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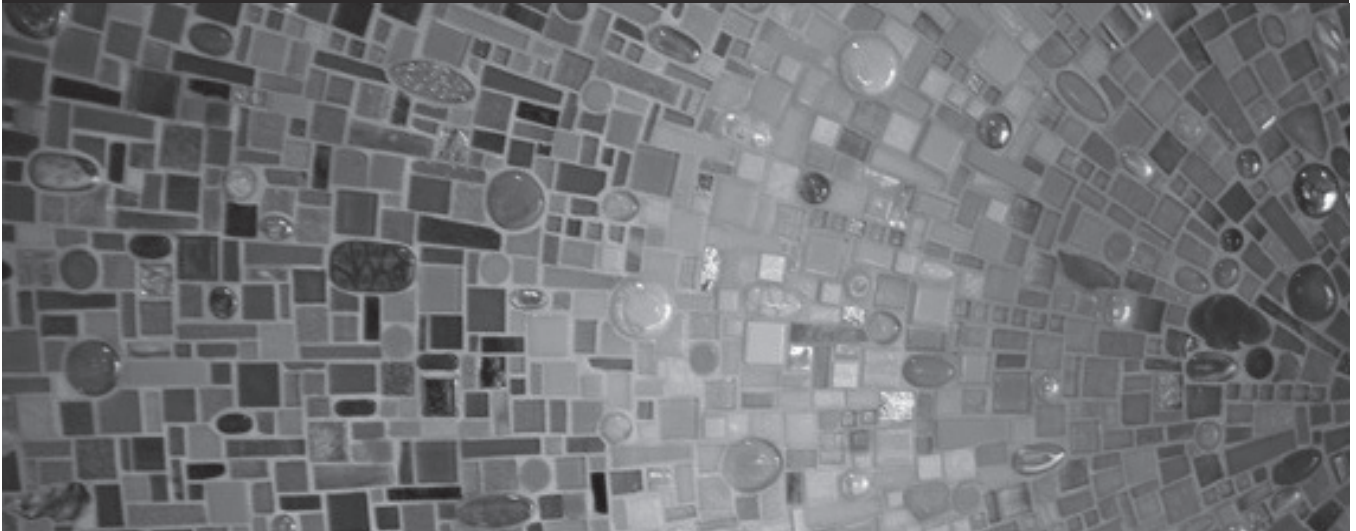
Editor
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Editorial Assistants
Cierra Davis, MA, LPC
Caroline Hamby

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SUPPORTING VIRGINIA'S LGBT YOUTH

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month (LGBT Pride Month) is celebrated annually in June to honor the work toward achieving justice and equal opportunity for LGBTQ Americans. Federal, state and local policies are increasingly focusing on issues specific to LGBTQ youth. Numerous state, local, and national advocacy groups are engaged in this important work as well. Encouraging greater acceptance and support for all youth, including those who are or are perceived to be LGBTQ, will make communities, schools, and homes better places for **all** youth. We welcome you to the VCPN's first issue on Virginia's LGBT youth.

The struggle for both social inclusion and equality has been a long-standing battle for the LGBTQIA population. Though strides have been made in regards to the civil rights of LGBTQIA persons, there is still room for growth and improvement in every aspect of our society and local communities (Morris, n.d.). Issues faced by LGBTQIA youth is one of these areas. The youth in our society are neither immune nor deaf to sociopolitical occurrences. As such, attitudes and actions of leaders in our communities and nation, from displaying "safe space" stickers to violence and threats of exclusion of transgender persons, messages of acceptance and rejection are heard by LGBTQIA youth and all others.

As a diverse group of professionals, we play an important role impacting

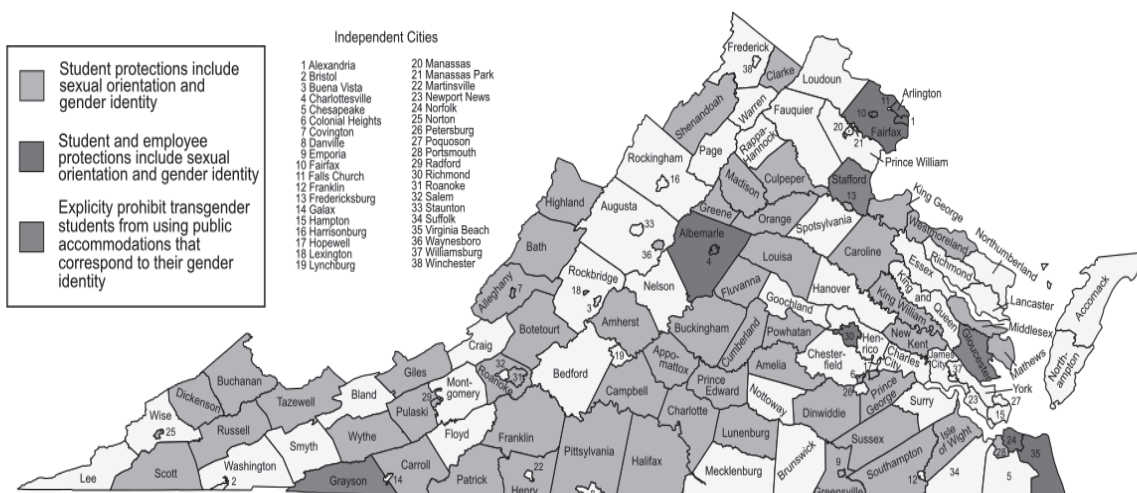
and shaping these messages towards and the welfare of LGBTQIA persons. Therefore, our positive influence on LGBTQIA youth in our communities is paramount.

Suicide Among LGBTQIA Youth

The impact of suicide on youth has been a significant focal point of LGBTQIA issues. The root of poor expectancies of the wellness of LGBTQIA youth is often attributed to pervasive attitudes of homophobia. This often plays out in the form of bullying, harassment, rejection, and a lack of support in addressing discrimination towards LGBTQIA and youth that are perceived to deviate from a heterosexual and cisgender identity. While schools are often associated with fostering these toxic environments, such behavior also

exists within families of LGBTQIA youth. The Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2016) conducted a survey on sexuality and morbidity and found that 60.9% of LGBT and 46.5% of questioning youth experienced feelings of hopelessness over the past year in comparison to 29.9% of heterosexual youth.

Additionally, 42.8% of LGBT and 31.9% of questioning youth seriously contemplated suicide in comparison to 14.8% of heterosexual youth. Following this trend, 29.4% of LGBT and 13.7% of questioning youth attempted suicide while the percent of suicide attempts of heterosexual students was 6.4%. With such a clear distinction between the prevalence of suicidal ideation and attempts of LGBTQIA and heterosexual youth, efforts toward substantial change is clear.



