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# Eliminating the fear factor : fostering an environment of equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in schools

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## Recommended Citation

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# Eliminating the fear factor : fostering an environment of equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in schools

## **Abstract**

The United States of America has been listed as one of the most violent places in the world to live. For gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals, the dangers of violence are even greater and are perpetuated by fear and ignorance. GLBT individuals are victims of oppression in the forms of torture, rejection, stigma, social pressure, isolation, and murder. In an attempt to understand why this oppression takes place, this paper will examine the nature of the oppression and how society is responsible for the continuation of it. With understanding, maybe fear can be eliminated and an environment of equality can be established.

ELIMINATING THE FEAR FACTOR: FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT OF  
EQUALITY FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER  
PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,  
and Postsecondary Education  
University of Northern Iowa

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education

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by

Lana L. Hollar

May 2005

This Research Paper by: Lana Hollar

Entitled: ELIMINATING THE FEAR FACTOR: FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT OF EQUALITY FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS

Has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

3-7-05

Date Approved

Adviser/Director of Research Paper

3/8/05

Date Received

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## Abstract

The United States of America has been listed as one of the most violent places in the world to live. For gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals, the dangers of violence are even greater and are perpetuated by fear and ignorance. GLBT individuals are victims of oppression in the forms of torture, rejection, stigma, social pressure, isolation, and murder. In an attempt to understand why this oppression takes place, this paper will examine the nature of the oppression and how society is responsible for the continuation of it. With understanding, maybe fear can be eliminated and an environment of equality can be established.

Sexual orientation refers to a person's sexual and romantic attraction to people of the same gender (homosexual orientation), another gender (heterosexual orientation), or both genders (bisexual orientation) (Amnesty International, 2001; Bohan, as cited in Palma & Stanley, 2002). Gender identity refers to a person's experience of self-expression in relation to social constructions of masculinity or femininity (gender). A person may have a male or female gender identity with the physiological characteristics of the opposite sex (Amnesty International, 2001). Transgender identity refers to a compelling sense that one's gender identity is not in conformity with the physiological characteristics of the sex one is born with (Campos, 2002). This may lead some to seek a change of their physical sexual organs, usually involving hormones or surgery, to bring their physical characteristics into conformity with their gender identity (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG], 2002).

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals come from all areas of urban, suburban, and rural communities. They exist in all shapes, sizes, and skin tones (Campos, 2002). Ginsberg (as cited in Campos, 2002) estimated that approximately 2,610,000 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth exist in the United States. Ponton (2003) noted there are more than two million school-age lesbian and gay Americans. In regard to transgender individuals, approximately 3% of the general population has significant feelings of discomfort about their gender, cross dress, or are transsexual. These feelings begin anytime between age

three and puberty. The majority of the young people experiencing transgender feelings are indistinguishable from other youth in their dress or manner (Support Services for Sexual Minority Youth, as cited in Otto, 2002).

The defining terms that are used to describe sexual tendencies vary from culture to culture. The socially constructed generic terms gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) will be used for ease of reading. These terms are widely recognized within the United States of America but in no way do justice to the diversity of terms or breadth of differences within the people that these terms attempt to classify. It is not the author's intent to minimize the diversity of people that identify themselves with these groups or prefer other terminology (Amnesty International, 2001). Adolescence is a transitional time from childhood to adulthood (Morrow, 2004). According to Nichols (1999), although many youth make the transition through these formative years with healthy social, physical, and mental development, this is not true for many GLBT students. These students are at high risk for violence.

GLBT students regularly encounter hostile attitudes of peers and faculty (Peters, 2003). Morrow (2004) identified a number of risks that GLBT youth encounter that lead to feelings of depression, substance abuse, lowered school performance, and internalized homophobia. There is a high rate of truancy, dropping out of school, and suicide among GLBT youth (Nichols, 1999).

This manuscript provides a review of the literature that identifies relevant issues pertaining to GLBT individuals and the societal structure that they function within. This sets forth a framework for fostering an environment of equality for GLBT students within the school setting. Evidence suggests students are treated with hostility, intolerance, and are at high risk for violence due to their sexual orientation. The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness and identify what can be done in schools to reduce the fear factor.

