Theses and Graduate Projects

7-19-2001

The School Experience of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students

Lisa Stromquist
Augsburg College

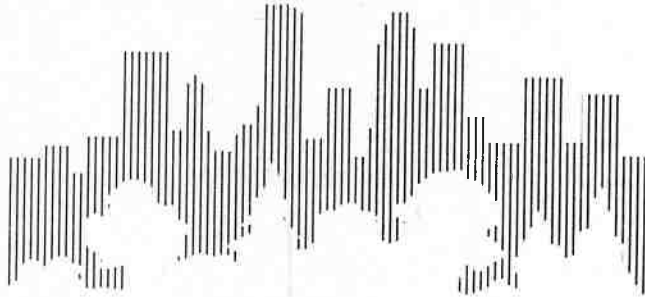Follow this and additional works at: https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd

Part of the Social Work Commons

AUGSBURG

C·O·L·L·E·G·E

MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK
THESIS

Lisa Stromquist

The School Experience of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students

2001

The School Experience of Gay, Lesbian

and Bisexual Students

Lisa Stromquist

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirement of the degree Master of Social Work

AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MN
2001

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of:

Lisa Stromquist

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

Date of Oral Presentation: July 19, 2001
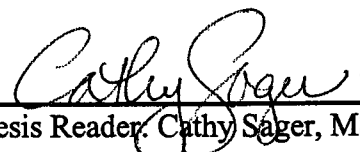
Thesis Committee:

_____
Thesis Advisor: Maria Dinis, Ph.D.

_____
Thesis Reader: Laura Boisen, Ph.D.

_____
Thesis Reader: Cathy Sager, MSW

Abstract

The School Experience of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students

Lisa Stromquist

2001

A content analysis was conducted on of the public school experience of 3 youth from gay-straight alliance groups, who self identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. The major themes found are the importance of caring and involved teachers, the positive experience of gay-straight alliance groups, and the affects of peer harassment. Implications for social work practice and policy are discussed.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher introduces the problem, provides a history of the problem, and the purpose and significance of the research study. The research questions and summary are also stated.

Background of the Problem

In the past decade, gay men, lesbians and bisexuals have become more visible and more politically active (Yang, 1999). Public opinion surveys conducted in 1999 show that while Americans on average support equal rights for gays and lesbians, they also continue to be among the most disliked groups of people in the country (Yang, 1999). On June 28, 2000, the verdict in the case of *The Boy Scouts of America v. Dale* reversed the decision of the lower courts, allowing the Boy Scouts to continue to discriminate against gay men (United Methodist News Service, 2000). During this turbulent time, affording full rights to sexual minorities continues to be very controversial (Yang, 1999). As school districts have been made aware of the incidents of antigay harassment within the schools, the courts and the gay and lesbian community have pushed them to provide a safe learning environment for all students, including those who are or may be perceived as gay or lesbian. The Minneapolis public schools policy on sexual, religious, racial harassment and violence delineates the responsibilities of employees and students in the district to maintain an environment of learning that is free of harassment. The policy was revised in 1993 to include harassment based on sexual orientation and affectional preference (Minneapolis School Board, 1993).

Statement of the Problem

Due to the difficulties of developing a healthy identity in a homophobic society, gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLBT) youth are at risk of dropping out of school, isolating from peers, being victimized and thrown out of their homes, running away, abusing chemicals and attempting suicide. By neglecting the needs of GLBT students, schools are missing the opportunity to provide supports to assist students who are self-identified or are questioning their sexual orientation. When students identified or perceived as GLBT are harassed and ridiculed in school, they are not provided a safe, supportive learning environment (Holzhauser, 1993). Harassment toward GLBT students is a form of sexual harassment, which creates a hostile environment. Sexual harassment is widespread in the American culture and as schools are a microcosm of society, sexual harassment is also a school problem (Abbasi & Holman, 1996).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore the climate of the public schools from the perspective of students who are self-identifying as GLBT. Students currently in high school can provide a personal perspective on the needs of GLBT students.

Adolescence is a developmental period that involves biological, psychological and social changes (Hamburg, 1974). Heterosexuals have societal and educational structures to support their emerging sexual identity formation (Governor's Commission, 1993). For children who are questioning their sexuality or have identified themselves as gay or lesbian or bisexual, this time can be one of isolation and lack of support from family and community members who had been supportive in other areas of their development. Children who do not feel accepted by society or supported in their

community may suffer from self-hatred or lack of self-esteem (Governor's Commission, 1993). Poor self-esteem can lead to poor academic performance.

Significance of the Study

Social workers have an ethical responsibility to advocate for populations that are marginalized by society. This study provides an opportunity for gay, lesbian and bisexual students to voice their unique experiences in their high school. This study may provide some insight into their struggles and provide information useful to school social workers, administrators, teachers, and policy makers. By understanding their experience, social workers can be responsive to the needs of GLBT youth.

Research Questions

This study explored the interpersonal experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in high school. The research questions for this study are: What are the interpersonal experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth currently in high school? Are school-based services meeting the needs of gay, lesbian and bisexual students?

Summary

The background of the problems facing GLBT students was the subject of this chapter. The purpose and significance of the study were delineated and two research questions were stated. The next chapter will address a review of the literature. In chapter 3, the theoretical framework for the study will be discussed. The methodology utilized for the study is explained in chapter 4. The findings are reported in chapter 5 and discussed in chapter 6. Recommendations and implications for social work practice are also described in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will define school harassment and violence based on perceived sexual orientation, and review the extent of the problem. The themes of adolescent development in a hostile environment, invisibility, isolation, identity development, disclosure and suicide will be discussed. Interventions for GLBT students will be summarized.

Due to mandatory school attendance school districts have the responsibility for ensuring the safety of our youth. "We exist to ensure that all students learn, and to support their growth into knowledgeable, skilled, and confident citizens capable of succeeding in their work, personal and family life into the 21st century" (Mission statement of the Minneapolis Board of Education, 1999, p.23). Windom Open school includes the provision of safety in their mission statement. "...We will provide a safe environment where we can learn and play together. We value our diversity, and will strive to learn from the richness of each person's unique gifts" (Mission statement of Windom Open School of Minneapolis, 1999, p1).

Schools are failing to provide children who are perceived as gay, lesbian or bisexual the safe environment they need to develop into confident citizens (Holzhauser, 1993). Mission statements and policies against harassment and violence are important; however, policies alone will not change the school climate. More direct intervention needs to be taken within the schools for change to occur (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). Models of intervention in the literature include the following strategies: development of gay straight alliances, support groups, bringing in guest speakers, expanding the health class curriculum to be inclusive of all sexual orientations, staff training, and safe staff

visible in schools (Anderson, 1994; Governor's Commission, 1993; Harbeck & Uribe, 1992; Holzhauer, 1993).

Historical Background

The student movement for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students has followed in the footsteps of the gay rights movement. Credited as the beginning of the gay liberation movement, the Stonewall riots occurred on Christopher Street in New York on June 27, 1969 (Governor's Commission, 1993). During this time of social upheaval people were questioning authority and challenging the status quo. Community organizing groups developed to address civil rights for all people. The first gay, lesbian and bisexual student organization was on the Columbia University campus in New York City in 1967 (Governor's Commission, 1993). The Student Homophile League received attention and led the way for similar groups to form at other Colleges and Universities. It was several years before high school interventions and groups began to form.

Studies show that approximately 9 students in a classroom of 30 have a gay family member or are themselves gay, lesbian or bisexual (Fontaine, 2001). It is logical to assume that throughout the history of public education there have been gay students. Formal interventions for gay, lesbian and bisexual students are fairly recent. In the early 1970s gay community groups such as the Homophile Union of Boston began sponsoring groups for gay youth.

In July of 1980, the Boston Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Youth (BAGLY) was founded as a support and social group for youth under 23 years who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning their sexual or gender identities. Unlike other groups serving the gay population, BAGLY was youth led with adult volunteer advisors. A

predecessor to the Gay/Straight Alliances, BAGLY was built on the principle of youth empowerment, peer leadership, and the development of organizational skills. The success of the Boston group led to a proliferation of similar groups across the state of Massachusetts.

An incident of harassment toward a 16-year-old openly gay student at Fairfax high school in 1984 prompted some faculty and administrative staff to develop a program within the school to address the needs of gay, lesbian and bisexual students (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). In the 1985-1986 school year, a counseling and education model program began at the school in Los Angeles, entitled *Project 10,* named after the Kinsey's (1948) report that estimated 10% of the population to be homosexual. It was the nations first school-based program to assess and address the needs of gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

The Hetrick-Martin Institute, a social service organization serving the New York gay community opened an alternative public school in 1985 (Holzhauer1993; Hunter & Shafer, 1987; Savin-Williams 1994). The Harvey Milk School was established with a mission to provide a safe environment for gay and lesbian students who were not regularly attending school as a result of anti-gay harassment.

In 1989, a federal government report on teen suicide indicated an epidemic of suicide by gay and lesbian youth (Governor's Commission, 1993). This report prompted Massachusetts Governor, William Weld, to establish the nations first Governor's Commission on gay and lesbian youth. The first task of the commission was to assess the climate of Massachusetts's schools and make recommendations to facilitate change

within all schools in order to adopt zero-tolerance policies regarding harassment and discrimination against gay and lesbian students.

The National Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Straight Teachers Network founded in 1993, later changed its name to include students and other educators (Peters, 1997). It is a national organization with local chapters in larger metropolitan areas across the country. The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) facilitates anti-bias training and promotes the development of Gay/Straight Alliances in schools. Gay/Straight Alliances (GSA) are youth led high school organizations working to eliminate homophobia and harassment in schools. These are school-based clubs with a faculty facilitator, devoted to human rights and dignity for all people. GSA groups usually have a social justice and education focus. They work to change school policies, educate staff and students regarding issues affecting GLBT people, anti-gay harassment and violence.