Resources for Engaging in Change

Making meaningful changes towards supporting LGBTQIA youth in the state of Virginia and nationally will likely require complex and exhausting work. Maintaining safe and judgment-free spaces for LGBTQIA youth is one easily accessible resource to start with and capitalize on. Prior to creating safe spaces, it is important to reflect on assumptions and values that may result from homophobic and heteronormative beliefs. Whether such beliefs and attitudes are subtle or overtly held, they convey a message that LGBTQIA youth are not welcome in openly sharing aspects of their sexual and gender identity. Not only do these beliefs and attitudes serve as a barrier to how LGBTQIA seek support, these beliefs and attitudes can prevent professionals, allies, and advocates from full participation in making changes to support LGBTQIA youth.

Many other resources exist that can be used to jumpstart change in how LGBTQIA youth are supported throughout the state of Virginia. Equality Virginia, an education, outreach, and advocacy organization for LGBTQIA persons in Virginia, offers several local and national resources for creating more inclusive and accepting communities and environments. These resources include information and direction on legal and supportive tools for LGBTQIA students, space to voice experiences of discrimination, and informational resources on being a transgender ally. On a national level, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has created an informational resource that explains student rights for LGBTQIA youth in response to facing discrimination in their school setting (ACLU, n.d.). Also, GLSEN offers tools for developing safe spaces, starting a Gay-Straight Alliance, and classroom resources for educators. Lastly, The Trevor Project offers a number of resources that can be used to highlight efforts toward inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQIA youth in Virginia. A few notable resources that are provided by The Trevor Project include a model for addressing and preventing suicide among LGBTQIA youth, training resources for adult allies, and training resources for responding to LGBTQIA

youth in crisis. The diversity of resources available through these organizations and others offer a first step in the path toward providing better support to the LGBTQIA youth of Virginia.

The resources provided by each of these organizations serve as a nice starting point for practitioners eager to learn how to support these vulnerable youth. Each can be easily accessed online at their respective websites listed below:

- www.equalityvirginia.org
- www.glsen.org
- www.aclu.org
- www.thetrevorproject.org

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Contributed by Darius Green, MA., PhD student at James Madison University.

The Current Legislative Landscape for LGBTQ+ Youth in Virginia

by Sarah Brown, JD, and Caroline Hamby, MA, EdS

Scenario

You are a social worker working in a high school. One day, a client comes in to discuss a situation. Your client appears very distressed. You invite the client to discuss their concerns with you. Initially, they indicate that their pronouns are they. Dakota then discloses that they identify as transgender and would like to use the bathroom consistent with their gender identity. Using the bathroom consistent with their assigned gender is causing Dakota significant distress. Dakota has avoided going to the bathroom at school and has missed several days of school due to their anxiety and fear. Your client discloses that they are uncertain of where to turn next. You want to address Dakota's concerns and coordinate with the school to ensure that the rights of your client are protected and affirmed. This article discusses how you might proceed.

Initial Tips for Talking with LGBTQ+ Youth (Orr & Baum, 2015):

- Create a safe space for your clients to voice their concerns by using gender-neutral, affirming, and non-judgmental language.
- The client is the expert on their own gender identity. Always address your client by the name and pronouns they indicate are appropriate. Using a transgender client's birth name is potentially extremely distressing to the client.
- Avoid assumptions about LGBTQ+ clients' sexual orientation or gender identity. Gender identity and sexual orientation are separate elements of an individual's identity.
- Become familiar with your state and city/county ordinances related to LGBTQ+ protections in order to proactively advocate for your clients.
- Emphasize the rights of LGBTQ+ clients to attend school in a safe and identity-affirming environment. Reiterate that, as a social worker, you are their advocate and their champion.

Pertinent Legislative Concerns

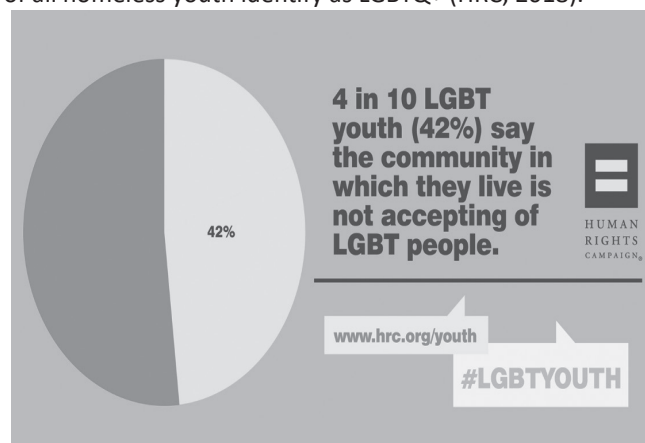
Legislation related to LGBTQ+ protections vary widely from state to state. Some states have specific laws to protect LGBTQ+ individuals, though Virginia is not included in that list (Human Rights Campaign, 2018). No existing Virginia legislation specifically protects LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination in all potential circumstances. However, former Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe's first executive order when he took office in 2014 banned discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in Virginia government employment. A 2017 executive order extended those protections to include protection from discrimination in the provision of state services (Peters, 2017).

The absence of specific legislation in Virginia does not mean that LGBTQ+ individuals are without protections. The U.S. Constitution guarantees all individuals equal protection under the law. Furthermore, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 "prohibits sex discrimination in educational

institutions that receive federal funding" (Know Your IX, n.d.). While Title IX was initially conceived to address disparities between male and female students, the Department of Education issued Title IX guidance in 2016 expanding its interpretation to address gender identity (Cordle, 2017). The 2016 Title IX guidance suggested that schools should treat transgender students according to their gender identity—including the use of restrooms, names, and pronouns (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The majority of schools across the country are already treating transgender students in accordance with the guidance; however, for those students who were experiencing discrimination, the guidance provided a powerful weapon in their fight for equality. It also gave school districts help in creating uniform policies and best practices.

The 2016 Title IX guidance was recently rescinded (Cordle, 2017). The rollback of the guidance concerning the application of Title IX creates legal uncertainty for transgender students who face discrimination. It is important to note that the law has not changed. Title IX still exists, and LGBTQ+ students who are discriminated against at school may still have legal recourse under it and under the U.S. Constitution.. Since Title IX's enactment in 1972 the U.S. Supreme Court and the Department of Education have consistently interpreted it broadly. Over the years it has been expanded to protect against both sexual violence and sexual harassment in educational institutions that receive federal funding. The consistently broad interpretation of Title IX may indicate that if the Supreme Court were to hear a Title IX case involving gender identity discrimination it might include it as prohibited sex discrimination (Cordle, 2017). Until a case makes it to the Supreme Court, or more specific bills are passed, the legal road ahead for Virginia's LGBTQ+ youth is uncertain.

