessarily specific to school social workers, the same roles identified in the literature were also identified by many of the respondents as roles that they perform.

No previous research which specifically focused on school social workers' and their perceptions regarding gay, lesbian and bisexual students was found, therefore these

research findings add to the overall knowledge in regard to working with this population of youth. Overall, the literature review and the research findings were similar in their focus on the need for, and importance of, the accessibility of services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students in schools.

## Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this research involved the external validity of the study, which is decreased due to the lack of representativeness of the sample. Due to time and financial considerations, the sample only includes those school social workers who are members of the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association. Therefore, the research sample is only approximately 20% of the total number of school social workers in the State of Minnesota. In addition, the sample size was limited because a second mailing was not conducted, which was also unavoidable due to time and financial considerations. The external validity of this research is low because the sample population was not randomly selected and therefore, findings can only be generalized to the sample population. In an attempt to increase the sample size and in order to minimize the affects of not doing a second mailing on the research, respondents were given three weeks to return the survey, and also were given an addressed, stamped envelope to send back the survey.

A limitation of the research instrument is that 90% of the questions were closed-ended in nature. This hindered a respondent's ability to answer each of the questions in a natural way, and ultimately limited the amount of information that was received. The researcher did offer two open-ended questions and a section for additional comments and suggestions in order to balance the impact of this on the findings.

Another limitation is that the researcher did not have the time to survey other school personnel, students or parents. Because the research explores need and access to services, any additional data obtained from these sources would be helpful, and should be a consideration for further research.

This research's method does not include triangulation, which also limits the internal validity of this research. The findings of this research have no ability to show cause and effect and are based solely on perceptions, which are susceptible to response bias. Including in-depth interviews and field observation with the sample population in the methodology of this research would have increased the overall internal validity.

## Relevance to Research Question

The research question of this study is, "What are school social workers' perceptions of their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students?" The findings are helpful in that they build a foundation for better understanding the current environment in schools in Minnesota for gay, lesbian and bisexual students. This foundation includes the level of recognition by social workers of this population in the schools, the awareness of the amount of harassment that occurs towards these students, the level of service provision in schools, and the question of protective policies and if they are in place.

It is only possible to fully understand a school social worker's ability to prevent and eliminate discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students when there is this understanding of the environment in which they are working, as well as an understanding of the individual's personal and professional framework. One way to achieve this

understanding on more of a macro level would be to contact the U.S. Department of Education, which has access to information that may be able to provide more insight into the school environments in the U.S. On more of a micro level, the State Department of Education offers the same information about Minnesota schools. As was discussed earlier, the recognition of this population in the schools remains a critical issue as service provision cannot be attempted if there is no perception of a population in which to advocate for and serve.

In addition, the majority (54%) of the respondents do not feel that they have had an adequate amount of training and education to provide services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students. Again, this fact challenges schools of social work and other training and education arenas to reexamine curriculum and other materials for inclusiveness of issues related to working with this population. The importance of gaining knowledge is in the belief that knowledge exudes confidence. Without access to a sufficient amount of resources and knowledge, school social workers cannot be expected to maintain the confidence and means necessary to advocate for these students in environments that can often times be hostile.

Despite these challenges, the findings were promising in that the majority of school social workers felt they played some role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students. These opinions were presented along a continuum, with some school social workers feeling that they play a pivotal role in their schools, and other school social workers believing that they play a part only because of the fact that a piece of their job is to protect all students from discrimination, regardless of sexual orientation. Although the majority of the workers felt that they were able to be the

most effective on a micro level, i.e. providing individual counseling and referral, there were some social workers that indicated that they were supported by their school(s) in being able to offer services on more of a macro level, i.e. support groups, student trainings.

Regardless of what school social workers felt they were able to offer, almost all of those who participated in the study believed that gay, lesbian and bisexual students deserve the right to feel safe in their schools and to receive services from the school. When asked in what ways the respondents have advocated for gay, lesbian and bisexual students, the majority indicated that they have confronted others who were making heterosexist comments or remarks, and have spoken up or defended this population of youth in some form. Other areas of advocacy that could be implemented more frequently include putting up awareness posters, starting support groups and participating in policy-making committees.

In the following Chapter, a discussion of the implications of the research for school social workers takes place, and recommendations for policy, practice and future research are proposed.

# CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this Chapter, implications for social work practice in relation to the study findings will be discussed, and recommendations for future research, policy and practice will be suggested.

