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LGB students and the school environment

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Abstract

Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students often face negative school environments. This literature review examines the current school environments encountered by LGB students and the risk factors associated with these experiences. These risk factors include suicide, substance abuse, academic issues, and struggles with identity development. After examining these risk factors, recommendations for improving the school environment are explored. Further recommendations for school counselors working with LGB students are then discussed. This literature review examines the use of client-centered therapy, bibliotherapy, group counseling, and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy as approaches to working with LGB youth.

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Abstract

Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students often face negative school environments. This literature review examines the current school environments encountered by LGB students and the risk factors associated with these experiences. These risk factors include suicide, substance abuse, academic issues, and struggles with identity development. After examining these risk factors, recommendations for improving the school environment are explored. Further recommendations for school counselors working with LGB students are then discussed. This literature review examines the use of client-centered therapy, bibliotherapy, group counseling, and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy as approaches to working with LGB youth.

LGB Students and the School Environment

An individual's sexual orientation is characterized by his or her attraction to others on a physical and emotional level (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). This attraction can be for people of the opposite sex (heterosexual), same sex (homosexual), or both sexes. The term gay is often used to refer to a man who is attracted to other men and lesbian refers to women who are attracted to other women. Bisexuality is used to describe a sexual orientation towards members of both sexes. This paper will refer to lesbian, gay, and bisexual students collectively as LGB or sexual minority, terms commonly used in academic literature.

Researchers estimate that approximately 10% of the population has a sexual orientation other than heterosexual (Muller & Hartman, 1998). However, LGB youth are more likely than their adult counterparts to conceal their sexual orientation (Morrow, 1993). Choosing to conceal their orientation may be in response to not feeling safe within the environments that they must exist, such as school (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2005; Morrow). Homophobia and heterosexism is common in schools. Homophobia is defined as the irrational fear of anyone perceived or known to be gay or lesbian (Robinson, 2005). Heterosexism is the belief that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexual relationships are preferred and superior to homosexual relationships (Robinson). Moreover, their age makes LGB adolescents an extremely vulnerable subgroup of the larger gay and bisexual community (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). Adolescence is the developmental time period when questioning one's sexual orientation commonly occurs (Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). Compared to their heterosexual counterparts, LGB youth are at an increased risk for

problematic development and researchers have found links between homosexual and

bisexual orientations and a variety of mental health concerns and psychological distress

(Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Busseri, Willoughby, Chalmers, & Bogaert, 2006).

School is often a central piece in the lives of adolescents. As such, schools should

promote healthy growth and development by providing a safe learning environment for

all students, regardless of sexual orientation. However, schools have been found to be an

unsafe place for many LGB students (GLSEN, 2005; D'Augelli, Pilkington, &

Hershberger, 2002; Morrow, 1993, 2004; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). Homophobia

and heterosexism are common in these settings. Approximately 65% of LGB students

report feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation (GLSEN, 2005). This

paper will examine the school climates experienced by LGB students, risk factors related

to these experiences, how to improve the school environment, the role of the school

counselor and different therapeutic approaches for working with this population.

<div align="center">The School Climate</div>

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted their

most recent national climate survey in 2005. Surveys were completed by 1,732 lesbian,

gay, bisexual, and transgender students, ages 13 to 20. Students from all 50 states and the

District of Columbia were included in the sample. According to GLSEN (2005), "results

of the 2005 survey indicate that anti-LGBT language, as well as bullying and harassment

on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, remain common in

America's schools" (p. xii).

Biased language and homophobic remarks were reported as the most common

anti-LGB behavior experienced at school. Approximately 75% of respondents reported

hearing words such as "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often and almost 90% of students reported hearing "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" being used in a deprecating way. These comments were most often made in the absence of faculty and other school staff. However, only 16.5% of respondents indicated that staff present when comments were made intervened. Students reported that staff intervened less when homophobic remarks were made as compared to racist or sexist remarks. In addition, 18.6% of respondents reported hearing homophobic statements made by teachers or other school staff (GLSEN, 2005).