The uncertainty of the law and absence of precedent and legislation creates an even greater need for vigilance by those working closely with children. Statistics show that a vast majority of LGBTQ+ youth report hearing negative messages from school, the Internet, and their peers about being LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ youth are almost 5 times as likely to have attempted suicide as non-LGBTQ+ youth. Finally, while LGBTQ+ youth represent 7% of the total youth population, 40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+ (HRC, 2018).





The extraordinarily high rates of homelessness for LGBTQ+ children demonstrate that home may not feel like a safe place for them to express their gender identity or sexual orientation. School may be the one place where they can express themselves and embrace all the wonderful and unique parts of their identity. Other students, teachers, and staff occasionally react unkindly. When this happens, children need to feel supported and understood by someone they trust. If you are assisting a client who is facing harassment or discrimination at school, first and foremost let them know you care. Validate their feelings and be a safe place for them to express themselves. Feel honored that they trust you enough to reach out. Make sure they know you will be there to support them.

When working together on a plan of action, it is helpful to have details and facts. Stress to the client the importance of writing down incidents as they happen: Include names, dates, and specifics. Encourage the client to advocate for themselves at school if they feel comfortable doing so. Be aware that any individual is qualified to file a com-

plaint to the Department of Education on behalf of the client, including social workers and administrators if the client wishes them to do so. If this is the case, review the complaint with the client in order to ensure that it is complete, and if possible, filed in a timely manner. The Department of Education requires that complaints be filed within 180 days of the incident (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2018). Above all, review and reinforce the client's rights both as a student and as a person.

Sometimes all it takes is a meeting with the school counselor and/or administration to make the school aware of the difficulties the client is experiencing. Go with the client or make a phone call if they feel insecure about going alone. Most school counselors and administrators are understanding and responsive. They want school to be a safe and comfortable place for all students. A potential next step might be a collaboratively created Gender Support Plan (GSP) that aims to create a holistically safe and supportive educational environment for the client (Orr & Baum, 2015).

Occasionally, schools will fail to take the necessary steps to protect students. If that happens to the client you are assisting, it is suggested that social workers and other personnel should consult with progressively higher levels of the administration. If nobody is willing to listen or alter the circumstances in a positive way for your client, there are organizations that can help. Making sure that clients can live comfortably and safely as students and human beings is a critical part of serving them and helping them flourish in the rest of their lives.

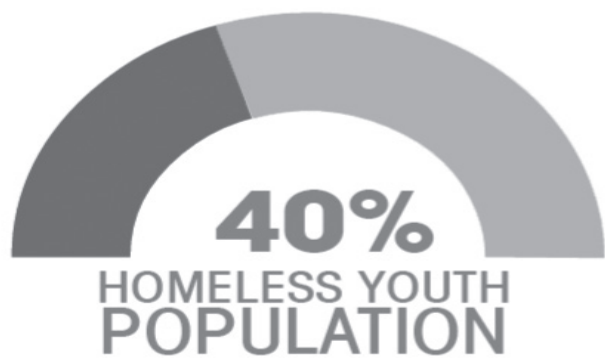
Related Resources

Lambda Legal
<https://www.lambdalegal.org/>

Southern Poverty Law Center
<https://www.splcenter.org/>


ACLU of Virginia
<https://acluva.org/>

Human Rights Campaign
<https://www.hrc.org/>



■ GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER
 ■ STRAIGHT





The Impact of LGBTQ+ Youths Myths & Misconceptions

The LGBTQ+ community often faces misconceptions about their sexuality, gender, and identity. This is especially true for LGBTQ+ youths. Misconceptions can often be held by those who work closely with LGBTQ+ youths such as teachers, social workers, doctors, counselors, etc. This can have an impact on the services that this population receives as well as the perpetuation of misguided understanding of the LGBTQ+ community. This article will discuss common myths and misconceptions in hopes to shed light and bring understanding specific to LGBTQ+ youths.

Myth #1: Being LGBTQ+ is a phase and a choice.

Adolescents are often described as “confused” or “misguided” when it comes to sexual identity, sexual attraction, and gender identity. This leads to the misconception that being LGBTQ+ is simply a phase or a choice. However, over 30 years of research has pointed out that being LGBTQ+ is an identity and not a choice.

Myth #2: LGBTQ+ youths are easy to identify.

It is a common belief that those in the LGBTQ+ are easily identifiable based on their performance, linked to their sexual and gender identity. This misconception is based on the idea that all members of a specific group within the LGBTQ+ community ascribe to a specific way to display their sexuality and gender. This refers to behaviors that are categorized as masculine or feminine and the general binary lens in which LGBTQ+ individuals can be viewed. In reality, one’s gender performance is not indicative of their sexual or gender identity. Many LGBTQ+ youths are impossible to distinguish from their heterosexual or gender normative individuals.

Myth #3: Being a bisexual youth implies having multiple partners and being promiscuous.

A misconception for bisexuality is that bisexual individuals have more than one partner to satisfy “both sides”

of their sexuality. Although bisexual youths have affections and attraction to persons of the same sex as well as other sex, most of them describe themselves as monogamous. Bisexual youths have the same ability as heterosexual youths to be attracted to more than one person at the same time, but this does not imply that they seek multiple partners.

Myth #4: Transgender youths who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual before transitioning are straight after transitioning.

Transgender youths are often expected to become “straight” after transitioning. According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, transgender people in various levels of the transition process, identify as: 23% heterosexual, 23% gay or lesbian, 25% bisexual, and 23% choose the label “queer”. Transitioning for a transgender youth does not simply equate to having heterosexual identification.

Myth #5: Gay and lesbian teens only have sex or romantic relationships with the same sex.

Although more gay and lesbian teens report that they have sex and relationships with the same sex only, some report having sex and relationships with both sexes. This implies that sexual identity does not predict sexual or romantic behavior.

Myth #6: Transgender youths all

ascribe to the idea that they are “trapped in the wrong body”.

Although this may be a common phrase in the transgender community, some transgender youth feel like it accurately describes their experience of gender identity while others report that their understanding of their identity is much more complex and can’t be described by this phrase. Those who work with transgender youth are encouraged to allow them to identify their own narrative.

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Contributed by Mina Attia, MS, NCC, LPC Resident in Virginia and PhD Candidate at James Madison University.