## Implications for Social Work Practice

School social work practitioners are faced with a number of challenges in the school. The formative era in the history of school social work began in the early 1900's (Sedlak, 1981), and the profession of school social work continues to evolve within the schools. This creates an opportunity for school social workers to develop practice guidelines in their position which are inclusive of issues surrounding discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

Social workers in general need to increase their knowledge base regarding those issues that gay, lesbian and bisexual students face. A suicide rate that disproportionately includes these youth (Demspey, 1994), a substance abuse rate that exceeds the rate for heterosexual youth by two to three times (Sears, 1987), and an overrepresentation of homeless gay, lesbian and bisexual youth (Sanford, 1989), indicate alarming realities that every social worker should be aware of and be educating others on.

The results of the research upon which this thesis is based appear to be clear about the fact that social workers generally want to support gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in any way that they can. The majority of the respondents indicated that schools should provide services specific to students who are gay,

lesbian and bisexual, and the majority also saw that they play a role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward these students.

Due to isolation, school social workers who are in more rural areas of the State may experience more barriers in providing service to gay, lesbian and bisexual students, and may have limited opportunities for education and training specific to issues related to gay, lesbian and bisexual students. The Minnesota School Social Workers' Association may be one way to provide support and information to these workers around the State.

The current political climate in our nation is such that extreme conservatism threatens the ability of social workers and other human service practitioners to attain the resources necessary to adequately work with these youth. The Smith-Helms amendment, which was proposed in August of '94 during a review of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, suggested that federal money be cut to any school that encouraged or supported homosexuality, "...as a positive lifestyle alternative" (Congressional Quarterly, 1994, p. 809). While this amendment was not passed, it is almost certain that more efforts will be attempted in the future to implement other policies like these that perpetuate the oppression and hatred of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. This is why it is so critical for social workers to be proactive in educating themselves and advocating for others in the fight for equal rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth and adults.

## Recommendations for Future Policy, Practice and Research

The literature review and the research study offer many areas for suggestions for social work practitioners.

Many of the respondents in this research share the same views regarding the current limitations to, and importance of, providing services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students. Professional organizations like the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association can work to break down the barrier of isolation for school social workers around the State. This organization can be a link for social workers in remaining current on legislative activity surrounding issues related to gay, lesbian and bisexual youth and adults. In addition, general information on trainings and educational opportunities specific to this population can be offered. Other benefits that may result include advocacy in the form of phone calls and letters to legislators, and the formation of a unified front for confronting issues of discrimination.

On more of a micro level, school social workers can offer their space in the school as one where gay, lesbian and bisexual students are welcome and accepted. Posters that focus on creating awareness can be displayed in the office, and jokes or harassing remarks can be confronted and viewed as an opportunity to educate others. By doing so, it is more likely that the social worker will be viewed as an approachable and safe person within that school. These can be simple steps which may ultimately prevent significant problems.

In addition, social workers should constantly be evaluating their practice, and in doing so, asking themselves if they are viewed by students and other staff as a safe and supportive person in their school(s). If a worker is not sure of the answer, then she/he needs to reevaluate current practices and make adjustments where necessary. One way to do this is by asking students about their perceptions of current service accessibility and availability.

There are a number of efforts being implemented in area schools that focus on the prevention and elimination of discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students. The St. Paul school district has implemented district-wide training and education programs for students and adults in relation to issues surrounding homosexuality and bisexuality, South High School has a number of programs and groups available for teens, and the Minnesota Department of Education has created a booklet entitled, "Alone No More: Developing a School Support System for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth" (1994). This booklet outlines steps on both a macro and a micro level for creating a supportive environment for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. Specific steps for creating inclusive classrooms, advocating for gay, lesbian and bisexual students, starting support groups and educating others are included. It is recommended that all school social workers obtain and read this booklet, and develop their own plan for creating safety and support in their school(s). See Appendix E for a list of state and local resources and programs specific in working with the gay, lesbian and bisexual population.

On a policy level, schools of social work and other training grounds for human service providers need to be evaluated for their inclusiveness of material and discussion on issues relating to homosexuality and bisexuality. The accrediting bodies of these institutions need to strongly emphasize the need for this information in the curriculum. As was discussed earlier, awareness and education are two of the most important areas in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward this population.