### What GLBT Youth Endure

Historically, GLBT individuals have repeatedly been victims of ongoing ostracism, violence, rejection, and torture (Campos, 2002). Culturally, they do not adhere to the socially sanctioned construct of heterosexism (Morrow, 2004). Because of this, members of society have treated them in inhumane ways, such as torment, isolation, rejection, stigma, and social pressure (Herek, 1998).

#### *Torment*

“Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are prohibited under international human rights law” (Amnesty International, 2001, p. 3). Maintaining the social order of rules and laws is important in many areas of the world. Because of this, gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people are tortured or ill-treated because their sexual identity is seen as a threat to the social order (Lipkin, 1999). In many parts of the world, homosexuality is considered a betrayal of one’s culture, unnatural, or abnormal. Until 1972, The American



Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality as a sickness and psychiatric illness (Campos, 2002). The “repression that LGBT individuals face is often openly and passionately defended in the name of culture, religion, morality or public health, and facilitated by specific legal provisions” (Amnesty International, 2001, p. 4).

There are often severe societal penalties for not conforming to socially approved dating practices as well as adhering to gender expression norms. Society uses name calling, ostracism, taunting, and even violence as means of getting GLBT individuals to conform to a heterocentric social environment (Morrow, 2004). For many GLBT individuals, the most frequent experience of violence will be in their homes, schools, places or work, or on the street (Amnesty International, 2001). The violence from these environments can contribute to isolation of the GLBT individual.

### *Isolation*

Adolescents typically turn to social supports such as family, neighborhoods, and faith communities to help them develop a sense of identity (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2001). Morrow (2004) noted that these same supports do not reflect the identity needs of GLBT youth. GLBT teens typically enter youth with no groundwork for the social identity that comes with being a sexual “minority” individual (p. 92). Often times, GLBT-negative jokes, language, and actions are a daily part of their societal environment (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender [GLBT] Youth in Iowa Schools Task Force, 2003). As a result,

GLBT adolescents are often isolated from their family, peers, adult role models, and other social supports. This isolation can lead to limited social skill development, substance abuse, low self-esteem, and depression (Morrow, 2004).

Further isolation occurs when GLBT individuals are harassed or are witnesses to assaults on others. When community and school leaders ignore their membership in the social environment, GLBT youth do not feel as if they belong, which perpetuates their isolation. As a result, they frequently drop out of school (Lipkin, 1999). Hetrick and Martin (as cited in Lipkin, 1999) identified GLBT individuals' isolation as threefold: social, emotional, and cognitive. This isolation is sometimes a bi-product of rejection.

### *Rejection*

According to Lipkin (1999), when there is a threat to the adolescent's membership in the primary group, homosexual identity often brings forth crisis and fear of rejection. School is one of the primary developmental periods of most adolescents' lives. For most of the formative years, it is the central location for practicing socialization, life skills, and development of students' identities (Morrow, 2004). For GLBT students, school is often an unsafe place that is laden with harassment and discrimination (GLBT Youth in Iowa Schools Task Force, 2003).

Rejection is further perpetuated when GLBT individuals are stereotyped. Stereotyping is a form of dehumanization that classifies an entire group by the

actions of a few. The lingering effect of this dehumanization is that heterosexual males feel justified and self-righteous in attacking them on the streets and corridors of the schools. Name-calling has the same effect (Pharr, 2002). Results from the 2001 National School Climate Survey (as cited in GLBT Youth in Iowa Schools Task Force, 2003) reported over eighty percent of GLBT students have reported verbal harassment due to their sexual orientation. Further, the 1999 National School Climate Survey by GLSEN (as cited in GLBT Youth in Iowa Schools Task Force, 2003) reported twenty-six homophobic remarks were heard each day by an average high school student and that ninety-seven percent of the time there was no response by the teacher. Feelings of rejection are further perpetuated by the attachment of stigma.

### *Stigma*

The stigmatization of GLBT individuals is attached to family construction, gender, concept of individuality, intimacy and public display of affection, fear and aggression, status, public policy, reproductive demands and expectations, natural order, medical care, maturity and development, “and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body” (Warner, as cited in Pardie & Luchetta, 1999, p. 57).