The first Gay/Straight Alliances began in 1989 at Concord Academy and Phillips Academy in Massachusetts. As of this writing, there are over 800 GSA groups in 46 states (glsen.org, 2001). With the support of GLSEN, the Minneapolis Public School program Out 4 Good began in 1995. Originally a non-funded program, it now is staffed with a full time coordinator and a part time assistant. The goals of Out 4 Good are to promote K-12 student achievement throughout the district by providing direct support to GLBT students, staff and families through working to improve school climate, nurturing respect for all, and educating the community about the principles of anti-discrimination, anti-violence and inclusivity (Out 4 Good, 2001). To facilitate these goals, Gay/Straight Alliance groups have been formed in most area high schools. Additional services to students at the school level include: support groups, peer educator and speaking

opportunities, designated safe staff program, individual counseling, resource information, and partnering with local youth serving agencies. Services to staff include: inclusion training, curriculum and lesson plan resources, technical support and resource information, and partnership with other community organizations such as Outfront Minnesota and GLSEN. In 1995, the first Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) group formed in the Minneapolis School District at South High School (Appelbaum Interview, 2000).

<center>Adolescent Development in a Hostile Environment</center>

Harassment in school interferes with the learning environment. Of high school students surveyed in Massachusetts's schools in 1995, 25% of GLBT students reported missing school because of fear for their safety compared to 5% of non-gay students (Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Garofalo & Wolf, 1998; Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999). Threats with a weapon were reported by 25% of gay students while non-gay students reported threats with a weapon at a rate of 7%.

Uribe (1994) warns against labeling children or forcing them to chose a label for themselves. Rather she stresses the importance of acceptance of all children while providing the supports needed for adolescents to develop good relationships as well as coping strategies. One teacher noted the lack of acknowledgement of the needs of gay teens at the school where he teaches. There were no posters inviting students to talk about sexual identity issues at his school (Anderson, 1994). By not providing a platform for discussion on the topic of sexual identity in the schools, an ominous silence remains. This silence can lead to low self-esteem fear and self-loathing in GLBT teens. Holzhauer (1993) described gay and lesbian youth as a hidden minority within the school population. Societal discrimination against sexual minorities in areas such as

employment, housing, marriage, child custody and sexual expression provide a message that it is socially acceptable to treat gay students differently (Hetrick & Martin, 1987). This societal message provides the climate in which schools function. Some students having experienced harassment have turned to the courts for recognition and compensation of their suffering (Fontaine, 2001).

In the first case of its kind, Jamie Nabozny was awarded $900,000 in a lawsuit against administrators and the Wisconsin school district where he had attended high school (Callahan, 2000; Fontaine, 2001). He filed suit after suffering years of verbal and physical abuse by classmates. It was determined by the court that the school administrators were at fault for failing to intervene and stop the abuse (Reese, 1997). An estimated 28% of gay and lesbian students drop out of school due to harassment and abuse. The Safe Schools Coalition found that 8% of all students reported antigay harassment directed at them because they were perceived to be gay or lesbian (Reese, 1997). Of youth who identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, 34% said they had suffered antigay abuse at school. A 1993 Harris poll surveyed high school students who reported that 86% would be very upset to be called gay or lesbian by a peer (Anderson, 1994). This shows how stigmatized sexual minorities are in our society and in our schools.

A survey conducted in the Los Angeles County school district found that most antigay harassment and abuse was inflicted by peers and was of a premeditated nature (Savin-Williams, 1994). Forms of violence that occur at school range from name calling to "gay bashing" or physical attack. Harassment and abuse result in poor school performance, and a higher incidence of truancy, school transfers and dropping out. To

provide a safe school environment for GLBT students in New York City, the Harvey Milk School was established. Prior to attending Harvey Milk, many students had dropped out of their New York public school due to the intolerable climate where they were victims of verbal and physical assaults (Hunter & Shafer, 1987, Holzhauer, 1993, Savin-Williams 1994).

<div align="center">Invisibility</div>

In schools where there are not blatant abuses, there is neglect of the needs of gay and lesbian youth (Uribe 1994). If their presence in school is overlooked, their needs are not being addressed. Since gay and lesbian youth can often blend into the student body, their existence and needs are not as visible as other minority students. As schools celebrate African American and women's history months, they overlook gay pride month (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). Health classes that do not expose children to homosexuality as an acceptable form of sexual orientation nor do they provide GLBT youth the safe sex information they may need.

The presence of gay, lesbian and bisexual students in elementary, middle and high school classrooms is often ignored (Uribe, 1994). This invisibility is detrimental to the process of growing up, development of identity and self-esteem, and feeling a part of the school community (Holzhauser, 1993). Kay Jennings, of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, advocates for changes in schools that promote a safe and inclusive environment for GLBT students and teachers (Bailey & Phariss, 1996). Jennings outlines steps to be taken to create this safe environment. These steps are; inclusion of sexual orientation in nondiscrimination and antiharassment policies, support for students who are struggling with sexual identity, training for faculty and staff, addition of gay and

lesbian issues in the curriculum, provision of role models, and diversification of library materials to include information on gay and lesbian topics (Bailey & Phariss, 1996).

Schools that do not allow for teachers to be *out* do not provide an opportunity for that teacher to be a role model for the student body (Anderson, 1994; Morrow, 1993). Morrow (1993) chastises schools for making it a hostile environment for teachers who have good intentions. In order for teachers to respond to harassment or hostility toward children who are different, training and instruction on how to intervene needs to be provided at the district or administrative level. Teachers do not react to offensive name calling when they do not have the support of administration. Morrow (1993) describes the needs of gay and lesbian youth as well as makes helpful recommendations for schools, communities, and social workers. She challenges social workers to evaluate their own homophobia and to become an advocate for gay, lesbian and bisexual children.

Isolation

The theme of isolation runs throughout the literature. Youth who self identify as GLBT, but yet have not labeled themselves, are often isolated from other teens like them (Ryan & Futterman, 2001). Unlike ethnic minorities, gay youth may not be obvious to each other. Homophobia also affects gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in preventing them from seeking to connect with one another. They may feel uncomfortable with themselves and lack self-confidence, making it difficult to develop friendships with peers and good relationships with adults. Hetrick and Martin (1987) provide the concept of isolation as multidimensional, cognitive, social and emotional. Cognitive isolation refers to the lack of positive information and images of gays or lesbians in the child's environment. Bereft of a model for which they can identify themselves, gay, lesbian, and

bisexual youth must develop their identity amidst this isolation. They must make their own sense of understanding without the role models and guidance that most children get from their parents and communities. Social isolation refers to living in an environment that is often hostile to gays. Emotional isolation results when negative feelings such as shame, guilt, and anger are internalized without a way to process these feelings. The task during adolescence is for the child to develop an identity separate from the adults who have cared for them (Ashford, J. et al., 1997). Hetrick & Martin (1987) describe the experience of isolation as it relates to identity development in GLBT youth, and highlight the psychosocial impact our homophobic society has on our youth.

The isolation and stigmatization that GLBT youth endure is evidenced by how they use free time and in their increase of risky behaviors (Caldwell, Kivel, Smith, & Hayes, 1998). If GLBT adolescents are not comfortable and safe participating in social and leisure activities, their social and identity development may suffer. To better understand the leisure and recreational needs of GLBT and questioning youth, a study was conducted in 4 high schools in the southeastern United States (Caldwell, et al., 1998). GLBT and questioning youth experience leisure differently than their non-gay peers (Caldwell, et al., 1998). Gay males reported more boredom than non-gay males. Gay and bisexual males reported feeling that their parents had too much control over how they used their free time, and were inclined to rebel against those parental controls. For GLBT youth free time and leisure choices were less physically healthy. They were less likely to engage in aerobic activity and more likely to participate in binge drinking.

Identity Development and Disclosure

Adolescence is a time when children are developing their own identity (Ryan & Futterman, 2001) and for a percentage of youth their identity will include same sex orientation (Uribe, 1994). Because our society is primarily heterosexual, the expectation is that youth will be heterosexual and are socialized as heterosexuals. When children identify themselves differently from societal expectations, there is often both internal and external conflict (Morrow, 1993). Outside of the family, school is a primary place where children are nurtured, socialized and learn the norms of society. Because adolescents are keenly aware of individual differences and have a desire to "fit in," children who are seen as different may become targets of harassment (Walters & Hayes, 1998). When children do not feel safe in school, they may have poor school performance, become truant, drop out, and exhibit behavior problems. The affects of harassment and abuse are not limited to the confines of school, but affect a child's self esteem and identity development (Morrow, 1993).

Hunter and Schafer (1987) expand on Hetrick and Martin's (1987) description of cognitive isolation. GLBT youth are unlike other minorities with a stigmatized identity. Youth stigmatized by race learn coping and survival skills from family and community who can teach them about being a minority within a dominant culture (Ryan & Futterman, 2001). Most often they do not have gay or lesbian parents who can show them how to be gay or lesbian in society and be proud of themselves (Hunter & Schafer 1987). Supportive families can insulate children from some of the stigma placed on the youth and allow self-esteem to build (Ryan & Futterman, 2001). Children may be

growing up in a family that is extremely homophobic creating increased difficulty for them to adapt to their thinking of themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered.