Creating a funding base to address the lack of time and resources and examining creative alternatives in these areas are also recommended . Many school social workers have expressed a need for more time and resources, and it is important to document the need, approach school officials and lobby local legislators. If more money or time cannot be secured through these channels, an alternative option that would partially satisfy the need for time and be cost-efficient for the school is to utilize student interns as much as possible. This becomes easier for those school social workers who are in areas where there are local colleges or universities; however, there are a number of students who commute from rural areas who also need these opportunities.

Future research is not only necessary in the area of working with gay, lesbian and bisexual students in school, but is vital in understanding the serious impact of discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. It was only because of the impact of the research which outlined serious psychosocial issues for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth that the need for intervention was identified.

More comprehensive research on the availability of services in schools from the gay, lesbian or bisexual youth's perspective is especially critical in fully understanding the current need. Practitioners must not assume that they know how to best meet the needs of these youth, and by asking gay, lesbian and bisexual youth to get involved, an opportunity is created for them to become a part of creating a safer future for themselves and others.

Also, more longitudinal research on the long-term effects of discrimination toward this population of youth is needed, and more research including gay, lesbian and bisexual youth and adults of color needs to be undertaken. A more

comprehensive examination of school social worker's perceptions is also recommended.

This research has produced a number of thought-provoking findings in relation to school social workers and their perceptions of working with gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in schools. It is important, however, to put this research into context by remembering that individual perceptions do not necessarily predict individual behavior. My goal for this research was to generate awareness and inquiry in school social workers around the State regarding the current climate of schools for gay, lesbian and bisexual students. I hope that more interest in this area will continue to build awareness, and will allow for the creation of services in schools that are inclusive of the gay, lesbian and bisexual population. This creation of services may hopefully create more tolerance in our communities. The bottom line is that gay, lesbian and bisexual students have the right to feel like they belong in their schools and they belong in their communities. They have the right to express who they are and what they feel.

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# APPENDIX A

Appendix A

MSSWA

Minnesota School Social Workers' Association

6324 25th ST. NW • MAPLE LAKE, MINNESOTA 55358 • (612) 963-5806

Ranna Hansen LeVoir
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Paul Neuman
Region IX Rep.

Carol Seidenkranz
Region X Rep.

Sharon MacDonald
Newsletter Editor

November 13, 1994

Jennifer Corniea
5140 11th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55417

Dear Jennifer,

This letter is to confirm that you are authorized to use the names of school social workers who are members of our organization for your research project at Augsberg. Since you are also a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association, I will send you labels with names and addresses for your research project. If you need any additional information, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Ranna Hansen Le Voir

Ranna Hansen Le Voir

# APPENDIX B

**Appendix B**

Dear School Social Worker,

I am a graduate student at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN. and am working toward a Masters degree in Social Work. As a part of my masters thesis, I am conducting a research project on school social workers' perceptions of their role in preventing and eliminating discrimination toward gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

The purpose of my study is to gain insight into a school social worker's ability to advocate for, and to provide services to, gay, lesbian and bi-sexual students. I will also be looking at how school social workers define their role in the school regarding this issue, and will examine if school social workers feel that they are supported by educators and/or administrators in their school district on this issue.

You are invited to participate in this research project by completing a survey. I will also be inviting all other members of the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association to participate, who are currently working as a school social worker in a school(s) which serves any grade between sixth and twelfth.

The survey will take approximately twenty minutes to complete. Your participation in this survey will allow me to gather more accurate information regarding the views of school social workers in the State of Minnesota.

Please be assured that you will remain **completely anonymous** in this process. In any presentation of the data collected in this study, it will not be possible to identify any of the participants. Only the researcher will have access to the completed surveys. All data will remain confidential and will be kept in a locked file. The data will be kept until completion of the study. To ensure anonymity, please do not place your name or any other identifying information on the survey.

Do not feel obligated to participate in this study unless you wish to do so voluntarily. Participation will in no way influence your current or future relationship with Augsburg College, the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association, or your employer. By completing and returning the survey, you have given your consent to participate in the study. There are no monetary or other types of benefits for participation. If you agree to participate, please complete the enclosed survey and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided. Only surveys received by January 30th, 1995 will be included in the study.