Unfortunately, the problem does not stop here. GLSEN (2005) also found that almost two-thirds of students surveyed reported being verbally harassed at school at least some of the time during the last year because of their sexual orientation. One-third of students had experienced physical harassment at school and almost one-fifth had reported being physically assaulted. Approximately two-thirds of LGB students reported being sexually harassed in school. Relational aggression and vandalism or theft of personal property was also reported by LGB students in this survey. GLSEN notes that these results have been corroborated by research conducted using a national sample of general secondary students.

These results are similar to those found by other researchers. Other researchers have found between 30% and 59% of LGB youth had experienced some form of verbal harassment or abuse (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). Almost 25% had been threatened with violence and over 10% had been physically assaulted (D'Augelli et al.).

The harmful effects of this type of school climate are not limited to those students being targeted by physical, verbal, or sexual harassment. Other students that witness peer harassment are also harmed, especially if school personnel fail to act or implicitly approve of such actions (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002). In one study, over one-third of LGB students reported being aware of the harassment of other LGB youth, and one in ten knew of other LGB youth that had been physically assaulted (D'Augelli et al., 2002). The fear of abuse or harassment by one's peers may be one reason many LGB youth conceal their sexual orientation until after high school graduation (Morrow, 1993; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995).

<div align="center">Risk Factors</div>

Suicide

LGB adolescents are at an increased risk for suicide. According to Russell and Joyner (2001), adolescents with a same-sex orientation are more than twice as likely to attempt suicide. However, being LGB is not the cause for this increased risk. It is the psychological distress associated with sexual minority status that increases the risk of suicide (Kitts, 2005). Depression and externalizing symptoms reported by LGB adolescents accrue mainly because of the victimization and harassment at school and the lack of support experienced by these students (Williams et al., 2005). Victimization at school has been found to be directly related to increased health risk behaviors, including suicide, among LGB students (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006). Goodenow et al. found school victimization to be a significant predictor of suicide on three different measures.

There are other predictors of suicide among this population. These include low self-esteem, alcohol or drug use, loss of friends due to sexual orientation, knowing other LGB adolescents that have committed suicide, parental reactions, and dating violence or forced sex (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; D'Augelli et al., 2002; Goodenow et al., 2006).

Substance Abuse

LGB adolescents also show an increased risk for substance abuse. Muller and Hartman (1998) reported the substance abuse rate among LGB youth to be two to three times higher than for heterosexual adolescents. Victimization at school has also been shown to be directly related to this increased risk for substance abuse among LGB students (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002). Feeling unable to escape from these experiences at school, substances may be seen as a viable option (Goodenow et al., 2006).

Researchers have found several substances to be used by LGB youth, including alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, and cocaine (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; D'Augelli et al., 2002; Muller & Hartman, 1998). Of these, alcohol seems to be the most prevalent, with 76% of LGB youth under 21 reporting use (D'Augelli et al.). One reason for this may be the result of a lack of social outlets and positive community supports for LGB youth, resulting in bars becoming the primary location for socialization in the gay and lesbian community (Morrow, 1993, 2004). According to Wright and Perry (2006), the private and somewhat secretive nature of this community often leads young people to target well-known "hang outs" such as bars, restaurants, or clubs. In a study of 194 LGB

youth under 21, 43% reported attending a gay/lesbian bar at least once a month, with 18% attending weekly (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993).

Academic Performance and Dropout

A negative and hostile school climate can have a significant impact on the academic performance and achievement of LGB students. Fear of abuse and tension experienced at schools can lead to problems such as truancy, dropping out, and poor academic performance (D'Augelli et al., 2002; GLSEN, 2005; Morrow, 1993, 2004). GLSEN reported finding that almost 30% of LGB students had skipped one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe. Highly victimized students are more likely to skip school more often (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002). According to the National Climate Survey (GLSEN), students who had been physically harassed due to their sexual orientation were three times more likely to have skipped a day of school in the past month. This is more than five times the amount reported by secondary students in the general population.

Continual peer harassment and rejection may eventually lead to students dropping out of school altogether (Morrow, 1993). LGB students were twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to report that they were not planning on finishing high school or attending college (GLSEN, 2005). Obviously, this type of harassment and repeated truancy from school has a negative affect on academic performance. Students who reported being more frequently harassed, especially physically, also reported significantly lower GPAs than those of other students, 2.6 versus 3.1 (GLSEN).