Homophobia makes identity development of GLBT youth more complicated (Lock & Kleis, 1998). At a time when adolescents are developing their sense of self, social skills and self-esteem, GLBT youth are also struggling with their sexual identity (Zera, 1992). This struggle is affected by a child's own homophobia. Children vary on what age they become aware of their sexual orientation, however most gay and lesbian adults report recalling a feeling of being different as young as they can remember (Ryan & Futterman, 2001; Zera, 1992). Most children become aware of their sexual orientation by the age of 10 and label themselves as gay or lesbian around the age of 14. The first disclosure to others most often comes later, between ages 16 and 18 (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pikington, 1998). During the time between self-identification and disclosure to others, teens are living with a secret that they know will cause difficulties when it is disclosed. By carrying this burden in silence, they are more apt to have low self-esteem, exhibit acting out behavior, depression and anxiety. Hunter and Schaecher (1987) suggest that the social stigma attached to homosexuality can lead youth to thoughts of self-hatred, thus placing them at risk for suicide.

Suicide

Increased rates of suicide amongst GLBT adolescents has been reported in studies conducted with both the general population and with studies conducted with self identified GLBT youth (Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999; Hershberger & Pilkington, 1997; Proctor & Groze, 1994; Remafedi & French, 1998). The rate at which gay youth attempt suicide varies widely by study.

Hershberger & Pilkington (1997) studied youth from 15-21 years old self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual, attending gay community based programs. Suicide attempts were at a rate of 40% for males, and 43% for females. In a 1993 survey conducted in Massachusetts, students who reported being sexually active with same sex partners had twice the rate of single suicide attempts as students who were sexually active with opposite sex partners (Faulkner & Cranston, 1998). A 1987 study conducted in Minnesota public schools (Remafedi & French, 1998) found gay and bisexual males had a suicide attempt rate of 28% compared to 4% of heterosexual males. For lesbian and bisexual females, the suicide attempt rate was 20% compared to 14% for heterosexual females. According to Proctor & Groze (1994), the suicide risk for gay, lesbian and bisexual teens has been inadequately researched. As a hidden minority, gay adolescents sexual orientation may not be evident to health care professionals. Proctor and Groze (1994) suggest the suicide rate for gay and lesbians is 2 to 7 times higher than the suicide rate for heterosexuals. In an attempt to verify or negate results from earlier studies, they surveyed a sample of 221 self identified gay, lesbian or bisexual youths. The respondents' average age was 18.5 years. Of this sample, 70% had attempted suicide, 26% had strong suicidal ideation, and 34% had neither made an attempt nor had thought about it. The results were consistent with the findings of previous studies. A 1995 Massachusetts' study conducted by the Center for Disease Control, surveyed 3,365 public high school students, of which 4% identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or unsure of their sexual orientation (Garofalo, et al., 1999). GLBT, and youth unsure of their sexual orientation were over 3 times more likely to report a suicide attempt than the respondents self identifying as heterosexual. In gender specific analysis, suicide was

significant for gay males, but not for lesbians (Garofalo, et al., 1999). For gay males the use of cocaine, school absence due to fear of lack of safety, and sexual contact against their will was significantly related to increased suicidality (Garofalo et al., 1999). The implication for social work practitioners is that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are at high risk for suicide. Recommendations to social workers include prevention strategies of a strong support system of peers and adults within the school, as well as an opportunity for youth to develop the internal qualities to help them cope with the increased stress of being part of a stigmatized group (Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Garofalo et al., 1999; Hershberger & Pilkington, 1997; Proctor & Groze, 1994; Remafedi & French, 1998). Recommendations specific to schools and school social workers is to provide support groups for students as well as education and sensitivity training to staff and teachers (Proctor & Groze, 1994). The authors advocated for programs like gay and lesbian adolescent social services (GLASS), a residential program in the community of West Hollywood, California. They founded the program to offer needed services to youth who lacked family support and had been homeless.

What are our Schools doing for GLBT Students?

A study conducted in the1985 school year as a part of Project 10at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles (Uribe & Harbeck 1992). The qualitative study involved 50 students who identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual with their ages ranging from 16-18 years old. The group was racially mixed with 37 males and 13 females. Informal interviews were conducted over several months. The question covered 4 areas: school experience, family relationships, substance use, and concern over health issues, including AIDS. The group reported widespread verbal and physical harassment in

middle stage is when Peters (1997) finds most youth access services. The identification with being gay or lesbian is beginning to form for them. This is the point where group work can provide support and education as well as just a safe place to be oneself. He describes the ends of the coming out phase as an integration of the gay identity into a positive whole self. One student best described the importance of the group: " It's like I can only be gay for an hour and a half a week. I need twenty-four hours seven days a week" (Peters, 1997, p. 58). This statement exemplifies the need for support groups in schools and the community. Peters (1997) explains group work with adolescent gay and lesbian youth, including its challenges.

<div align="center">Gaps in the Literature</div>

The gay rights movement has had a tremendous impact on society's views of GLBT (Yang, 1999). Because we are in the midst of this change, some of the literature reviewed is dated in its content and focus. Although harassment is still an everyday occurrence for many GLBT youth, there are also programs and policies in place to address that harassment. Peters (1997) does not explain the process of developing support groups for GLBT youth within a school, and the policies that may impact group formation. Current literature is now beginning to reflect the progress that has been made. Research using quantitative methods would provide hard data on what is working in schools to eliminate the hostile environment. Quantitative studies were used to show that GLBT youth are at high risk for suicide; however, it is not clear what the causal factors are for this increased risk. More studies on suicide risk are warranted. Qualitative research done in schools with support groups, gay straight alliances (GSA), and an inclusive curriculum would also add to the body of knowledge.

In order to respond to the need for qualitative studies, the focus of this study will be on interviewing current high school students attending Minneapolis public schools. This study will provide exploratory information on school experience of GLBT adolescents.

Summary

In chapter 2, major themes pertaining to lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescent development and interventions for those students were discussed. Systems theory is described and applied in the next chapter to interpersonal experiences and meeting needs of GLBT students with school based services.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The school environment is a major influencing factor in children's lives (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). The time spent at school is significant in length and significant in potential influence. Relationships with adults in school provide not only instruction but also provide role models for behavior. School life is a system that interacts with other systems. By utilizing the systems theoretical framework and identity formation theory, the interaction between school life and other systems can be understood and applied to the development of sexual identity.

Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory derives from the study of biology, where every system is seen as a subsystem of a greater system (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). The basic premise of systems theory is the interrelatedness of the parts of the whole. What happens in school influences what happens at home and visa versa.

System theory concepts

Person in the environment is a perspective that explains behavior as contingent upon environmental influences (Hepworth, Rooney, & Larson, 1997). It places more emphases on the strength of the environment impacting the person rather than the person impacting the environment.

Habitat and Niche

Habitat refers to where people live and the choices they have made about how they maintain the living environment (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). Habitats vary in their level of positivism. One end of the extreme would be an enriched environment that

allows for individuals and groups to grow and flourish. The opposite extreme would be a barren environment that does not promote any growth at all. Part of that continuum would be a hostile environment that does not nurture the individual, but is also hazardous to the individual's development. A niche refers to a person's place of comfort within the habitat. Niche includes the position, status or roles a person has in their habitat (Hepworth, Rooney, & Larson, 1997).

Homeostasis

Homeostasis is the tendency for systems to stabilize during times of change in order to remain the same (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). As systems are influenced by the interrelationship with other systems, homeostasis allows the balance to remain. With individuals as well as groups, if one member changes another member must adapt to compensate for that change

Constructivism

Constructivism or perspectivism is a construct that individuals are builders of their own reality (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). Constructivism means that people create and perceive their own reality and thus can be influenced to adapt their reality by the therapeutic process. As various systems interrelate perceptions change based on those relationships.

Microsystems, Mesosystems, Macrosystems and Exosystems.

The environment is made of four levels of systems (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). The most influential system is the micro system, which directly affects the experiences of the individual such as family, friends, and school. The mesosystem refers to the interactions between those microsystems. Macrosystems are the larger institutional

systems that have an indirect influence on the lives of individuals. The term exosystem

refers to the indirect relationship of one person's microsystem on another person. For

example, a parent's workplace would be part of their child's exosystem.

<div align="center">Identity Theory</div>

Erik Erikson's theory of human development explains how the process of

maturity continues throughout the lifespan from infancy to old age (Ashford, LeCroy, &

Lortie, 1997). The psychosocial stage at adolescence is *identity vs. identity confusion.*

Adolescence is a time when children are gathering information about themselves and how

they fit in their various communities. Jean Piaget *cognitive theory* explains how people

use and organize information to understand themselves, and their world. The key

concepts of Jean Piaget's structural approach to cognition are schema, adaptation,

assimilation and accommodation. Schema is information that an individual possesses.

When there is a disconnect between the information or schema held internally and the

schema of society, the information must be adapted. Assimilation refers to adaptation of

new information by changing perceptions. Accommodation consists of changing

cognitions to adapt to perceptions (Ashford, LeCroy, & Lortie, 1997).

<div align="center">Homosexual Identity Model</div>

Development of sexual identity for gays and lesbians evolves over a period of

time and is often not completed during adolescence (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996). Gay

and lesbian adolescents share the same process for tasks of development as their

heterosexual peers, unaffected by their sexual orientation. Identity formation and

consolidation is more difficult for the gay and lesbian youth because there is conflict

between the positive feelings of attraction and societies negative views of homosexuality.

Cass (1979) identified six stages of identity formation for gays and lesbians: confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis.

Confusion

When a child begins to question society's expectation of heterosexuality, there is confusion due to conflicting internal and external information. This is a time when children seek out information about same sex attraction. The next stage in Cass's model is comparison.

Comparison

Children begin to accept the possibility of their homosexuality and compare their same-sex attractions to societal expectations of heterosexuality. During this stage, teens may recognize social alienation within their immediate systems and the larger society.

Tolerance

The stage of tolerance is marked by a need to affiliate with gay and lesbian individuals. There is movement toward self-identification as gay or lesbian and away from societal expectations of heterosexuality. For adolescents with high social needs, there may be increased difficulties during this time when they feel more isolated and different than their peers.