Please feel free to contact myself, or my thesis advisor, Dr. Tony Bibus, at any time with any questions that you may have regarding this research project. Dr. Bibus can be reached at 330-1746.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Corniea

Jennifer Corniea
MSW Student - Augsburg College (94/12/3)
(612) 822-4279

# APPENDIX C

Instructions:

**Either a pen or pencil may be used to complete the questionnaire. Most of the questions in the survey can be answered by simply checking the response that reflects your perspective; other questions ask for written-in answers. If you choose not to answer a particular question, please move on to the next question.**

**At the end of the questionnaire, there is space for you to offer comments. Any additional comments that you would like to make would be appreciated, and are helpful in better understanding the concerns and interests of school social workers related to this issue.**

**I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study.**

Survey Questions

*** Are you currently a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers' Association, and are employed as a school social worker in Minnesota for a school which serves any grade between sixth and twelfth? (Check One)**

Yes_____ No_____

**If you answered "No," please STOP! You have completed the questionnaire. Please place the questionnaire in the envelope provided and mail it back as soon as possible. Thank you!**

**If you answered "Yes," please continue answering the questions.**

*** Please answer the following questions by checking the response which best reflects your perspective. The questions should be answered in relation to the school(s) in which you are currently employed.**

**1. Are there gay, lesbian or bisexual students in your school(s)?**

Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____

**2. Are there gay, lesbian or bisexual staff at your school(s)?**

Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____

**3. Within this school year, are you aware of any incidents of verbal or physical harassment by staff toward gay, lesbian or bisexual students in your school(s)?**

**Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____**

**4. Within this school year, are you aware of any incidents of verbal or physical harassment by students toward gay, lesbian or bisexual students in your school(s)?**

**Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____**

**5. Do you believe that your school(s) should provide services (eg. counseling, support groups, referral) to gay, lesbian and bisexual students in relation to their sexual orientation?**

**Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____**

**If yes, what services should be provided: (check all that apply)**

**_____individual counseling**

**_____support groups**

**_____family counseling**

**_____referral to outside agencies/programs**

**_____staff trainings/in-services**

**_____student trainings/in-services**

**_____other (please specify)_____**

**6. Does(do) your school(s) provide services (eg. counseling, support groups, referral) to gay, lesbian and bisexual students in relation to their sexual orientation?**

**Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____**

**If yes, please specify what services are available in your school(s): (check all that apply)**

_____individual counseling

_____support groups

_____family counseling

_____referral to outside agencies/programs

_____staff trainings/in-services

_____student trainings/in-services

_____other (please specify)_____

**7. Do you believe that homophobia, or the irrational fear of sexual orientation other than heterosexuality, is an obstacle in providing services to gay, lesbian and bisexual students?**

Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____

**8. Do you feel that your views on the provision of services to gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents in the schools are similar to the views of the school(s) for which you are employed?**

Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____

**9. Do you see your own ethical beliefs as being congruent with the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers?**

Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____

**10. In what ways, if any, have you advocated for the prevention and elimination of discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual students: (Check all that apply)**

_____Put up awareness posters reflecting sexual orientation issues.

_____Confront others who make homophobic jokes or remarks.

_____Speak up in defense of and in support of students and staff who are gay, lesbian or bisexual.

_____Start a school support group.

_____Be a part of a policy-making body which prohibits discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual staff and students.

_____Other (please specify)_____

_____None of the above.

**11. As a school social worker, do you feel that you have had an adequate amount of training and education to provide services specific to gay, lesbian and bisexual students?**

Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____

**12. Does(do) your school(s) have an anti-discrimination policy in place which includes discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual students and staff?**

Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____

*** For the following questions, please write in your responses:**

**13. What barrier(s), if any, are there to providing services in schools to gay, lesbian and bisexual students?**

**14. As a school social worker, what role, if any, do you feel that you play in the prevention and elimination of discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual students?**

Background Information

* Please feel free to skip a question(s) if you feel that by answering, your anonymity may be threatened.

15. Gender: _____Female _____Male

16. What is your highest level of completed education?

_____Bachelors of Arts or Science (B.A./B.S)

_____Bachelors of Social Work (B.S.W.)

_____Master of Arts/Science

_____Master of Social Work

_____Ph.D

_____Other (Please Specify)_____

17. What is your ethnicity (eg. African American, American Indian, European American, etc.)?

_____

18. How long have you been a school social worker?

_____0 - 2 years _____3 - 5 years

_____6 - 8 years _____over eight years

19. What is your age? _____ Years

20. Which of the following best describes the location of your school(s)?

_____Rural _____Urban _____Suburban

**Other Comments/Opinions:**

**Upon completion of this survey, please place it in the envelope provided and mail back as soon as possible.**

**Thank you for your participation in this survey!!**

# APPENDIX D

## Appendix D

The following are the "Other" responses given for the survey question, "In what ways, if any, have you advocated for the prevention and elimination of discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual students:"

"Board member of Youth Gay and Lesbian Services."