Identity Development.

LGB youth are at an increased risk for problematic development (Busseri et al., 2006). These adolescents go through many of the typical stressors and changes that occur during this developmental period as well as additional stressors that result from being a sexual minority (Kitts, 2005; Vare & Norton, 2004). Moreover, "cultural circumstances create differences in the social and emotional development of many gay and lesbian teens" (Vare & Norton, p. 190). Being socialized in hostile and homophobic environments can make developing a healthy identity as a LGB individual difficult (Lemoire & Chen, 2005; Morrow, 1993).

According to Erikson (1963), forming an identity is the most significant developmental task for adolescents (as cited in Morrow, 1993). Interaction and acceptance from peers plays a vital role in this process. However, it is typical for young people in this age group to have a lack of understanding or acceptance for those considered to be outside the norm. Pressure to conform is common during this developmental period. LGB adolescents often find themselves either isolated or denying their identity as a sexual minority in order to fit in (Morrow).

Moreover, while many of their heterosexual peers are discussing their romantic relationships, LGB adolescents may not know another LGB individual (Kitts, 2005). Community centers and other supports for LGB youth are often lacking in many communities (Kitts; Morrow, 1993), and there are often very few, if any visible, positive role models (Morrow, 2004). While other young people in minority groups have their parents to look to for validation and instruction about life as a minority, this is not so for

LGB adolescents (Morrow, 1993). In addition, there is a lack of accurate information for them to draw from (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002).

Recommendations for Improving the School Climate

Ultimately, schools should take a proactive stance in preventing harassment and work towards becoming a safe haven for students and staff (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002; Jeltova & Fish, 2005). Avoiding, denying, or merely reacting to harassment of LGB students on a limited basis only maintains a "chilly" school climate for these students (Mayberry, 2006). LGB adolescents who feel supported and included at school tend to do better academically and have fewer problems with disruptive behavior (Murdock & Bolch, 2005). There are several recommendations for how schools can create a more positive and welcoming school climate for LGB students.

School Policies

School policies on discrimination and harassment should be written to include sexual orientation (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Stone, 2003). In addition, schools should have anti-bullying policies that also include sexual orientation. Stone asserts that an effective policy includes applicable laws, procedures to address complaints, and a statement of zero-tolerance. Comprehensive school policies have been shown to be correlated with lower incidents of homophobic remarks being heard, lower rates of verbal harassment, and fewer suicide attempts by LGB youth (GLSEN, 2005; Goodenow et al., 2006). Students in schools with comprehensive policies reported higher rates of intervention by school faculty and were more likely to report incidents of harassment (GLSEN). Unfortunately, despite evidence of the effectiveness of such policies, only 22% of students surveyed by GLSEN attended schools with such policies.

Professional Training for Educators and Staff

Having a school staff that is knowledgeable and supportive of LGB issues can have a tremendous impact on the experiences of these students (GLSEN, 2005; Goodenow et al., 2006). Mandatory sensitivity training, workshops, professional development, or in-services for administrators, teachers, aides, counselors, nurses, coaches, librarians, and any other school staff in regular contact with students about sexual orientation, legal and ethical issues, and anti-LGB bullying intervention strategies would be one way of improving rates of intervention by staff members and creating a safer school climate (GLSEN; Goodenow et al.; Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Stone, 2003). A needs assessment should be conducted and school staff should be informed of the extent that LGB students are victimized at school, as well as the consequences of ignoring this information has on students' academic achievement, their physical and psychological well-being, and the potential for retaliation through violence (Dupper & Meyers-Adams, 2002). Moreover, faculty and staff should be trained to identify factors related to school difficulties or misbehavior, such as a lack of family or peer support and few psychological resources for coping, so that they know when and how to intervene (Murdock & Bolch, 2005).