Acceptance

Identity acceptance is when there is a clear identification of sexual identity. When possible, gay and lesbian youth seek to increase social contacts with other gays and lesbians. In urban areas, this is more easily accomplished than in rural or sparsely populated areas. Inability to associate with gay and lesbian peers creates difficulty during this stage.

Pride

Pride for the gay culture and identity is paramount at this stage of development. Affiliation may develop into activism within the gay community. A devaluation of the heterosexual institutions such as marriage and antagonistic thinking may occur during this stage.

Synthesis

Identity synthesis is the final stage of Cass's (1979) identity model. During this stage, there is a coming together of the self and community. There is a reduction of "us and them thinking" and more integration of the self.

Application of Systems, Identity Theory

and Homosexual Identity Formation Model

Systems Theory

Utilizing the person in environment perspective, the school environment can be analyzed to determine how it impacts upon student behavior and adolescent development (Ashford, LeCroy, & Lortie, 1997). If the environment is hostile or unsafe, a gay, lesbian or bisexual student's behavior will be adversely affected. Also as the climate changes as the result of direct intervention, staff training or with the addition of peer support groups, student's development of self will be positively influenced.

Systems theory uses habitat to describe the environment in which one lives (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). This study expands upon that definition to include schools. The level of positivism that schools offer gay, lesbian, and bisexual students will influence their ability to find their niche. The literature review highlighted the problems that result when children do not find their niche in school. Students who do not feel

included in the school habitat display problem behaviors, including acting out, skipping

school and dropping out.

As school is part of the microsystem for children, they are directly influenced by

the behavior of peers and adults and the relationships that have within the school. For all

students the school is a microsystem. The need for relationships within school may be

even more critical for lesbian, gay and bisexual children because their family may not be

a supportive system for them. Although policy changes alone will not stop harassment

based on sexual orientation, interventions aimed at changing the environment is also

required. Policy is a first order change; intervention will encourage second order change.

Identity Theory

According to Erikson's theory, people progress through the stages of development

whether or not they have resolved the conflict at each level (Ashford, LeCroy, & Lortie,

1997). For the adolescents questioning their sexual orientation, there is increased conflict

at the stage of *identity vs. identity confusion*, perhaps prolonging that stage and impacting

on subsequent stages. Cass (1979) furthers Erikson's work expanding on the stages of

adolescence, young adulthood, and maturity. Information about gay and lesbian

individuals and issues can assist adolescents at the stage of identity confusion. Having

information accessible in the education system would be beneficial at this stage (Cass,

1979). Curriculum and library materials inclusive of sexual minorities could alleviate

some of the conflict present during this stage of confusion as well as the following stage

of comparison. Counseling during this stage of confusion could assist the adolescent in

exploring information, assistance defining what it means to be different while

discouraging labeling at this early stage.

When adolescents are comparing this new information of possible homosexual orientation with their view of themselves as a heterosexual, counseling can assist students with the fears and anxieties that may come form this incongruent information (Cass, 1979).

During the identity tolerance stage, counseling can assist with problem solving around how and when to *come out*, and developing approaches to negative reactions to their sexual orientation. Peer support groups, such as gay-straight alliances, are helpful to gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth since many experience isolation with this realization of being part of a marginalized minority.

Acceptance of sexual identity involves more affiliation with others who identify themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. School social workers can be a resource to information about community events and activities for the gay, lesbian, bisexual community.

The final stages of pride and synthesis may not be completed during the high school years; however, with supportive families and communities, some young gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are active in community affairs as speakers and peer educators. This would indicate a level of pride in their identity and perhaps an ability to balance their sexual orientation with other aspects of their identity. Providing opportunities to express themselves within the schools and community at large could facilitate these stages of identity development.

Summary

In this chapter, the systems theory concepts, identity theory and the homosexual identity model were explained and applied to the research study. How these theories interact with and explain the development of identity was analyzed for gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals. Counseling and interventions were discussed at each stage of identity development. The next chapter will delineate the methodology of the research study.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology is presented and concepts are defined. How the respondents sample was obtained, data collection techniques, and the method used to interpret the data is all described. In conclusion, the procedures to protect the study respondents from harm are outlined.

Research Questions

This study explored the experience of being a GLBT youth in high school and how they use services available to them. This study's research questions are: 1) What are the interpersonal experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth currently in high school? 2) Are school-based services meeting the needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students?

Research design

The research design used in this study was an exploratory and inductive qualitative method of in-depth interviewing to interpret the experience of GLBT high school students. Qualitative inquiry provides information that is psychologically rich, and provides an in-depth understanding of an individual's experience (Rudenstam & Newton, 1992). The opportunity for participants to tell their story in their own words illustrates the strength of the qualitative research method. Interviewing allows the researcher to gather information from the subject's thoughts and perceptions that can not be obtained by direct observation or from quantitative methods (Patton, 1990). To get the depth of the information the researcher sacrifices the scope of the experience, using a few respondents in contrast to the quantitative method that can survey a large number of

people. The information gathered through interviews is exploratory in nature and can not

be generalized to a larger population, as can the survey data (Patton, 1990). The

sampling approach in qualitative research is purposeful in contrast to the random

approach used in quantitative research (Patton, 1990). A purposeful sampling approach

was selected to gather information from a select group of individuals; gay, lesbian and

bisexual high school students.

A standardized open-ended interview format was used. Questions were

developed to obtain the subject's thoughts, feelings, observations and perceptions of their

experience and their school environment. In order to obtain a first hand account of the

student experience, current high school students were interviewed. The subjective nature

of data analysis is a weakness of qualitative research, however the first person account

allows the data or interview responses to really speak for themselves. In that way the

analysis is left in part up to the reader. For this exploratory study, the qualitative research

method was the most appropriate method to obtain data on the experience of lesbian, gay,

and bisexual youth.

Key Concepts and Operational Definitions

The key concepts in this study are gay, lesbian, bisexual, homophobia, harassment,

and school intervention. The operational definitions are:

1. The terms gay, lesbian, and bisexual refer to emotional and sexual attraction to

    members of ones own gender or to both genders. Once considered as a mental

    illness, homosexuality is now considered a normal variation of human sexuality

    (Uribe, 1994). GLBT is commonly used to include gay, lesbian, bisexual and

transgendered individuals. GLBT is used in this study as synonymous of gay, lesbian and bisexual or transgendered individuals.

2. Homophobia is the irrational fear, hatred, prejudice or negative attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality (Gramick, 1983; Ryan & Futterman, 2001).

3. Harassment is statements or action that has the purpose or effect of creating and intimidating, hostile or offensive environment (Minneapolis Public School Policy 4002, 1993).

4. School intervention is defined as activities for students, teachers and staff that are designed to combat the negative effects of homophobia.

5. Come out is to recognize, acknowledge same-sex feelings, and disclose the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered identity to others (Ryan & Futterman, 2001).

<center>The study population</center>

The respondents of this study are current high school students, or recent graduates ages 15 to 18, who identify themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Most high school students are under the age of legal consent therefore parental consent was required. Students who are unable to gain parental approval were not included in the study. This provision excluded students who have not disclosed their sexual orientation to a parent, and limited the availability of participants. Disclosure of ones' sexual orientation is part of the development of an adolescent (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998). This disclosure impacts the dynamics of the family unit and does not always have a positive outcome (D'Augelli et al.). An attempt was made to balance the respondents according to gender and race, however with the small sample size, a balance was not obtained.

Sample criteria

In order to reach a sample of students, a convenience sample was used. Schools in a metropolitan area that offered either, support groups or extracurricular gay/straight alliances were approached for participants. The coordinator for *Out 4 Good*, a program of the Minneapolis public school was the researchers initial contact. The researcher conducted individual informational interviews with the coordinator and assistant coordinator of *Out 4 Good,* and 3 school social workers. The interviews were unstructured with the purpose to gather background information about the services provided by the Minneapolis school district. During the interview with the *Out 4 Good* coordinator, she encouraged this researcher to interview students and expressed her opinion that parental consent could be obtained to interview several students.

Recruitment of participants

Two high schools with interventions in place were selected. A letter requesting permission to recruit participants for the study was written to each school principal. One principal informed the researcher of the school districts policy to review all studies that recruit student participants. The researcher followed the process with the school district and received approval to recruit student participants, see attachment. Social workers at three high schools were interviewed, and the study explained. A letter outlining the study was sent to group leaders requesting permission to recruit participants at an upcoming group meeting. A script was prepared and read at the meeting and participants were given a form outlining the benefits as well as the potential risks involved with participation in the study. Potential participants were given an information sheet about the research study and a consent form to return to an Augsburg College mailbox. Five

students returned consent forms, and 3 followed through with a scheduled interview. A 20-dollar honorarium was provided to all study participants.

Measurement Issues

Reliability

Reliability refers to the amount of accuracy of a measurement technique (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). When a question is asked repeatedly with the same results the data is highly reliable. A measurement is more reliable when fewer random errors occur. To increase reliability the author conducted all interviews. An attempt was made to follow the questions in the same way and in the same order in each interview, however the interview format was more of a guideline and the conversation more free flowing. This format lowered the reliability of the interviews. Two sessions were recorded on audiotape and transcribed to ensure that all information collected was as accurate as possible, the third interview was conducted in a location not conducive to tape recording and notes were taken long hand.

Validity

Validity refers to a level of accuracy of measurement. Data is a valid measure when there is a relationship between the data and the content that is being explained. There are four levels of validity; each with an increased level of legitimacy. Face validity is the appearance of measuring what was intended to be measured. Content validity refers to how much the measurement reflects on the content of the study. Criterion-Related validity uses an external source to predict an outcome. Construct validity is based upon how the variables interact with each other. Content analysis was the analytical method to obtain information. There are disadvantages to content analysis

(Rubin & Babbie, 1993). An inherent weakness is in the validity of analyzing communication based on content. There is less validity when the researcher interprets the meaning of an interview, than when the information is covert.