Stigma is attached to social out-groups. Pharr (2002) suggested that people that fall outside of the norm, or the social out-group, are seen as deviant, abnormal, marginalized, inferior, not “right”, even if they belong to a group that comprises a majority of the population. Pardie and Luchetta (1999) noted that

stigmatization is a relational construct; the stigmatized people are recognized as deviating from the social standard and labeled. The label has a negative value within the context of the societal standard or norm. Additionally, the stigmatized people are perceived as somehow having brought the labeled condition upon themselves. This stigma and failure to meet the standards of the in-group can cause social pressures.

### *Social Pressure*

There are enormous social pressures for GLBT teens to adhere to heterosexual intimacy patterns. Since adolescence is the time that many teens develop intimate relationships, it is not uncommon for GLBT youth to cope with the pressures by participating in heterosexual behaviors. Some gay males father children and lesbian teens become pregnant while searching for social validation by passing as heterosexual (Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1994, as cited in Morrow, 2004). Other GLBT youth may internalize the negative attitudes and become sexually promiscuous. This puts them at greater risk for HIV, infection, and other sexually transmitted diseases (Herek, 1998)

### *Homophobia And Heterosexism*

Within the United States, cultural constructions of attitudes toward GLBT individuals are multifaceted and complex (Pardie & Luchetta, 1999). The heterosexual structure of society provides an environment of oppression for non-

heterosexual individuals resulting in fear or homophobia. These structures are achieved through economic factors, control, and internalization.

### *The Economic Factors*

Economic factors are often considered to underlie sexism and racism; that is, equal access to employment by women and minorities would mean fewer jobs and less money available for white men (Pardie & Luchetta, 1999). Economic power is maintained through racism and sexism to provide a large pool of unpaid or low-paid labor. When economic control is established by the wealthy few, others can be controlled through limiting mobility, employment options, and access to resources. The “myth of scarcity” blames the poor and “minority” (Pharr, 2002, p. 54) groups for using up too much of the limited resources, which helps oppressors, maintain economic power through the use of blame.

### *The Control Factors*

Control can be maintained by blaming the victim for their oppression. Stereotyping and negative messages work together to foster feelings of self-blame, lowered self-esteem, and a weakening of group pride. When the victim is inundated by blame and negative views, internalized oppression frequently takes place (Pharr, 2002). Homophobic name-calling is devastating to children experiencing homosexual feelings. Name-calling creates or reinforces hostile feelings towards the gay and lesbian population and forces all children to follow strict sex-role behaviors to avoid being tormented (Gordon, as cited in Otto,

2002). Morrow (2004) stated that internalization of homophobic and heterosexist messages begins very early in peoples lives, frequently before GLBT youth fully realize their gender identity and sexual orientation.

### *Internalization*

Internalized oppression, internalized homophobia, or internalized transphobia represent the state in which GLBT individuals internalize the negative messages perpetrated by society based on their sexual orientation (Morrow, 2004). It takes on the form of self-hatred and insufficient feelings of self-worth, manifesting itself in the form of self-destructive behaviors such as self-abuse, depression, or substance abuse (Herdt & Koff, 2000). It is no wonder that there is a high prevalence of suicides within these populations. GLBT teens are twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to attempt suicide (Otto, 2002). Lipkin (1999) warned that suicide risk is high for GLBT teens because they frequently suffer from abandonment by others, loss of previous identity, and repeated humiliations.

If individuals have learned self-hatred because of identification in a specific group, then the hatred can be acted out upon the group. This is called "horizontal hostility" ( Pharr, 2002, p. 61). Since it is less threatening to act out hostility toward other oppressed people rather than the oppressor, people sometimes continue to show respect toward those in power while destroying their own neighborhoods and disrespecting the same or other "minority" groups (Pharr, 2002, p.62). Blaming the oppressed for their state of existence through

internalized oppression and horizontal hostility are ways of controlling people and keeping them in their places.

### Interventions in the Educational Setting

GLBT individuals need school advocates willing to take a stand against the torment and hostility of words, gestures, and physical acts that others inflict upon them. Everyone must assume responsibility for changing the violent nature of society. Understanding what causes people to become violent provides insights to create safe places for them to live, work, and play (Corder & Brohl, 1999). Recognizing the common threads of all oppressions will increase awareness and move people to incite change. This work may include policy development and enforcement, teacher and student training, availability of library resources, and curriculum development (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG], 2001). Schools, teachers, counselors, and community can work together to foster an environment of equality for all students by utilizing educational opportunities.