It is not only important that there is supportive staff at school, but that LGB students are aware of these individuals (Goodenow et al., 2006). Their presence has been positively correlated with a greater sense of safety and school belonging, fewer missed days of school, and more reports of intending to attend college (GLSEN, 2005; Goodenow et al.). However, having only one or two supportive staff members may not be enough. GLSEN noted that students reporting only knowing of one or two staff

members showed no difference from those students who reported knowing none, but students who knew of many were much more likely to report positive experiences at school.

Curriculum and Resources

Another powerful tool for creating a safe and inclusive environment for LGB students is to expand the curriculum in various classes, especially sex-education or health courses, to include relevant LGB topics (Elia, 1993; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). This curriculum should provide students with positive representations of LGB history, events, and people, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights movement, or LGB authors (GLSEN, 2005; Munoz-Plaza et al.). Sex-education should include sexuality issues that are relevant for all students and moves beyond the topic of HIV/AIDS when discussing LGB issues (Elia; Munoz-Plaza). Having a comprehensive curriculum that includes accurate information about LGB issues, people, and events not only helps these students to feel a greater sense of safety and belonging, but it also helps all students learn to respect all people (GLSEN).

Information and resources for LGB students can be presented in other ways around the school. Bulletin boards displaying various community resources and activities for a number of multicultural groups including LGB students would be one non-threatening way to provide information to a variety of students. Include books in the school library, both fiction and non-fiction, that contain stories and information on LGB topics. LGB speakers and issues could also be included during diversity awareness or career week activities (Stone, 2003).

Gay-Straight Alliances

Gay-straight alliances (GSAs) have been shown to have numerous positive impacts on school environment (GLSEN, 2007; Goodenow et al., 2006; Lee, 2002). These groups are often led by students, with supervision of a staff member trained in LGB issues (GLSEN, 2007; Jeltova & Fish, 2005). They are open to all students and provide a safe place to discuss issues related to sexuality. In addition, GSAs are often involved in advocating for improving school climates, educating others in the school and community about LGB issues, and support LGB students and allies (GLSEN, 2007).

The presence of GSAs has been shown to be related to greater physical safety and a reduction of victimization of LGB students (GLSEN, 2007; Goodenow et al., 2006). LGB students who attended schools with GSAs were less likely to report feeling unsafe at school because of their orientation and were less likely to report hearing homophobic remarks than students attending schools without GSAs (GLSEN, 2007). By reducing victimization in schools, these groups may also help prevent suicide among LGB students (Goodenow et al.). Naturally, LGB students attending schools with GSAs also reported missing fewer days of school and had a greater sense of belonging (GLSEN, 2005).

Unfortunately, very few schools have these types of organizations. According to GLSEN (2007), only 22% of secondary students responding to a national survey reported having a GSA or another student club that addresses LGB issues at their school, and only 47% of LGB students reported being aware of such an organization. The likelihood of having such an organization also appears to vary depending on the region of the country and location of the school. Students in the South and those living in small towns or rural areas are the least likely to have a GSA at their schools (GLSEN, 2007).

Safe Zone/School

Schools that have established GSAs can also implement a *Safe Zone* or *Safe Person* program. Faculty members that have joined students in the gay-straight alliance can designate his or her room or office as a safe place for LGB students (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). These spaces are designed to be inclusive and welcoming for all students and are recognized as the "safe zones". Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG, 2003) recommended designating an area in the room where LGB and other diversity materials, resources and anti-harassment policies are displayed (as cited in Jeltova & Fish). A faculty member involved in the school's GSA, or the "safe person", should also serve as representatives of the school to the LGB community (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). According to Jeltova and Fish (2005), once several faculty members participate in the *Safe Zone* program, others are likely to follow suit after witnessing its positive effects. According to PFLAG, the spread of "safe zones" throughout the school may eventually lead to a change in the school system, creating a safe school for LGB students (as cited in Jeltova & Fish).

Even in schools without GSAs, "safe spaces" can still be established. School counselors and other supportive faculty members can display pink triangles or other support symbols to let LGB and heterosexual students know that they are an "ally" or friend (Stone, 2003). Researchers suggest that school counselors display such symbols and also keep books and other resources available in their offices for openly LGB youth, as well as students questioning their sexuality (Morrow, 2004; Stone).