Some steps can be taken to increase the level of validity in qualitative studies. The validity of the data in this qualitative study was maintained by structuring the questions to directly relate to the research question. The validity of this study relied on the participants answering questions in a thoughtful and truthful manner. If participants do not feel comfortable to express themselves honestly or fully, the validity of the data is affected.

Systematic Error

In field research, the manner the questions are asked or worded can increase systematic error (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Other researchers reviewed the interview questions prior to implementation of the study to reduce the possibility of systematic error.

Data Collection

Instrument Development

The researcher developed a standardized open-ended face-to-face interview format. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as an addendum. The format included follow-up questions in case the adolescent participants required prompting. The interview questions were directed at the themes represented in the literature. The questions were intended to allow participants to speak about their own experience using their own words. In addition to the interview, a short questionnaire was given to each participant to collect nominal information such as gender, age and grade in school.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through the interview process. Two of the three interviews were audio taped and transcribed, and during the other interview notes were taken by hand. Interviews were conducted in a public location convenient to the participant and approved by the School district. Interviews lasted between 35 minutes to 1 hour.

Data Analysis

Inductive logic was used to analyze the data obtained through the interview process. Content analysis was used to analyze the commonalities and differences in the responses. The responses were compared to other research reported in the literature review. Content analysis uses a coding process to interpret the communicated information (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). The manifest content, which is the surface content, was coded for interactions with peers, teachers, administrators, and gay-straight alliance group members. The content was also coded for outcomes the student felt were positive and those they felt were negative.

Human Respondents

An application was made to the Institutional Review Board (IRB approval # 2001-19-01) of Augsburg College, outlining the risks and benefits of this study. A similar application was made to the Minneapolis Research Evaluation and Assessment (REA) department, and approval was given. Respondents and their parents were informed of the voluntary status of the students' participation. Information was given with the consent forms outlining the rights of respondents to refuse to answer any question. Respondents were notified verbally and in writing that at any point in the

research process they could discontinue participation without affecting their relationship with Augsburg College, Minneapolis Public Schools, or any school program.

Due to the personal nature of this inquiry, respondents might experience emotional reactions. The researcher did not engage in counseling during or after the interview. Participants were informed of community based counseling options for follow-up support after their involvement in the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the research methods employed to conduct this study were discussed: research design, sampling, procedures, data, collection, data analyses, and human respondents. In the next chapter, findings are presented.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented. Characteristics of the respondents are provided and how their responses apply to the research questions is discussed. Common themes contained within the interviews were verbal harassment, safety, the influence and importance of caring adults, and the critical need for Gay/Straight Alliances, support groups and a GLBT inclusive curriculum.

Profile of the study participants

The participants attended 2 schools in the Minneapolis School District. Five students agreed to participate however only 3 students followed through with an interview: a gay male, a lesbian and a bisexual female. Each student volunteered to participate and met with the researcher individually. Participants had *come out* about their sexuality to one or more of their family members including a parent. The participants are 15, 16, and 18 years old. Each of the students had *come out* to a family member, by the age of 14. Two of the respondents are European American and one participant is Native American. The respondents had attended their schools for at least two years, and had been involved with GLBT services for a year or more.

Research Question: What are the interpersonal experiences of GLBT youth currently in high school?

Each of the respondents related individual experiences in school apart from their identity as gay, lesbian or bisexual. For the bisexual female (01), her sexual identity played a minor role in her school life; however, for the gay male his role in the Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) was primary to his school experience. "The GSA was just starting up and I was able to get involved right from the start"(03). Volunteering in the

GSA speakers' bureau helped him define his identity, and allowed him to explore an interest in pursuing teaching as a career. The GSA speakers were trained as peer educators to go into other schools providing a forum for discussion and education to reduce name-calling and harassment of gay and lesbian students.

School climate and Harassment

Part of the school climate for respondents was daily hearing some variation of the phrase: *that's so gay*. This has become a commonly used phrase by middle and high school students and unless peers or school personnel address it, it continues without students giving it much thought. This subtle but prevalent form of harassment creates a hostile learning environment. The literature reflects more hate speech directed at individuals than the respondents experienced.

Every day I hear 'that's gay' or 'faggot' in the halls. You hear that a lot. I know mostly they aren't meaning homosexual, they mean like that's stupid, but it still hurts. They are so uneducated. I tell kids that if they mean stupid or dumb to say that instead because it offends me. I know other kids have started doing that too. It wasn't anything we planned to do but I think having the GSA helped us feel more powerful to do that (01).

Unlike most of the experiences relayed in the literature, study respondents did not experience physical abuse or constant harassment. "I hear that's so gay but it is used as a petty put down, like that's so stupid"(02). One respondent noted how her experience was different from another girl in school who was more obviously lesbian in her appearance. This reflects upon the level of invisibility of GLBT students who blend into the crowd. There is an amount of safety in this ability to be invisible, but with it comes isolation.

When a student is more obviously different, they are more likely to be targets of harassment.

> I hear it (*that's gay*) everyday. I haven't really heard put downs directed at me, oh except once. And I let him know that he was ignorant. There is one girl at school that is harassed a lot, but she looks more butch, not feminine looking, so people call her dyke or say 'are you a boy or a girl?' (01).

Other forms of harassment are more blatant and directed at individuals. One female respondent faced a daily dilemma of navigating the bathrooms both at school and in the community. She expresses the anger toward the perpetrators as well as feelings of shame, and anger at the situation. The person in the environment perspective is congruent with this scenario. The girl is strongly impacted by her environment and makes adaptations to avoid an uncomfortable situation.

> I get crap all the time because I dress more masculine than other girls. I have to go to the bathroom during class time when no one is in the halls and no one is watching. If there are girls in the bathroom or people in the halls then I will just like walk around or go to a different bathroom. Cause if there are girls in the women's bathroom then they say that's a women's bathroom, you shouldn't be in here. Even when I walk into a women's bathroom, I feel so ashamed. People say things all the time. Once I was washing my hands and two girls came in and told me I was in the wrong bathroom, and that I shouldn't be in there. I told them I'm not and that I can read the sign, I told them if I wasn't a girl I wouldn't be in there. I left feeling awful about myself. I was so angry. That was when I was a freshman and I've been taking that ever since. I will not use the bathroom during

passing time, because that is when everyone is in the halls and using the bathroom (02).

Safety

Respondents were asked about safety at school and whether they felt safe. The responses show that safety is interpreted at both an emotional and physical level. One student is very active in the school gay community and this is reflected in his comments. "I feel 100% safe at school, if there were metal detectors that would make me feel unsafe, we don't have those. There is a great communication system and a great sense of community." (03) The student is constructing his own reality by playing an active role in the process of creating the school environment he desires. There is a level of control that he feels about the safety of the school that differs from the next respondent's comments. "I don't have enemies that I know of. There is always the Columbine stuff, the shootings; you can't really worry about that happening- it's not in your control." (01). With several school shootings in the recent past, safety is a concern for all students, not just gays and lesbians. None of the respondents had experienced physical violence or threats of violence.

> Most of the time I feel safe, it's just some of the remarks I get then I feel unsafe.
> Generally I do feel safe, however when people stare at me and talk about me, and
> the remarks I get then…. there is a lot of tension (02).

Those who had experienced verbal harassment directly felt less safe than the other respondents. The feeling of tension reflects a discomfort with the situation and conveys a feeling of fear for her safety.

The student respondents each shared personal experiences of middle school and high school. One student felt very isolated in middle school, and contemplated suicide.

"I was called a fag everyday in middle school by one kid who's locker I had to pass. I let it roll off my back. I was in my own world, I was suicidal." (03). High school has been a very different experience for him, "The whole community is visible here, not just the random gay kid."(03)

"In middle school kids are not able to stretch their minds. In high school, it's obviously different. There are different age groups; their intelligence is on a higher level. No one has a GLBT program in middle school."(01) Each respondent mentioned the lack of any interventions or support services for GLBT students in the middle schools. They recognized their sexual orientation during those years and would have appreciated having someone at school to discuss those feelings.

> I think they should have more education about GLBT facts, not biased information- not like gays are good, or gays are bad. For kids that don't know that much, cause I think that would get rid of a lot of discrimination. I just don't think people really know- like some of the TV shows have things that are false stereotypes of gay people, and I think that leads people in the wrong direction (01).

One student would like to see more visibility both in middle and high schools. He gave some suggestions on how to provide that acknowledgement of the presence of GLBT youth.

> Coming out day is in October, which is at the beginning of the school year. There needs to some something. March is women's history month and February is African American's history month. We could at least have a week in October for the GLBT students (03).

Relationships with supportive adults

Important to students was the availability of staff to talk to about issues affecting

them because of their sexuality. The schools had designated teachers and social workers

as *safe staff* who had received training from *Out 4 Good*. One student talked about safe

staff at her school.

> I think there are about 40 teachers this year. They have mugs and the pins. I feel
>
> good about that however I don't hear teachers calling kids on their language.
>
> Maybe they don't hear it, but I think they just don't want to deal with it. There is
>
> a lot of bad behavior that teachers ignore; it's not just that (01).

The implementation of designated safe staff in schools has been a policy change;

however what the student has noted is that the behavior of the staff hasn't reflected the

change. This may be a result of conflicting priorities of the teaching staff, or it may be an

indication of larger societal issues such as homophobia, reflected in the school

environment. Teachers will not respond to name calling or harassment when they are not

empowered to intervene through training and administrative support (Morrow, 1993).