LGBTQIAAPD

*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning,
Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Demisexual*

When Coming Out Is the Question, Empowerment Is the Answer

For nearly 30 years, the practice of disclosing one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity has become more socially acceptable and encouraged. This cultural shift has been supported in large part by the annual National Coming Out Day—named for what the practice is commonly called—which has been celebrated on October 11 every year since 1988. It commemorates the second National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, and signifies the sense of empowerment coming out can have for individuals and communities that identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Questioning, and Ally (LGBTQ+) (Human Rights Campaign, 2017).

The duty to empower individuals and families is a core ethical tenet for those whose work focuses on child protection and welfare. Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that indeed coming out has the potential to improve an LGBTQ+ person's sense of self-efficacy and mental health (Birkhold, 2017; Rothman, Sullivan, Keyes, & Boehmer, 2012). That said, the body of evidence during this same three-decade period also suggests important risk factors for LGBTQ+ individuals that come out. Kosciw, Palmer, and Kull (2014) found that the results of coming out for LGBT secondary-school students were, at best, mixed. In their sample, which included more than 7,000

adolescents from across the United States, "outness" was related to higher victimization but also higher self-esteem and lower depression. As such, these researchers concluded that being out as an LGBT adolescent was a reflection of resilience in light of the higher risk of victimization. They noted that contextual factors (e.g., victimization was found to be higher for LGBT students in rural settings) influenced how their model operated among LGBT youth.

Professionals and clinicians with a responsibility for ensuring child welfare, therefore, must be well acquainted with these contextual factors that may influence the risks inherent in a child's decision to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity. One helpful way for professionals to work with students and themselves to sort out these difficulties is to facilitate the *Coming Out Stars* (n.d.) activity developed by Jeff Pierce at the University of Southern California. The activity can be done with groups of any size and takes about 20 minutes. The materials required include blue, purple, red, and orange paper stars and a pen or pencil for each participant.

During the activity, participants are asked to choose a colored star and label the star with key elements of their world: self, a close friend, a community to which they belong, a specific family member, an

aspirational job, and other hopes and dreams. Once the star is labeled, the participants stand silently in a circle and follow the facilitator's instructions. The facilitator reads a series of instructions related to the contextual factors included on the individual stars. These instructions include a wide range of responses from hypothetical coming out events the person has within their chosen contexts from accepting to shaming. At the end of the activity's narrative, the facilitator opens the floor for the group to discuss their experience with each other. Coming Out Stars has great potential for helping LGBTQ+ persons sort through the critical factors or making a disclosure that has both the potential for high risk and high reward.

Though coming out is not a panacea for LGBTQ+ empowerment, American culture is far more accepting in 2018 than it was in 1988. Polls suggest that almost three-quarters of Americans believe same-sex relationships should be legal (Gallup, 2017), and same-sex marriage has been legal in all 50 states since 2015. Furthermore, Virginia has made its own strides toward combatting homonegativity. For example, in 2014 then-Attorney General Mark Herring declined to defend the Commonwealth's marriage laws that prohibited same-gender unions. In November of 2017, Danica Roem was elected as the first openly transgender representative

COMING OUT...

to the Commonwealth's House of Delegates. Because the culture has become more accepting, some have begun to advocate for LGBTQ+ folks not to come out. This is not to suggest that anyone should be closeted, but instead empowered by acceptance of non-heterosexuality and gender non-conformity as part of everyday human life. In his opinion piece for the Washington Post published on October 10, 2017—the day before the most recent National Coming Out Day—Matthew H. Birkhold makes this very argument. “ ‘Coming out’ implicitly announces—to LGBTQ individuals, allies, and enemies—that gay people are aberrant,” wrote Birkhold, an openly gay professor at Ohio State University. He continued:

Our homosexuality is so different that we must proclaim it; heterosexuality, however, is normal and expected. ... (T)he more Coming Out [author's capitalization] is celebrated, the more it reinforces a normative ideal that is harmful to gay people. In the process of trying to make ourselves safe and visible, we are marginalizing ourselves. This will end either when all people are expected to 'come out' or when no one is expected to do so.

May these powerful words resonate with those whose professional and clinical focus is the welfare of children. Many options are available to LGBTQ+ individuals, their families, and the professionals who care for them. Whether the question is to come out or to not come out, empowerment is the answer.

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Charles F. Shepard is a licensed professional counselor (LPC) and National Certified Counselor (NCC) in private practice and a student in the Ph.D. in Counseling and Supervision program at James Madison University (JMU).

Do you want to learn more about coming out?
See this wonderful handout and activity from
The Safe Zone Project:

<http://thesafezoneproject.com/activity/demystifying-coming-out-do-and-dont/>

The Safe Zone Project is an outstanding resource for training, awareness, research, and facilitation of all sorts of issues that can help you become a stronger ally for LGBTQ youth. Visit it today!



CYBERBULLYING IN LGBT YOUTH

What is...



L G B T ?



Lesbian: a woman attracted to women
Gay: a man attracted to men
Bisexual: someone who is attracted to their own and other genders
Transgender: someone who's gender identity doesn't line up with their sex assigned at birth



42%

of LGBT youth have experienced cyberbullying.



58%

say something bad is said to them or about them online.



35%

have received threats online.



33%

report sexual harassment online.



20%

report receiving harassing text messages from other students.

THE RISKS



2x

more likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol to cope with bias and stress.



2.5x

more likely to inflict self-injury.



2x

more likely to attempt suicide.

8x

more likely to attempt suicide if the family of the LGBT youth rejects them.

The Impact of Social Media on LGBTQ Youth

Angela Pezzella, MA, EdS

The introduction of the internet has vastly changed the way youth interact, socialize, and relate to one another. In the past 10 years, technology has continued to advance and its widespread use extends even to children and adolescents. The introduction of smartphones and social media now brings with it a unique set of opportunities and challenges faced by youth today. While the technologies and advances are still relatively new, understanding their impact is still in its early stages; moreover, its specific impact on LGBTQ youth is even more lacking. It is important for parents, schools, professionals, and peers to be aware of both the unique challenges and opportunities the introduction of social media brings to today's LGBTQ youth.

While the internet and social media provide many benefits, they also open the door for harassment, bullying, and security and privacy issues. Specifically, constant access to the internet at our fingertips has opened the door for a new form of bullying among youth, commonly known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as, "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 207). The most common forms of cyberbullying LGBTQ youth face include: discrimination, screenshotting, sexting, and internet predators (Netsanity, 2017). Research has shown that cyberbullying has adverse physical and mental health consequences for youth (Abreu & Kenny, 2017). While most studies have focused on heterosexual and cisgender individuals, LGBTQ youth are two to three times more likely to have been targets of cyberbullying than non-LGBTQ youth (CDC, 2017; GLSEN, 2013). Furthermore, within LGBTQ youth, transgender youth, "other" genders, and cisgender sexual minority females reported higher levels of online and text-based bullying than cisgender male sexual minority youth (GLSEN et al., 2013).

Cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying in that it can occur anywhere and at all times, making the victim feel more vulnerable and helpless. Perpetrators often feel less inhibited, increasing the frequency and severity of the bullying. Moreover, information on social media has a wide reach, increasing visibility and therefore shame and other negative consequences. Research shows that exposure to cyberbullying has severe consequences for young peoples' physical and mental health, including academic problems, depression, low self-esteem, substance abuse, and suicide (Abreu & Kenny, 2017). Even witnessing others being victimized can negatively impact LGBTQ youth's identity and wellbeing.

Source: <https://netsanity.net/cyberbullying-lgbt-youth/>

LGBTQ youth, who are often already experiencing traditional bullying, lack support from their peers, parents, schools and community, and often do not report cyberbullying. Current cyberbullying interventions do not always target LGBTQ youth in their efforts. Schools must work collaboratively with parents, LGBTQ students, and communities to create policies to protect its students. Parents are encouraged to openly talk with their children about the risks of social media, help manage screen time, block dangerous hook-up/meet-up apps made for adults, as well as provide supportive responses if their child reports cyberbullying.

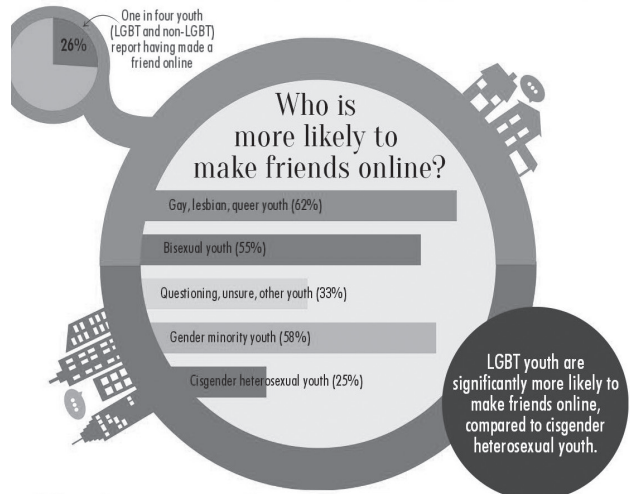
Comprehensive school policies that create awareness of LGBTQ-specific cyberbullying is recommended to begin combatting cyberbullying (Abreu & Kenny, 2017). The CDC provides online resources for youth, allies, parents, families, and schools to create positive and supportive environments: <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm>. Supportive and understanding communities are essential to assist youth in recovering from this traumatic form of bullying and decrease its academic, physical, and psychological effects.

While social media has opened the door for further experiences of bullying and victimization, it has also provided LGBTQ youth with information, resources, and connections not previously available a decade ago. As Dr. Eliza Byard, GLSEN's Executive Director stated: "The Internet impacts almost all aspects of our lives, but is particularly entrenched in the lives of youth, who are the most connected people online in our society. LGBTQ youth continue to face extraordinary obstacles in their day-to-day lives whether at school or online, but the Internet can be a valuable source of information and support when they have no one or nowhere else left to turn to. As social media evolve, so must our efforts to serve LGBTQ youth to ensure their safety, health and well-being" (GLSEN, 2013).

Social media can provide connection to online communities and groups to provide individuals with support, understanding, and a space to explore their sexual/gender identity, as well as larger advocacy efforts and health information. A study by Jenzen and Karl (2015) found that 78% percent of LGBTQ youth, as opposed to 19% of heterosexual youth, were dependent on online resources for pertinent sexual health information. Additionally, social media can be a break from the isolation, loneliness and rejection often experienced with youth developing gender/sexual identity and navigating everyday struggles. In a study by Lucero (2017), virtual communities were found to provide safe alternative spaces for LGBTQ youth to communicate and express themselves with an invisible audience, free from physical harm.

Online Social Support ••• for LGBTQ Teens

In today's digital age, meeting friends online is becoming more and more common. To understand how online friendships may benefit lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) teens, we looked at data collected online from 5,542 youth, aged 13 to 18 years in 2010-2011.



What do we mean when we say...

Sexual identity?

We're referring to a person's sexual and emotional attraction to other people, who can be of the same and/or opposite sex
Examples: gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual

Gender identity?

We're referring to a person's deeply felt identification to a gender, which may or may not be the same as the sex assigned at birth
Cisgender: A person's gender identity is the same as the sex assigned at birth

Gender minority?

An umbrella term for gender identities that are not the same as the sex assigned at birth
Examples: transgender, gender non-conforming

Quality of online friendships

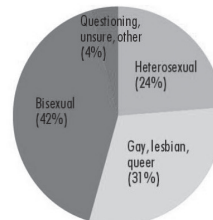
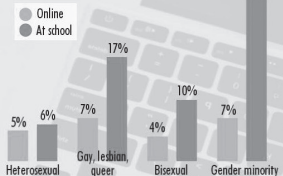


About 2 in 5 sexual minority youth say their online friends are less judgmental than friends made in person.

Sexual minority youth are more likely than heterosexual youth to say their online friends are better at understanding them and better at listening to problems than friends met in-person

Feeling unsafe

Across sexual and gender identities, some youth report feeling unsafe online and at school. Nonetheless, LGBTQ youth are more likely than non-LGBT youth to feel unsafe at school.



Getting bullied online

Of youth who experience getting bullied online, almost 1 in 3 are gay, lesbian, or queer. Two-fifths of youth bullied online are bisexual youth.

••• conclusions

The Internet is an important source of non-judgmental support for LGBTQ youth. At the same time, LGBTQ youth face greater risk of being bullied online than non-LGBT youth. In-person friendships are important for both LGBT and non-LGBT youth and may help reduce the likelihood of peer victimization.



Source: Thoma, M.L., Mitchell, K.J., Palmer, N.A., & Rainey, S.L. (2011). Online social support as a buffer against online and offline peer and sexual violence among U.S. LGBT and non-LGBT youth. Child Abuse & Neglect.