### *Addressing Personal and Professional Biases*

Personal and professional biases are a risk to helping professionals. When working with GLBT individuals, their families, school, or community members, helping professionals would be well served to examine their biases. Cultural conditioning founded on the dominant worldview is powerful. Heterosexuality, economic roles, and social values have become firmly established as the natural

order. The majority of people who grow up in the United States develop a sense of self that is shaped by heterosexist views (Pardie & Luchetta, 1999). This heterosexual perspective could prove a barrier to counselors' effectiveness.

Additionally, other personal biases or hindrances may impact the counselor-client interaction. These may include reluctance to discuss the topic, lack of explicit policy or law, moral or religious beliefs, fear of being labeled gay themselves, or fear of controversy. Many counselors rely on professional journals, professional conferences, and mass media for their information on homosexuality and GLBT related issues (Lipkin, 1999). Counselors wishing to remedy cultural bias and constructs begin with self-examination of their "cultural blind spots" (Lee, as cited in Vernon, 2004. p. 153).

### *Educating Staff*

Teachers and staff may need to be provided with factual information in order to better serve the needs of GLBT students. Haddock and Zanna (as cited in Herek, 1998) revealed that attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are an outcome of multiple sources of information. Making significant changes in these attitudes would require more than mere modifications in the content of individuals' stereotypes. Negative attitudes toward GLBT individuals are impacted by perceived dissimilarity of values. Heightened awareness of value similarity could reduce the prevalence of antigay prejudice and discrimination. Students will, if they have not already done so, eventually work, study, live, or worship beside



openly gay and lesbian people (Lipkin, 1999). Staff in-service training provides an opportunity to contribute to the learning process of teachers and staff.

Harmful attitudes about GLBT individuals as a group are prejudices that are not grounded in personal experiences, but rather are based on stereotypes and prejudices (Campos, 2002). People who have the most positive attitudes toward GLBT individuals are those who say they know one or more gay, lesbian, or bisexual person well (American Psychological Association, 1998). To begin to remove barriers, school counselors must work with staff to provide them with accurate information in order to raise awareness of the needs of GLBT students.

Palma & Stanley (2002) noted that historically, schools have been at the front line of civil rights and social change for visible racial and ethnic groups. The American Psychological Association (1998) advised educating all people about sexual orientation and homosexuality. Szalacha (2003) suggested sensitivity workshops, speakers, and violence prevention strategies. By educating the educators, it is possible to reduce anti-gay prejudice and offer appropriate responses to expressions of sexual prejudice.

### *School and Community Resources*

Palma & Stanley (2002) identified the need for counselors to update the library holdings to reflect the diversity of the world. Providing accurate information about homosexuality is especially important to young people who are forming their own sexual identity whether homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual

(American Psychological Association, 1998). Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (2002) recognized that the library is the place that students go to when looking for accurate gender and sexuality information. For this reason, librarians and media specialists should be cognizant that their holdings are current and include themes that are relevant to the GLBT students' needs.

GLBT students often fear stigmatization, harassment, or harm. This leads to feelings of isolation and invisibility (Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones, Tabor, Beuhring, Sieving, Shew, Ireland, Bearing, & Udry, 1997). Israel and Selvidge (2003) identified that GLBT individuals are typically not raised in GLBT communities. With this in mind, counselors must increase knowledge of GLBT community resources and culture in order to help these students with identity issues. Resnick et al., (1997) suggested that counselors connect GLBT teens with positive adult role models in the school and community.

Students are bombarded by messages of sexuality through television, movies, magazines, and advertising (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2002). Ponton (2003) noted the first steps to dispelling myths and defining equality include answering questions that children have in an honest manner. This will break down barriers for prejudice. Talking about sexual orientation in a neutral or positive manner will help pass on values of respect and understanding. Silence on these issues may be misinterpreted, so it is important for people to "promote tolerance" (p.5). Teachers, counselors, and other school

staff have the opportunity to provide information in an honest way while modeling respect and understanding. The availability of adult role-models with honest information, combined with library resources will enable students to get accurate information to their questions.