Research on youth resiliency has shown that the presence of at least one caring person

can provide the supports needed for children to develop and grow emotionally and

socially to their potential (Bernard, 1995). The most frequently sited adult influence

outside the family system is a favorite teacher (Werner & Smith, 1989). Two of the

respondents spoke of teachers or social workers with which they had a caring supportive

relationship.

There is one teacher in particular, which I can talk to like a mother, but yet not *my* mother. I feel comfortable talking with her about some things that are harder to talk to my mom about (01).

"There is a social worker for the GLBT students, other kids can go to her too, but she is really a coordinator for GLBT students. She is the person to go to, everyone is real close with her."(02) Each respondent recognized the importance of having adults available to talk with about personal issues. Schools that have high expectations, and provide the supports needed for students to achieve those expectations, report high academic achievement (Bernard, 1995). Consistent with the person in the environment perspective of systems theory, the student's growth and development is contingent on the school environment. The role of teachers is paramount in modeling behavioral expectations. When teachers feel supported by the school administration and the mission of the school, they will be empowered to intervene when harassment occurs (Bailey & Phariss, 1996; Morrow, 1993).

In math class once and these 2 boys that are really close friends were just messing around and one of the kids said to me, you're close enough, you're my boyfriend, that's cool… and the teacher said that it was completely inappropriate and I don't appreciate you saying that. They said they were just joking around, but she took it really seriously. It was really the simplest remark and it didn't even offend me … she went on for about 5 minutes with different examples and then went back to math. It was nice to watch her, cause she knows that I'm gay and I think she did it in support of me (02).

Question #2: Are school-based services meeting the needs of gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

Gay/Straight Alliances and Support Groups

Each student found participation in the GSA and support groups positive experiences. One credited the GSA for keeping her in school, another for providing leadership opportunities. In their individual ways, each respondent had found a niche in their school habitat through participation in the GSA or GLBT support groups. "The GSA has been really important to me, it has given me a place to be. It has kept me at the high school." (01). As students become more actively involved in school groups they help to construct their own reality. To illustrate this constructivist perspective, the following quote is by a student who has become very involved with both the GSA at the school he attends and membership in a group of representatives from each GSA within the school district. "I participate in the citywide GSA which provides community building opportunities beyond just my school, we plan social events such as 'gay day' in the park for students from all schools."(03). This involvement is a demonstration of the *pride stage* within the homosexual identity model. The respondent has accepted his identity as a gay individual and has recognized himself as part of the larger community, taking on an activist role by reaching out to other students and adults in the GLBT community.

GLBT support groups provide a place for students to be open about their sexual identity, allowing them to work on the developmental tasks of identity formation and relationship intimacy (Callahan, 2000). Support groups are less focused on social justice

and offer recreational opportunities as well as a safe place to talk about issues such as dating, getting bullied, or *coming out.*

> The GLBT support group really helps people come forth. They have a place to be. They have people to talk to. We have discussion groups such as coming out issues, or any issues that have come up. I have friends that can't tell their parents so it's helpful for them to have places to go to, someone they can talk to (02).

The Minneapolis district program, *Out 4 Good,* and school based GSA's, are following in the footsteps of the Fairfax School's Project 10, which recognized the steps to creating an environment inclusive of all students (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). School are reducing isolation by providing a supportive community through GSA groups, support groups and safe staff programs, in which students can develop their identity as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. Providing and encouraging visibility is the second step in developing an inclusive environment.

> At another school the GSA is sponsoring a day of silence. I think that is cool. Students don't talk for one day and instead hand out cards to other students explaining the day of silence is to bring attention to the GLBT population, and how historically their voices have been kept silent (01).

> This type of activity will bring GLBT students and faculty into the consciousness of the school body and when there is visibility there is more safety and freedom (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). At each of the schools the respondents attend, information about support groups and GSA meetings are announced in a similar manner as other school-sponsored groups.

Inclusion

Providing a place for GLBT people in the curriculum does not require new curriculum guides, or funds, but rather teaching staff with the education, honesty and courage to be inclusive (Anderson, 1994). One school community was praised by students for its ability to be inclusive of all students, regardless of race or sexual preference. The curriculum at that school offers a GLBT literature course, and was inclusive of gay and lesbian relationships during a course on man/ woman communication class.

> We actually have a GLBT literature class that concentrates on gay and lesbian authors and focusing on the gay lifestyle. It is an elective that was just offered for the first time this year. The teacher encouraged us to reflect on our own lives and how we view that lifestyle (02).

By offering classes that focuses on positive attributes of the GLBT community, the school is directly combating the isolation that many GLBT students feel in school. A sense of belonging is essential for students to find their niche at school. When students feel isolated there is an increased risk of depression, suicide, and risky behavior. Information is critical to the *identity vs identity confusion* stage of human development (Ashford et al., 1997). Classroom curriculum that include GLBT people and issues, allow an open discussion of the oppression and contributions of this population.

> Gays and lesbians were included in a social studies course when the topic was genocide and tolerance. For one of my assignments I searched the Internet for other inclusive high school curriculums but wasn't able to find anything. The teacher is developing the curriculum herself (03).

An inclusive classroom can empower students to explore information that they would not be exposed to in a typical class. Even a progressive class on communication between the sexes was expanded and updated to include communication between same sex partners.

> We have a man woman critiquing class that I was in last year. It was mostly heterosexual couples, focusing on the relationship between men and women. But the teacher included gay and lesbian relationships and I thought that was really nice. We all had to do a presentation on couple issues or a gender issue; a lot of people did presentations on famous couples (02).

For her presentation this same student reported on Jamie Nabozny's experience of harassment while in middle and high school, and conducted a participatory exercise with her class focusing on words used to identify gays and lesbians.

> I did a presentation with another girl on Jamie Nabozny and the discrimination he faced. We did an exercise that had students list all the names they know for gays and lesbians. Then we asked them to cross out the ones that had a negative connotation and the only word remaining was the word queer. So we had a discussion about that word, and other words and how they are used within the community. I think I would prefer to be called queer which is more inclusive than being GLBT. Everyone is lumped into one. I think the word queer is more accepted than lesbian or gay. It really depends on how words are used (02).

Applying the homosexual identity development model (Cass, 1979) this student is in the stage of *pride*, which is delineated by activism and *coming out* to non-gay persons. GLBT youth are growing up in a time when there are greater opportunities to become more fully integrated at a younger age (Ryan & Futterman, 2001). Schools offering this

opportunity will provide the necessary tools for students to develop their identity inclusive of their affectional preference.

Summary

In this chapter, the results of the study were presented in relation to the research questions. Themes that were observed in the responses were highlighted and quotes were used to give the flavor of each person's experience. In the final chapter, the findings and implications of the major themes will be discussed. An analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as implications for social work practice and policy are reviewed. In conclusion, implications for future research are suggested.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Discussion of Findings and Implications of Themes

This study investigated the current experience of GLBT students in 2 Minneapolis public high schools. The respondents shared both positive and negative school experiences as the result of their identity as GLBT. The literature reviewed focused on the lack of acceptance provided GLBT youth and how the negative experiences of students affected their identity development and self-esteem. Comparatively, respondents in this study gave a more positive view of their school experience than was reflected in the literature. This may be an indication that the GLBT programs in their schools offer opportunities for them to find a niche, be *out,* and be proactive in the school community. It may also be because the respondents were self selected. They may have had more positive experiences with *coming out,* and have developed a positive self-image of themselves as GLBT, than students who chose not to participate. The respondents are a small group of individuals and their experiences can not reflect the possible range of experiences of youth in Minneapolis identifying as GLBT.

Incidents of harassment and hostility were prevalent in the literature however for the respondents harassment and ignorance was more present in middle school than high school. Each acknowledged that students frequently use "fag" and "gay" as general put downs directed at anyone. Respondents had differing experiences with adult responses to derogatory comments. One respondent had witnessed teacher intervention when anti-gay slurs were used while another respondent could not recall ever hearing a teacher intervene. All respondents had found a peer group, and supportive adults within either a

GSA or a support group. The participation in GSAs, support groups and GLBT community sponsored events were available and utilized by each of the respondents. They had reached out and found a peer support system and appeared to have avoided the isolation reflected by students within the studies reviewed in the literature. Each student articulated a need for further education of the entire student body on GLBT issues, and direct intervention when anti-gay language is used in the halls or classrooms.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the small sample size (N=3), there are inherent limitations. This exploratory study provides a sampling of experiences however falls short of the quantity of respondents to offer a good picture of the school experience of gay, lesbian and bisexual students. A qualitative study requires more respondents to reach saturation and provide information on the common experience (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Participants of the study were all active and out in their school communities, either in the Gay/Straight Alliance, or in the support groups. Because of this status their experience may be quite different from other students who are more closeted and not yet able to reach out to other students who are questioning their sexuality or have identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. In compliance with Augsburg College's IRB and The Minneapolis School District's REA rules, guardianship permission was required for students to participate. In fulfilling this requirement, several students who expressed an interest in participating were excluded. Recruitment of participants was directed at students who are involved in school-based interventions thus limiting students who have not made the choice to be involved, yet may be identifying themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. It would be important to hear the about the school experience from those students. There would be

an opportunity to further explore the school-based interventions from the perspective of students who are choosing to not participate.