Questions? Let us know at innovativepublichealth@gmail.com
To learn more about this study, visit innovativepublichealth.org

Online Safe Spaces for LGBT Youth (According to LGBT Youth)

Angela Pezzella, MA, EdS



Thanks to research conducted by Fabian (2017), we have an idea of safe spaces for LGBT youth based on the online experience of LGBT youth themselves. In addition to online resources and organizations such as the *Trevor Project*, *It Gets Better*, *Born This Way*, and many more, LGBT youth have cited these five sites as the safest spaces to hang out and connect online:

1. **Tumblr:** Tumblr contains blogs that are LGBT-positive and contains positive advice for youth, by searching “LGBTQ” in the tags. Most LGBTQ publications and organizations also have Tumblr pages, such as the *The Advocate*, *Autostraddle*, *GLAAD*, *GLSEN*, and the *Trevor Project*.
2. **Private LGBTQ Facebook Groups:** As part of *Gay Straight Alliance* school chapters, *GLSEN* local chapters, or LGBT centers, private Facebook groups provide amazing spaces for young LGBT people to connect and develop.
3. **Wattpad:** A social publishing platform where users share written stories and fanfiction. With its own LGBT community page, it allows LGBT people to connect and see accurate representations through writing.
4. **7 Cups LGBT Forum:** 7 Cups has a one-on-one listener service to connect users anonymously with trained support when they need to talk. Users can also access the 24-hour chat room designated for LGBT teens
5. **TrevorSpace:** The *Trevor Project* is known for their efforts to prevent LGBT suicide. They maintain *TrevorSpace*, a social networking site exclusively for LGBT youth and their friends between the ages of 13–24. All accounts must be approved and the site is moderated by trained *Trevor Project* staff to ensure users adhere to the community guidelines that keep the site safe.

Social media can also serve as a way to gain understanding and acceptance from other LGBT youth like themselves and be part of a larger LGBT community. While social media, chat rooms, and online resources can be an important place for LGBT youth to explore themselves and connect with others, it is important for parents to encourage face to face connections and support as well. Individuals should have safe havens and support in the real world to help complement and bridge the gap from their online explorations and support.

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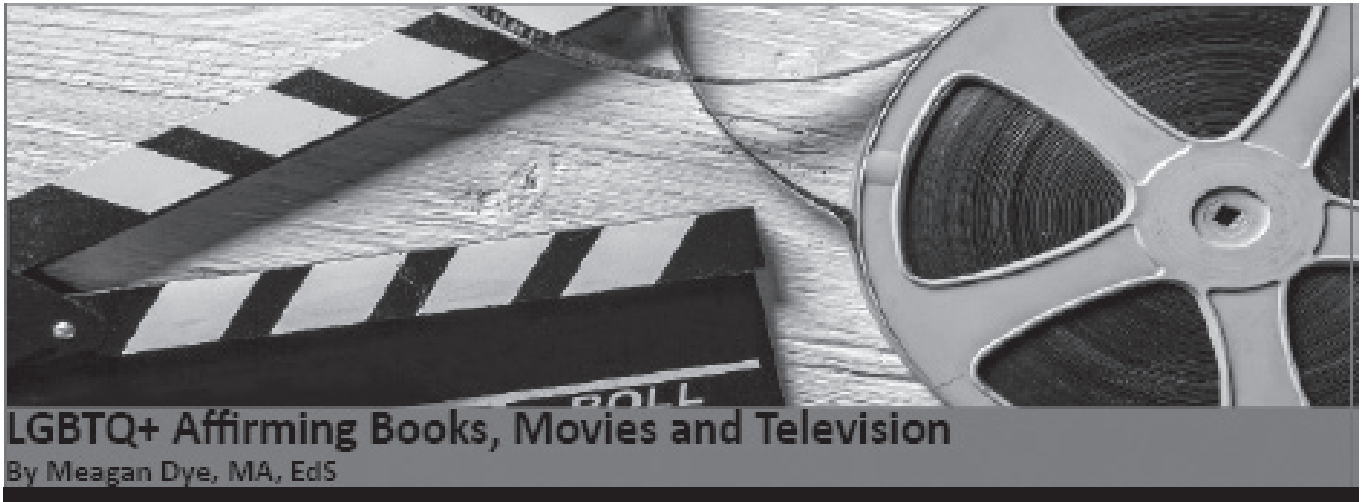
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LGBTQ+ Affirming Books, Movies and Television

By Meagan Dye, MA, EdS

For those who work with, live with, or love an LGBTQ+ and/or gender diverse young person, pointing them toward affirming books, movies or shows can be a powerful signal of support that could open up a conversation about gender identity and sexual orientation. Having books and media available in your home or office may give a child or adolescent an opportunity to see themselves represented in a story and demonstrate to them that you are a safe and welcoming presence. When LGBTQ+ children and adolescents see themselves reflected in a story or the world around them, it can be a valuable part of helping them feel open to exploring their identity (Batchelor, Ramos, & Neiswander, 2018; Brand & Maasch, 2017). Inclusive and affirming books, movies and shows are not only significant for LGBTQ+ young people, but more representation and exposure to LGBTQ+ characters can benefit all youth and help create more welcoming spaces and potentially decrease bullying (Batchelor, Ramos, & Neiswander, 2018). Below are a few recent shows, books, and movies that have inclusive characters or plots. Be aware that they are not representative of all gender identities or sexual or romantic orientations.

GLAAD Media Award nominee for Outstanding Kids and Family Programming, *Danger and Eggs*, is a show geared to children ages 6-11 that follows the story of a young girl and her best friend, a giant egg, as they have adventures. The show was written by, and has a variety of cast members and contributors who are part of, the LGBTQ+ community (Bendix, 2017). The show is not focused solely on LGBTQ+ themes, but easily incorporates trans youth and other LGBTQ+ characters (Bendix, 2017). An episode called "Chosen Family" follows the show's lead character, D. D. Danger, and her best friend, Phillip the egg, as they attend a Pride Parade. Check out the first season on Amazon.

Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda by Becky Albertalli is a young adult novel that was released in 2015 and was the inspiration for the new romantic comedy *Love, Simon*. The novel and the film follow the life of

Simon who is a gay and closeted high school student. Under a pseudonym, he begins an online correspondence with another gay teen whom he knows only as "Blue." The two become close, and Simon reveals to "Blue" that he is gay. Simon then navigates sharing his identity with friends and family, finding out who in his high school "Blue" is, and possibly being outed prematurely by another student. The movie and the novel explore a developing connection between two queer characters without the heartbreak of similar mainstream depictions of LGBTQ+ romance.

The 2015 Stonewall Book Award winner, *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*, written by Christine Baldacchino and illustrated by Isabelle Malenfant, tells the story of a boy who likes to wear a tangerine dress at school. When his peers pick on him, Morris uses his imagination and creativity to create a world that he delights in, and even invites a few of his classmates to come along on his adventures. This book encourages conversation about gender diversity, gender identity, and gender roles.