### *Evaluate Policy*

“The most effective way for school districts to ensure that they fulfill their legal obligations and, at the same time, protect students from harassment and discrimination is to adopt and implement a policy that clearly prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity” (GLBT Youth in Iowa Schools Task Force, 2003, p. 28). Szalacha (2003) noted an increasing number of educational systems are adopting procedures and policies that ban harassment and discrimination against sexual minority students.

According to the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (2002) GLBT students and members of the school community should know that equality is valued and that discrimination is forbidden. This should be evident when reading the school policy involving sexual orientation and gender identity in the non-discrimination and harassment section. Peters (2003) noted that the school position on the safety of all students should be clear and proactive. This should include a statement that anti-gay harassment and violence will not be tolerated.

### *Families*

Counselors should recognize that family members often struggle with issues of loss, blame, insecurity, shock, pain, and denial (PFLAG, 1998).

Families frequently experience feelings that are linked to the losses of an image or of family expectations. This can be likened to the grieving process. Grief counseling techniques are found to be effective (Herdt & Koff, 2000).

Family members may want to talk to someone about their feelings and begin to work through them. It is important for family members to open lines of communication and support the GLBT individual with acceptance (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG, 1998]). Feelings of loss may be very profound for many families, since most are invested in supporting cultural ideals of being heterosexual. Families overcome their ambivalence through the ability to be honest with each other, to be uncomfortable, to respect differences, and to construct new meanings of love, adversity, sexuality, and family (Herdt & Koff, 2000).

According to Palma and Stanley (2002) some GLBT students may seek out the school counselor to assist with coming out to family and friends. The school counselor works collaboratively as a team with other school based personnel and outside agencies in order to provide direct services to families and students. This collaboration of services should be based upon individual and family needs for adjustment (Dougherty, 2000).

### Interventions for Students

Lipkin (1999) cautioned counselors not to assume that all homosexual individuals are in crisis. While many GLBT individuals struggle with violence, acceptance, and stigma, others have shown great resilience and adjustment to their socially problematic identities. Counselors should balance representations of GLBT adolescents with the joys and potential of their coming out, while being alert to their possible vulnerabilities.

#### *Creating an Inviting Environment*

If GLBT individuals do not feel comfortable, they may not seek out school counselors. In order to foster an environment that can be called a safe zone and invite disclosure, the following can be done: put up gay-positive posters, make support literature available, use inclusive language, use nongendered pronouns, do not assume heterosexuality, and assure confidentiality (GLSEN, 2002; Lipkin, 1999).

Additionally, helping professionals should be aware that due to the high risk for victimization, depression, substance abuse, and suicide, it is important to assess GLBT youth for safety when counseling them. Suicide assessment should be a part of a professional helper's work practice with GLBT youth. GLBT individuals who have previously had problems with substance abuse and depression, as well as those who have a history of past suicide risk, should be considered at particularly high risk (Morrow, 2004).

It is imperative that counselors and helping professionals respect the clients' level of outness and not push them to disclose information beyond their level of comfort and safety (GLBT Youth in Iowa Schools Task Force, 2003). The counselor can help GLBT individuals explore the costs and benefits of their disclosure to other people, such as friends, teachers, siblings, and parents. Client self-determination should be explored and respected with regard to disclosure decisions (Morrow, 2004). Counseling practices will not be effective when basic safety needs are not met first.

### *Curriculum*

Creating a safe environment for GLBT students requires work on a number of levels, including curriculum changes. In order for counselors to foster inclusiveness, they must convince schools to reach out to GLBT individuals and begin to break down stereotypes and prejudices. They must help others recognize that rejection, isolation, stigma, and social pressures increase risk factors, cause emotional distress and leave the door open to torture and violence (American Psychological Association, 1998). In order to combat the societal instruction of homophobic and transphobic stereotypes, schools need to begin to teach about homosexuality.

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (2002) suggested that schools integrate GLBT issues into curriculum through history, art, science, and English classes. This would be done in a way that demonstrates how the common

United States culture “emerged from a complex synthesis and interaction of diverse cultural elements that originated within the various cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious groups that make up the U.S. society” (Banks as cited in Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, pg. 279). Ormrod (2003) noted that students are better prepared to live and prosper in a democratic society when they are taught that diversity provides a richness of perspectives and ideals. Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner, and Trimble (2002) identified topics for inclusion, including historical connections, heroes, contributions, and cultural relationships.