Strengths of the Study

The information gathered through the interview format provided a personal perspective of the high school experience for a bisexual female, a gay male and a lesbian. Each had unique experiences and shared some commonalities. The findings show that the school interventions are affective for some individuals and are critical to some students staying in school. There is an indication that the strength of the services is just beginning to be realized and that the true value may only be evident in the years to come. The state of Massachusetts appears to be ahead of Minnesota in the infrastructures they have developed and funded to assure that the climate and safety of their schools is under constant review and action is taken to provide what is necessary for all students to flourish. Although a quantitative study may provide a greater amount of detailed information, the true strength of the study is the first person account that could not be gleaned from a survey.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

The literature review indicates that the Minneapolis school district is more proactive in their services for GLBT youth than many other areas of the country. Social workers in progressive communities may find existing services and have the opportunity to work within a climate that is more open to serving the needs of the GLBT population. For social workers in other parts of the country, and particularly smaller more rural communities the climate may be more reflective of literature and pose a greater challenge. To influence the climate of rural or less progressive schools, school social

workers may have to work hard to provide the visibility and inclusion that each of the respondents voiced as important to their school experience and their ability to develop their identity as GLBT students. Implications for practice are most applicable to school social workers, who have an immediate presence in the school and are advocating for the rights and safety of all students. School social workers can take a leadership role in determining their school climate and implementing changes to ensure a safe, supportive learning environment. Information about the GLBT community, in the form of posters, brochures and books should be visibly present in school social workers offices to allow students who may be identifying as GLBT or questioning their sexual orientation. School social workers who are not familiar or connected to the GLBT community will need to become educated and bring in speakers or materials to provide to students.

Implications for Research

Due to the small sample in this study, a continuation of the research on a larger scale would provide more information about the school experience for GLBT students. Further research in this area would be beneficial in order to develop and evaluate interventions in the schools for GLBT students. An annual district wide survey of school climate for all students would provide information on harassment based on sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, economic status, etc... This information could provide parents and school boards with details about the climate within the public schools. Similar to academic test scores that are currently given as a scorecard for the success of a school, a scorecard on a safe environment could be another rating method of a schools performance.

Other questions unanswered in this study are how school social workers perceive their role in providing information and guidance to students, who identify as GLBT, as well as the relationship between bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation.

References

Anderson, J. (1994). Including gay/lesbian students and staff: an issue of fairness and humanity. The Education Digest, 60, 35-39.

Ashford, J., LeCroy, C., & Lortie, K. (1997). Human behavior in the social environment: A multidimensional perspective. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole.

Bailey, N., & Phariss, T. (1996). Gay students in middle school. Education Digest, 13, 48-49.

Bernard, B. (1995). Fostering resilience in children. ERIC Clearinghouse on elementary and early childhood education. [on line], Available: www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digest. ED386327 1995-08-00.

Buckel, D., (1998). Stopping anti-gay abuse of students in public schools: a legal perspective. New York: Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund Inc.

Caldwell, L., Kivel, B., Smith, E., & Hayes, D. (1998). The leisure context of adolescents who are lesbian, gay male, bisexual and questioning their sexual identities: an exploratory study. Journal of Leisure Research, 30 , 341-352.

Callahan, C. (2000). Schools that have not protected and worked with gay and lesbian students have been sanctioned by the courts. Education, 121, 313-326.

Cass, V. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. Journal of Homosexuality, 4, 219-235.

D'Augelli, A., Hershberger, S., & Pilkington, N. (1998). Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and their families: disclosure of sexual orientation and its consequences. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 63, 361-371.

Faulkner, A., & Cranston, K. (1998). Correlates of same-sex sexual behavior in a random sample of Massachusetts high school students. American Journal of Public Health, 88. 262-266.

Fontaine, J. (2001). Public school's response to the needs of gay and lesbian youth. The Prevention Researcher, 8, 13-15.

Garofalo, R., Wolf, C., Wissow, L., Woods, E., & Goodman, E. (1999). Sexual orientation and risk of suicide attempts among a representative sample of youth. Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 487-493.

Garofalo, R., Wolf, C., Kessel, S., Palfrey, J. & DuRant, R. (1998). The association between health risk behaviors and sexual orientation among a school-based sample of adolescents. Pediatrics,101. 895-902.

Gramick, J. (1983). Homophobia: A new challenge. Social Work, 28, 137-141.

Hamburg, B. (1974). Coping and Adaptation. New York: Basic Books.

Hepworth, D., Rooney, R., & Larsen, J. (1997). Direct social work practice: Theory and skills. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole.

Herek, G. (1989). Hate crimes against lesbians and gay men: Issues for research and policy. American Psychologist, 44, 948-955.

Hershberger, S., & D'Augelli, R. (1995). The impact of victimization on the mental health and suicidality of lesbian, gay and bisexual youths. Developmental Psychology, 31, 65-74.

Hershberger, S., & Pilkington, N. (1997). Predictors of suicide attempts among gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. Journal of Adolescent Research, 12, 477-497.

Hetrick, E., & Martin, A. (1987). Developmental issues and their resolution for gay and lesbian adolescents. Journal of Homosexuality, 17, 25-43.

Holzhauer, E. (1993). The hidden minority: lesbian and gay students in our schools. School Social Work Journal, 18, 1-8.

Hunter, J., & Schaecher, R. (1987). Stresses on lesbian and gay adolescents in schools. Social Work in Education, 87, 180-190.

Kinsey, A., Pomeroy, M., & Martin, C. (1948). Sexual behavior in the human male. Philadelphia: Saunders.

Linn, E. (1999). The role of school mental health professionals in resolving school-related sexual harassment complaints. Social Work in Education, 21, 263-267.

Lock, J., & Kleis, B. (1998). A primer on homophobia for the child and adolescent psychiatrist. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, 37, 671-674.

Minneapolis Board of Education (2000). Minneapolis Public Windom Open School Student-Parent Handbook 2000-2001.

Morrow, D. (1993). Social work with gay and lesbian adolescents. Social Work, 38, 655-660.

Nichols, P., & Schwartz, R. (1998). Family therapy concepts and methods. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Owens, R. Jr., (2001). Counseling with lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. The Prevention Researcher, 8, 9-13.

Patton, M., (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Peters, A. (1997). Themes in group work with lesbian and gay adolescents. Social Work with Groups, 20, 51-69.

Proctor, C., & Grose, V. (1994). Risk factors for suicide among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths. Social Work, 39, 504-513.

Reese, S. (1997). The law and gay-bashing in schools. Education Digest, 46-49.

Remafedi, G., & French, S. (1998). The relationship between suicide risk and sexual orientation: Results of a population-based study. American Journal of Public Health, 88, 57-60.

Ryan, C., & Futterman, D. (2001). Lesbian and gay adolescents: Identity development. The Prevention Researcher, 8, 1-5.

Ryan, C., & Futterman, D. (2001). Experiences, vulnerabilities and risks of lesbian and gay students. The Prevention Researcher, 8, 6-8.

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E., (1993). Research Methods for Social Work. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole.

Savin-Williams, R. (1994). Verbal and physical abuse as stressors in the lives of lesbian, gay male and bisexual youths: Associations with school problems, running away, substance abuse, prostitution, and suicide. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 62, 261-268.

Stephens, R. (1996). 40 ways to safer schools. Education Digest, 13-19.

Uribe, V., & Harbeck, K. (1992). Addressing the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth: the origins of project 10 and school-based intervention. Journal of Homosexuality, 22, 9-28.

Uribe, V. (1994). The silent minority: Rethinking out commitment to gay and lesbian youth. Theory into practice, 33, 167-171.

Werner, E. & Smith, R. (1989). Vulnerable but invincible: A longitudinal study of resilient children and youth. New York: Adams, Bannistser, and Cox.

Wolfson, J. (1998). Safety GLASS for gay students leaves most unprotected. Education Digest, 50-55.

Yang, A. (1999). From wrongs to rights 1973 to 1999: Public opinion on gay and lesbian Americans moves toward equality. The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Zera, D. (1992). Coming of age in a heterosexist world: The development of gay and lesbian adolescents. Adolescence, 27, 849-854.

Appendix A
Recruitment Letter

Recruitment letter and presentation to members of Gay Straight Alliances within selected
Minneapolis Public Schools

I am a graduate student at Augsburg College in the Department of Social Work Master's
program. I am interested in the experience of students attending the public schools who
identify themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual. This research project is my thesis and is a
requirement for completion of my master's degree.

I am interested in hearing in your own words how you experience school as a gay, lesbian
or bisexual student. I am also interested in your perspective on any school services
offered to you because you are a sexual minority. I will be interviewing 10 volunteers
looking for their common experiences. Volunteers commit to a 45-minute to 1-hour
confidential interview. Because you are a minor, parental permission is also required to
participate. Your name will not be used in the paper however direct quotes will be used
to provide details on the common experience of gay students.

We each have our own timing, and this may not be a safe time for you to come out to a
parent or guardian. If you are not out to a parent or guardian, please do not feel any
pressure to come out to them at this time in order to participate in this study.

The interview will be conducted outside of school time. The interview will be at your
choice of the following locations: a reserved space in a public library, a meeting room at
Augsburg library, or at the school.

A cash payment of $20.00 will be made to each volunteer selected at the beginning of the
interview. The information gathered during the interview will be presented in a thesis to
Augsburg College, department of social work. A written summary will be provided to the
Minneapolis Public Schools research department to assist them in understanding the
needs of gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

Are there any questions about the study or the consent process?

If you would like to participate in this study, please complete the permission form with
your parent or guardian and return to me in the envelope provided. Your participation
will be held confidential. Neither the members of this group nor the faculty advisor will
be told who is participating in the study.

Questions about this study can be directed to me at 952-996-3472 or my thesis advisor
Maria Dinis, Ph.D. at 612-330-1704.
I plan to conclude interviews in April, so if you are interested in participating, please
return the consent forms as soon as possible.

Thank you allowing me to speak at your meeting today.

IRB #2001-19-1

Appendix B
Consent Form

The School Experience of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students: A Qualitative Study

You are invited to participate in a research study to provide an understanding of the experience of gay, lesbian and bisexual students. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be involved in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. Lisa Stromquist is conducting this study in partial fulfillment of the Master of Social Work thesis requirement at Augsburg College.