To find additional resources, visit the following:

HRC Foundation's Welcoming Schools Resource section (<http://www.welcomingschools.org/>)

Rainbow Books a collaboration Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table (GLBTRT) and the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of the American Library Association (ALA) (<http://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/>)

The Stonewall Book Awards <http://www.ala.org/rt/glbtrt/award/stonewall/honored>

The GLAAD Media Awards includes nominees for Outstanding Kids and Family Programming <https://www.glaad.org/mediaawards/nominees>



Finding community and peer support is a significant aspect of LGBTQ+ youth's well-being (Higa et al., 2012). Connecting LGBTQ+ young people to organizations that will allow them to meet other LGBTQ+ youth, interact with adults who are available and affirming, and be in a place they feel safe to be themselves can assist them in developing a positive self-image (Higa et al., 2012). In the Commonwealth of Virginia, Side by Side (formerly ROSMY) has been that organization, providing support and services to LGBTQ+ youth and their families for over 25 years. Their mission: "creating supportive communities where Virginia's LGBTQ+ youth can define themselves, belong, and flourish."

Ted Lewis, Executive Director of Side by Side, took time to speak with VCPN about some of the services offered to youth, families, and the community including support groups, issues related to foster care, and state-wide facilitations and trainings.

An essential feature of supporting LGBTQ+ children, teens, and young adults is the creation of community and this is the cornerstone of Side by Side's work. Lewis emphasizes the importance of knowing that children can become mindful of their sexual orientation and gender identity at a very young age. Lewis went on to say that gender diverse youth can be aware of their gender as early as three or four years old and children become aware of feelings of sexual attraction between 10-11 years old and sometimes earlier. Side by Side offers support groups to LGBTQ+ individuals ages 14-20 in their Richmond office and Charlottesville sites. A third site includes a partnership with Petersburg High School. Participants also have an opportunity to engage in leadership training and collaborate with the staff to create and expand Side-by-Side's programming.

Side by Side also offers mental health counseling ser-

vices with professional therapists on staff that specialize in working with LGBTQ+ youth. Lewis said this makes their agency unique in that, in addition to peer and family support, they can also offer six free counseling sessions as an option to those who attend the support group and want additional support. In some cases, Side by Side can provide additional meetings beyond the six sessions or they will refer those who need longer-term care out to other community providers who also work with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

We also discussed trainings offered by Side by Side at no cost to organizations that work directly with young people. Side by Side has worked with a variety of youth-oriented sites across the commonwealth including group homes and schools. The organization will accommodate requests for training that require lengthy travel but because they are a not-for-profit agency, they ask that organizations hosting them cover their travel expense. Lewis also encourages those who request training to reach out to agencies and organizations in their area to schedule multiple trainings in one visit. Lewis said that Side by Side also offers low cost LGBTQ Competency trainings that have been given to a variety of community agencies including assisted living facilities and most recently the Richmond Police Department.

When working with families who wish to foster children and adolescents, Lewis highlights the importance of providing training to potential foster families related to working with LGBTQ+ populations and directly asking potential families how they feel about welcoming LGBTQ+ youth into their family. Research supports that LGBTQ+ kids and adolescents are more likely to experience violence or run away from their foster homes.

You've probably heard there is a heated debate surrounding the practice of conversion therapy. Now be fully informed! Click on the link below for an outstanding resource from Side by Side so you too can understand why so many mental health associations as well as state and local governments are banning this form of "therapy":

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57922309e58c628849784690/t/58823a163a0411bdddcb9e01/1484929559850/Understanding+the+Dangers+of+Conversion+Therapy.pdf>



Understanding the Dangers of Conversion Therapy: Three Reasons to Say NO

Side by Side (continued)

Side by Side is actively working on ways to create safe housing for those LGBTQ+ youth in Richmond who are impacted by homelessness or have been part of the foster care system. The project is a collaboration with three other organizations: Virginia Anti-Violence Project, the Nationz Foundation, and Advocates for Richmond Youth with the aim of developing a safe housing host program and LGBTQ+ affirming training for foster care agencies. LGBTQ+ youth who have been impacted by issues of housing and immigration status will also be providing input and feedback throughout the process. The project is in its first steps so be sure to look out for more updates as the work progresses.

If you know an LGBTQ+ youth, family or organization that could benefit from the work of Side-by-Side, be sure to check out their website for more details:

www.sidebysideva.com

Current Side by Side support group offerings:

Richmond:

LGBTQ+ support group for youth ages 14-20

Middle school support group for LGBTQ+ youth ages 11-14

Transgender support group (ages 14-20)

LGBTQ+ youth of color support group for ages 14-20

Charlottesville:

LGBTQ+ support group for youth ages 14-20

Middle school support group for LGBTQ+ youth ages 11-14

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What's in your Toolkit? The Importance of Continuing Education for Helping Professionals in the Effective Treatment of LGBTQ+ Youth

Cierra R. Davis, LPC

How familiar are you with the concerns of children who identify as LGBTQ+ How effective do you feel about your ability to listen empathically while providing helpful support to children? When was the last time you attended a training on effective counseling or support for LGBTQ+ youth? Whether you are a counselor, social worker, teacher, principal, or general helping professional, it is important to remain current with the latest research, to involve yourself in training opportunities both in person and online, and engaging in supervision and consultation.

Professional Cultural Competency Research

Many providers lack adequate training on how to support children “who feel like their inner sense of being male or female does not match their physical body” (Ryan, 2009, p. 2). Included with this knowledge is understanding most current terms used by people to identify themselves. Evidence suggests that many counselors lack the appropriate knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues as well as the appropriate intervention strategies to help them (Graham et.al, 2012; Kull, Kosciw & Greytk, 2016; Sawyer et al., 2006).

So...where do you begin?

Workshop Attendance

Research shows that workshop attendance, in any form, yields higher competency knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues (Graham, Carney, & Kluck, 2012). Although participants reported attendance at conferences as the most frequently reported training activity, attendance at conferences was not found to have the same benefits as attendance at workshops and training sessions which were associated with increased competency.

Contact with LGBTQ+ clients

Research shows that the more contact helping professionals have with LGBTQ+ clients, the more competent they are with regard to helping skills, empathy, and awareness (Graham, Carney & Kluck, 2012). Consequently, the strongest recommendation is for helping professionals to gain more experience working with LGBTQ+ identified clients to strengthen their skill set and competency in this area.

Know your Resources

Identify community and online resources for LGBTQ+ youth, families and caregivers who teach parents and caregivers how to help their LGBTQ+ children; Connect youth with LGBTQ+ community resources and programs.

See the full online version of this article along with references, a glossary of helpful terms, and a discussion of the research guiding helping professionals in their development of cultural competence, empathy, and professional advocacy skills!