Through the developmental classroom guidance program, the school counselor can incorporate GLBT educational elements as well. Students are typically inquisitive about the subject and schools should accept the challenge of meeting their needs. Bailey and Phariss (as cited in Palma & Stanley, 2002) pointed out that to assist GLBT students, modification of conventional curricula can foster more affirming and inclusive environments. Van Wormer and McKinney (2003) suggested that counselors conduct sensitivity training and implement peer mediation programs to resolve conflict. Additionally, suicide prevention work could be incorporated into the guidance curriculum.

### *Small Group Counseling*

Firestein (as cited in Gladding, 2003) noted groups with mixed membership of homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual identities have been successful. Bennett (as cited in Szalacha, 2003) described gay-straight alliances

(GSA's) as school-based, student-run groups. Some schools have established GSA's as a safe haven for straight-ally and sexual minority students to meet. These groups meet to discuss ways of eliminating sexual prejudice and heterosexist attitudes in the school setting and creating a positive environment for all students. These groups have shown to be effective in the initiation of acceptance of sexual diversity.

GLBT students in rural areas often find the social isolation extremely difficult. The school counselor can help these students define their fears and nervousness, while attempting to locate support systems. These support systems typically consist of role-models and peer support groups or drop-in centers (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996). Nichols (1999) proposed starting a "diversity room" that would work to resolve conflict and promote group harmony (p. 515). The diversity room would be a safe place for discussion of belonging, acceptance, and tolerance.

### *Individual Counseling*

According to Helms (as cited in Israel & Selvidge, 2003) counselors that begin work with GLBT students on an individual basis must tailor their interventions to the student's personal point in identity development. Palma and Stanley (2002) noted that in individual counseling sessions, GLBT students can explore their personal awareness of sexual identity, sexual attitudes, and comfort level.



Even though GLBT individuals are highly responsive to standard therapeutic techniques, the counselor must consider the unique dynamics and environmental pressures that the student may experience (Palma & Stanley, 2002). Ettner (as cited in Carroll, Gilroy & Ryan, 2002) suggested that counselors strike a balance between facilitating client communication and the inclusion of more directive interventions. Fontaine and Hammond (1996) noted counseling interventions at the adolescent level could assist students to normalize their feelings, discourage labeling, and describe differences as a means of exploration of GLBT issues.

#### *Extracurricular Groups, and Community Support*

Stifling homosexuality ignores GLBT students' needs to express themselves. If counselors allow GLBT students to express their sexual orientation, they can begin to establish a positive identity (Lipkin, 1999). A major component of every historical social change movement has involved an effort to bond people together for the common good. This can be done by increasing the pride and self-esteem of the oppressed group (Pharr, 2002).

Often, GLBT individuals find it difficult to know how to fit in. Because of this, counselors must help them find ways of connecting to society. Through the use of organized groups and clubs within schools and communities, GLBT individuals can explore opportunities for self-expression. Gay-straight alliance

organizations typically sponsor social events like movie nights, skating parties, and dances, such as alternative proms (Lipkin, 1999).

GLBT individuals can also find affiliation through books and other printed material since role models and mentors can be especially scarce. Finding community and family support for their pursuits and failures are particular struggles. GLBT youth need to find social opportunities where it is safe for relational practice with their peers (Lipkin, 1999). Local organizations such as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) exist in many areas. PFLAG provides support to individuals and families while acting as a resource for information and education.

### Conclusion

Without active involvement of counselors, staff, community, and students, attitudes cannot change. In regard to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues, acceptance and a movement toward equality would certainly be a vast improvement over violence and oppression. Schools and communities must step up to the challenge in order to incite change (Palma & Stanley, 2002).

Schools can do their part to eliminate oppression by recognizing the barriers that GLBT students are faced with on a daily basis. Students that are tortured, ostracized, rejected, and endure other types of violence or social pressure suffer under these conditions (Herek, 1998). In order to actively make changes, school professionals must address their personal biases, receive GLBT related

education, provide accurate information to the GLBT students, and provide support to their families.

Additionally, school counselors must advocate for heightened awareness of GLBT issues within the school. This can be done by educating the professionals about their ability to create an inviting environment, how to adjust curriculum to foster inclusiveness, how to provide opportunities for group and individual counseling, and how to connect GLBT students to their community.

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