<u>What will happen during the study?</u>
The study consists of one audio taped interview of 45 to 60 minutes in length. A Master of Social Work student working on her thesis will conduct the interview. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions aimed at understanding the experience of gay, lesbian and bisexual students and school based interventions, such as gay straight alliances.

<u>Are there any risks?</u>
Depending upon your experience, telling your story during the interview may bring up uncomfortable feelings or thoughts. If at any point in the interview you feel unable to continue, you may stop the interview without consequence. The following community based 24-hour counseling referrals are available if you are interested.
Crisis Connection 612-379-6363
Outfront Minnesota 612-822-0127 or 1-800-800-0350
(Nationwide) The Trevor Project 1-800-850-8078

<u>Are there any benefits?</u>
Knowing that you are contributing to research may provide a rewarding feeling. Also by expressing your personal experiences you may have an enhanced sense of well-being. Participants will receive an honorarium of $20.00 before the interview begins.

<u>When and where will the interview be conducted?</u>
Interviews will be held at a location and time convenient for you. Interviews will be done in person by the researcher.

<u>Who will have access to the interview material?</u>
The audiotaped interviews will be transcribed by a paid transcriptionist and then destroyed. The transcriptionist will be required to sign a statement of confidentiality to protect your privacy. All identifying information from the interview, including your name will be removed or altered on the written transcript. The researcher's thesis advisor will review information during the process of writing the thesis. All information is kept confidential however, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Raw data, including the audiotapes will be destroyed no later than August 31, 2001.

<u>What if you change your mind?</u>
You can withdraw from this study or refuse permission to use your interview in the study at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with Augsburg College or Minneapolis Public Schools. The $20.00 honorarium will be yours to keep.

<u>Contacts and Questions</u>
Before you sign this form. Please ask any questions you have about the study. The researcher conducting this study is Lisa Stromquist. You may ask the researcher or thesis advisor any questions you have prior to, during or following the interview. You will be given a copy of the form to keep for your records.

Statements of Consent:

I have read the about information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked.

I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of parent or guardian_____ . Date _____

Signature of minor subject's assent _____Date_____

I can be contacted to schedule an interview at:_____

I consent to be audiotaped.

Signature of parent or guardian _____ Date _____

Signature of minor subject's assent _____Date_____

I consent to allow the use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature of parent or guardian _____ Date _____

Signature of minor subject's assent _____Date_____

If you have any questions or concerns you may reach me at:
     Lisa Stromquist
     Augsburg College, MSW Student
     952-996-3472
Or you may contact my thesis advisor:
     Maria Dinis, Ph.D.
     Augsburg College
     612-330-1704

Community Resources:
Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) 612-825-1660. www.pflag.org
Outfront Minnesota 612-822-0127. www.outfront.org
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) 651-603-4972. www.glsen.org

Appendix C
Interview Questions

1. How has participating in the gay straight alliance group affected your school experience?
2. Tell me about your experience as a gay, lesbian or bisexual student?
3. Does the school you attend include curriculum inclusive of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals and issues?
4. Are you aware of teachers or faculty who have been designated as "safe staff"?
5. What does it mean to you to be safe at school? Are you concerned about your safety at school?
6. What school activities for gay, lesbian and bisexual students have you participated in and why?
7. Have you heard derogatory language such as fag, faggot, or dyke at school? How has this affected you?
8. What has been the response of teachers or other school staff to derogatory language?
   Describe a time when a teacher addressed or ignored derogatory language.
9. What or who at school has been the most helpful to you as a gay, lesbian or bisexual student?
10. Is there anything you would like the school to do that they are not currently providing?

Appendix D
Fill in the blank

1. Age_____

2. Grade in school _____

3. Gender_____

4. Ethnicity_____

5. Sexual Orientation _____

6. At what age did you acknowledge a gay, lesbian or bisexual identity? _____

7. Which family members are you out to about you sexual identity?

_____

March 28, 2001

Lisa Stromquist
5612 Sheridan Ave. S
Minneapolis, MN 55410

Richard J. Spicuzza, Ph.D., LP.
Research, Evaluation and Assessment
807 Northeast Broadway
Minneapolis, MN 55413

Mr. Spicuzza,

This letter is in response to the conditions set by the Research, Evaluation and Assessment's review of my application to conduct research in the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Students will be given the following locations to chose for the interviews: a reserved space in a public library, a meeting room at Augsburg library, or at the high school they attend.

The following addition has been made to the script for recruitment of study participants: We each have our own timing, and this may not be a safe time for you to come out to a parent or guardian. If you are not out to a parent or guardian, please do not feel any pressure to come out to them at this time in order to participate in this study.

My contact at Washburn high school is Julie Railsback, Social Worker, 612-668-3444. Linda Nelson, principal at South high school has been my initial contact, 612-668-0570.

I plan to limit my recruitment of study participants to students at Washburn and South, as they have larger gay-straight alliance groups than the other schools I initially selected.

I received approval to proceed with the study from the Institutional Review Board from Augsburg, IRB# 2001-19-01. A copy of that letter is attached.

I look forward to your response to these additions.

Sincerely,

Lisa Stromquist, MSW candidate

AUGSBURG

C•O•L•L•E•G•E

MEMORANDUM
TO: Lisa Stromquist
FROM: Maria Dinis, Ph.D. Co-Chair
RE: YOUR RECENT IRB APPLICATION
DATE: 17 March 2001

I am writing on behalf of the College's Institutional Review Board on the Use of Human Subjects. Your proposed study, "The School Experience of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Students: A Qualitative Study" has been approved. Your IRB approval number is 2001-19-1. Please use this number on all-official correspondence and written materials relative to your study.

The IRB committee wishes you the best in your research.

cc: Professor Maria Dinis, Ph.D., Advisor and IRB Co-Chair

MP S
MINNEAPOLIS
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1
An equal opportunity school district

RESEARCH, EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

807 Northeast Broadway
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413-2398
(612) 668-0570
FAX: (612) 668-0575

2/21/01

Lisa Stromquist
5612 Sheridan Ave. South
Minneapolis, MN. 55410

Dear Lisa:

This letter is written to confirm the receipt of your application to conduct research in the Minneapolis Public Schools. The application is currently under review and we expect to have the application processed by the end of February 2001. Thank you for your interest in conducting research in the Minneapolis Public Schools. You should be receiving another letter confirming our decision after the review process is complete.

Cordially,

Richard J. Spicuzza, Ph.D., LP.
Assistant Director of REA

MP S

**MINNEAPOLIS
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**
SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1
An equal opportunity school district

RESEARCH, EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

807 Northeast Broadway
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413-2398
(612) 668-0570
FAX: (612) 668-0575

4/25/01

Lisa Stromquist
5612 Sheridan Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN. 55410

Dear Lisa:

The Minneapolis Public School District's research staff has reviewed your proposal, "The school experience of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students: A qualitative study." It is our privilege to inform you that we have approved your research project. You may use this letter as confirmation of the fact that we have approved your work, and that you are thereby authorized to proceed, as outlined in your research proposal.

Our office appreciates your responsiveness to the modifications suggested by the reviewers. All interviews should be conducted in the specified places: High school, Augsburg Library, or Public Library as specified in your consent letter. In addition, we ask that you work closely with Lori Abbelbaum who is located in student services department at the MPLS district office.

If your study should require any other changes or modifications than the ones offered here, our office should be made aware of it by submitting an addendum to your proposal.

We wish you the best in your endeavor. We believe that your research will benefit the Minneapolis Public Schools staff and students. Additionally, our office requests that at the completion of your project that we receive some form of a written summary of your results.

Finally, our office now requires a $20.00 processing fee to allow us to better track the progress of ongoing projects this fee can be sent to our office payable to the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Sincerely,

David Heistad, Ph.D. Director
Research, Evaluation & Assessment

Rick Spicuzza, Ph.D., LP Assistant Director

CC: Lori Appelbaum, 1st Floor 807

Julie Railsback, Washburn Social Worker

H:R\Research Requests\Approval Letter

MP S

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MINNEAPOLIS
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1
An equal opportunity school district

807 Northeast Broadway
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413-2398
(612) 668-0170 FAX: (612) 668-0165
TTY: (612) 668-0001   STUDENT, FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Out4Good
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Program Office of
Minneapolis Public Schools
Coordinator: Lauri Appelbaum
Phone: 612-668-0183
Fax: 612-668-0175
E-Mail: Lauri.Appelbaum@mpls.k12.mn.us

Minneapolis Public Schools and Out4Good is committed to ensuring that
All students learn in an environment that is safe and supportive
All families feel respected and included in their children's schools
All staff feel free to be the best professional they can be

Out4Good promotes K-12 student achievement throughout the Minneapolis Public
School district by:
- Providing direct support to GLBT students, staff and families;
- Working to improve the school climate in every building by nurturing respect for all;
- Educating the entire district community about the principles of anti-discrimination, anti-violence and inclusivity.

Services to Students
- Student support groups
- Community service learning activities, leadership opportunities and networking across schools
- Peer Educators/Speakers' Bureau
- Student social action groups (Gay/Straight Alliances)
- Individual counseling and resource information
- Safe Staff programs in schools
- Partnerships with local youth serving agencies

Services to Staff
- GLBT and allies staff networking
- School-wide staff inclusivity training
- District-wide inclusivity training
- Technical support and resource information
- Curriculum and lesson plan resources
- Individual consultation and support
- Partnership with Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network (GLSEN)

Services to GLBT Families
- Information on assessing school choice
- Parent consultation and support
- School and family resource information
- Partnerships with: Rainbow Families; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG); and the Love Makes A Family Anti-Bias Book Project