Programs promoting Allyship in Virginia Public Schools and Communities

By Tiffanie Sutherland, MA, NCC

Currently in the United States LGBT youth represent 7% of the total youth population. In a survey conducted by Teens, Health, and Technology in 2014, it was found that 81% percent of youth who identify as transgender and 72% of lesbian students are sexually harassed in school. Additionally, they found that 66% of youth who identify as gay or bisexual reported experiencing sexual harassment from their peers. Bullying can be defined as an unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Examples of this power imbalance can be seen through three different types of bullying: verbal, social, or physical bullying. LGBT youth report experiencing an unsafe school environment results in trouble in class, lower grades, absences or dropping out of school. The mental well-being of LGBT youth is also affected by substance use, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. Researchers have found that LGBT youth are two to three times more likely to experience bullying from peers, which doubles the likelihood of LGBT youth attempting to take their own life.

Public schools are making an effort to promote inclusivity by

promoting allyship and providing programs for LGBT students as a source of support. Allyship can be understood as an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group (The Anti-Oppression Network). Virginia public schools and communities are taking an active role in promoting allyship by creating programs to promote inclusivity and safe spaces for LGBT youth. Below are programs that promote allyship in both Virginia public schools and communities.

Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs)

Gay Straight Alliances are clubs that look to provide a safe place for LGBTQ youth and foster understanding in non-LGBTQ peers. GSAs seek to empower LGBTQ youth to succeed and thrive in the face of bullying and be an agent of change. GSAs are currently present in 103 schools in Virginia.

The Virginia Anti-Violence Project (VAVP)

The Virginia Anti-Violence Project works to address and end violence with a specific focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities across Virginia.

Side by Side

Side by Side is dedicated to creating supportive communities where Virginia's LGBTQ+ youth can define themselves, belong, and flourish. Side by Side has several outreach initiatives which include youth leadership trainings, support groups, counseling services, and scholarships.

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project offers accredited life-saving, life-affirming programs and services to LGBTQ youth that creates safe, accepting and inclusive environments over the phone, online and through text.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

Parent and Friends of Lesbians and Gays envisions a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. PFLAG has 8 chapters in Virginia that are committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy.

For more information on resources and programs available in Virginia please visit www.equalityvirginia.org.





POSITIVE PARENTING FOR LGBT YOUTH

MATT BUKOWSKI, MA, LPC RESIDENT

Parenting has always been one of the most challenging and developmentally rich tasks of adulthood. The stressors of modern life, including social media exposure, economic pressure, and increasingly busy schedules, all pose novel challenges. Parents must balance responsibility for their own lives with responsibility for others, and learn to meet their own needs while meeting the needs of their children. For some parents, having a child who identifies as LGBTQ requires little to no adjustment, and is a naturally affirming and growth-promoting experience for both parent and child. For others, however, having an LGBTQ child can induce a wider range of emotions including shock, shame, confusion and concern. For foster parents, raising an LGBTQ youth may add another layer of complexity to an already challenging parenting situation. This article presents a case example of parents who were positively transformed by their experience with LGBTQ youth, along with selected research on supportive parenting practices.

Case example

The inspiration for this article came from an early clinical experience where, over the course of two years, I watched a pair of loving and committed parents overcome their misconceptions about sexual orientation, and transform the life of their gay adopted son. When I started working on this case, the child (known here as Gary) was fourteen, had openly identified as gay since age five, and felt rejected by his conservative Christian adoptive parents. Gary also suffered with numerous mental health and developmental problems stemming from a complex history of abuse. After returning home from a residential placement, Gary was constantly at odds with his parents, who had both denied and actively sought to change his sexual orientation for years. Unfortunately, Gary's parents were affected by common misconceptions that his sexual orientation was the result of

abuse, a way to get attention, or at best simply a choice.

Parenting as a growth opportunity

Gary's story illustrates many of the issues that often face LGBTQ youth, and the powerful role parents can play in fostering resilience. Craig-Oldsen, Craig and Morton (2006) identified abuse by peers, mental health concerns, oversexualization of identity, targeting by people in authority, and sexual targeting by predatory adults as developmental risks for LGBTQ youth. Gary experienced each of these adverse conditions in response to his sexual orientation, but once his parents became allies they were able to mitigate these risk factors and help him move safely through adolescence. Other researchers have noted that LGBTQ youth with supportive parents have lower rates of depression, higher self-esteem, and more positive developmental outcomes. Furthermore, simply being supportive from a distance is not enough, youth with the best outcomes benefitted from parents who actually shared their journey and were actively involved in creating a wider supportive community for their children (Mehus, Watson, Eisenberg, Corliss & Porta, 2017).

Although parents of LGBTQ youth may face unique challenges, they may also have access to unique benefits. One qualitative study interviewed 142 parents of LGBTQ youth and identified five categories of positive experience (Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom & Riggle, 2013). The first and most prominent positive experience was personal growth. Participants reported becoming more open minded, adopting new perspectives, awareness of discrimination, and deepening compassion as distinct areas in which they grew personally from their parenting experience. Other benefits included positive emotions, activism, social connection, and close family relationships. The idea behind many participants' experience was that adjusting to their child's orienta-

tion forced them to have a deeper, more intentional relationship with their child, to communicate better, and to be more involved in their life.

Gary's experience as an LGBTQ youth was further complicated by the fact that he was adopted by conservative Christian parents who initially objected to his sexual orientation on doctrinal grounds. Although their faith was at first a barrier to connection, Gary's parents found ways to reconcile their spirituality with their desire for a healthy relationship with their child. In doing so they created an environment where Gary could benefit from his parents' strongly held values without feeling the pain of rejection for being who he is. In the end Gary grew to share his parents' faith, attend church services with them, and uphold many of their values. Gary's experience is echoed by research on outcomes for LGBTQ youth being raised in a Christian religious context. In addition to some negative experiences, researchers found that LGBTQ youth raised in Christian households reported a stronger sense of self, acceptance of others, incorporation of religious values into their lives, as well as increased social support (Dahl & Galliher, 2012).

Parents alone may not be able to change the world into an affirming, positive place for LGBTQ youth, but research has demonstrated that parental attitudes and participation can make a critical difference in their lives. As Gary's case illustrates, family connection, unconditional love, and meaningful activism can all grow out of despair, condemnation, and confusion. Regardless of where parents begin their journey of understanding, armed with accurate information and appropriate support, any parent can become a positive force in their child's life.

(References in the electronic version)



Department of Graduate Psychology
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Debbie C. Sturm PhD, LPC
Department of Graduate Psychology
MSC 7401, Johnston Hall
James Madison University
Harrisonburg VA 22807
Email: sturmdc@jmu.edu