"Task force working on AIDS education - not that that is specifically a gay or lesbian issue, but the issue of homosexuality must be addressed."

"Acceptance of staff and students who I feel might be gay or lesbian."

"Support group for children of gays."

"Suggested a school support group but principal vetoed the decision."

"Facilitated students attending community based education workshop that included break-out workshops on homosexual orientation..."

"I have things in my office which identify me as sensitive to and supportive of G/L/B orientation (PFLAG button on lamp, directory of G/L Twin Cities services, etc.)."

"When introducing myself in 8th grade classes, I list as one of the services I provide, 'a person to talk to about sexual identity issues'."

"Share resources and information/literature about the topic with counselors and district level personnel."

"I am conducting a group planning a in-service this month for middle school staff on this issue. Another sub-committee of a group is organizing a support group for G/L/B youth in the community."

"Advocated with superintendent and school board."

"Member of a district diversity committee."

"As a staff we are only beginning to look at how we'll provide these services to our students, it will be included in our curriculum as we are currently writing it."

"Discuss with students - rights of all to pursue own sexual orientation, etc."

"Referrals to agencies serving G/L/B students and their families."

"Training in dealing with sexual harassment."

"Individual counseling - referral to outside agencies."

## Appendix D

"Work with students and staff to create an environment where it is safe (safer) to deal with this issue personally and politically."

"Educated myself through workshops and conferences."

"Work with a group of students promoting a more respectful school environment with G/L/B persons as a supported group."

"Try to increase tolerance with students I see individually."

"Initiated in-service presentations on topics for support staff and student peer helpers."

"General sexual harassment policy formulation and implementation."

"Planned and implemented a staff training."

"Educate students about topic."

"Discussion of this area of need in our staff meetings."

"Organized a staff in-service."

# APPENDIX E

Appendix E

## Minnesota Resources for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth

### Support Groups

| | |
|---|---|
| Central High School - contact: Kay Williams | 293-8700 |
| Como Park High School - contact: Gloria Ferguson | 221-4368 |
| Hennepin Co. Home School - contact: Leo Treadway | 222-0311 |
| Minnesota Center for Arts Education - contact: Tom Carlson | 591-4700 |
| Minnetonka High School - contact: Shari Perlman | 470-3519 |
| Northwest Youth and Family Services - contact: Tisha Kehn | 636-5448 |
| South High School - contact: Sharon Bishop | 627-2510 |
| So What If I Am? - contact: Kirsten Gerber | 377-8800 |
| St. Louis Park High School - contact: Barry Dunayer | 928-6435 |
| West Suburban Teen Clinic - contact: Diane O'Connor | 474-3251 |

### Social

| | |
|---|---|
| District 202 - Youth Drop-In Center | 871-5559 |

### Support Services

| | |
|---|---|
| Family and Children's Services - Lesbian and Gay Program | 340-7444 |
| Family Service of St. Paul | 222-0311 |
| HELPLINE - Gay and Lesbian Comm. Action Council | 822-8661 |
| Minnesota Task Force Gay and Lesbian Youth | 729-4953 |
| Project Offstreets - Drop-In Center | 338-3103 |
| School's Out - Educator's Group | 825-2291 |
| St. Paul Public Schools - contact: Mary Tinucci | 293-8757 |

Greater Minnesota - Support

| | |
|---|---|
| Bemidgi:10% Family - contact: Dennis Leen | (218) 751-9154 |
| Duluth: Together - contact: Clyde Holmes | (218) 722-1497 |
| Marshall - contact: Mary Larson | (507) 532-5050 |
| Rochester - Gay and Lesbian Youth Services | (507) 289-6329 |
| St. Cloud - contact: Mary Cady | (612) 252-9504 |

P-FFLAG Organizations

| | |
|---|---|
| Twin Cities | (612) 458-3240 |
| Fargo/Moorhead | (218) 847-2818 |
| Northfield | (507) 289-6329 |
| Southern MN | (507) 437-2197 |
| Duluth | (218) 727-6455 |
| St. Cloud | (612) 259-4238 |
| Marshall | (507) 537-1481 |

University of Minnesota Youth and AIDS Project. (1994). Resources for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth and The Professionals Who Serve Them. Mpls, MN: U of M.