Recommendations for School Counselors

Due to their degree of need and the hostile environment encountered by LGB students in schools, it is clear that these individuals require support from within the educational system (Reynolds & Koski, 1994). School counselors are in an ideal and unique position to provide this critical support to sexual minority adolescents (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998; Stone, 2003). Counselors can support LGB youth being targeted and marginalized by their peers through individual and/or group counseling (Williams et al., 2005). Regardless of the approach taken, working with these young people provides much needed support and acceptance during a difficult time in their lives (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998).

Before counseling students of any sexual orientation, it is imperative that counselors are aware of their own biases and feelings about homosexuality (Elia, 1993; Morrow, 1993). Counselors should exercise a high degree of self-awareness and sensitivity about one's own homophobia and these attitudes need to be addressed (Elia; Reynolds & Koski, 1994). This awareness will help counselors understand how their biases and beliefs will impact their work with LGB students and proper steps can be taken to deal with any existing homophobia (Elia; Morrow).

Researchers recommend that counselors educate themselves and become familiar with issues surrounding LGB youth (Morrow, 1993; Pollock, 2006; Reynolds & Koski, 1994). Competencies in this area can be developed by attending professional development trainings, workshops, and reading relevant literature (Reynolds & Koski; Stone, 2003). Being educated about adolescent sexuality and having accurate information about homosexuality can help counselors not only work through their own

biases but it can also help them dispel negative myths held by students, faculty, LGB youth and their family (Morrow; Elia, 1993). The counselor could serve as an educational resource for the school community and help sensitize others to the issues of sexual minority students (Elia; Muller & Hartman, 1998).

Counselors working with LGB students can begin eliminating some of their biases in a few basic ways. First, counselors can become more aware of their use of language (Reynolds & Koski, 1994). When talking about dating and sexual issues, counselors should be careful not to use language that assumes boys only date girls and vice versa. Using the term "partner" instead of boyfriend or girlfriend, can help LGB teens feel acknowledged (Reynolds & Koski). Changing the use of language also helps counselors to avoid the heterosexual bias of assuming that all of their students are heterosexual (Morrow, 1993).

Moreover, counselors need to be willing to engage youth in dialogue about the issue of sexual orientation (Morrow, 1993). According to Pollock (2006), counselors and educators have historically been reluctant to deal with the issue of sexual orientation. LGB students often feel confused, embarrassed, and afraid. This is especially true during the early phases of becoming aware of their sexual orientation (Morrow). Counselors can help students feel safe discussing the topic of sexual orientation by initiating the conversation (Pollock).

Researchers are also calling for counselors to act as advocates for this population of students (Morrow, 1993, 2004; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Pollock, 2006; Reynolds & Koski, 1994; Stone, 2003) and to avidly promote peaceful, safe, and accepting school environments (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998; Williams et al., 2005). This often involves

raising the consciousness of administration about the difficulties faced by this population and the serious risks involved in ignoring these problems (Pollock). Programs that increase awareness among students and faculty are also needed in order to cause systemic change (Morrow, 1993).

The topic of sexuality is controversial, especially when it comes to working with and educating youth about such issues. Reynolds and Koski (1994) point out that there are often serious risks and institutional barriers facing counselors who wish to advocate on the behalf of LGB students. Advocating for and counseling students about issues surrounding their sexuality are further complicated by their status as minors. Stone (2003) suggests that counselors wanting to advocate for this population know and understand the ethical and legal obstacles of working with youth under the age of eighteen.

<div align="center">Therapeutic Approaches</div>

Clearly, there is a need for school counselors to provide services to sexual minority students. Several therapeutic approaches have been highlighted by researchers for use when working with LGB youth. Some of the approaches outlined here include: person-centered counseling, bibliotherapy, group counseling, and Solution Focused Brief Therapy. A brief summary of each approach will be provided next.

Person-Centered Counseling

Lemoire and Chen (2005) argue that the principles of Carl Roger's person-centered counseling work well with LGB adolescents. The complex nature of sexual identity development and the high degree of vulnerability of sexual minority youth call for a therapeutic foundation that genuinely respects and understands the needs and inner-

self of the LGB student. More specifically, the principles of congruence, empathy, and

unconditional positive regard are emphasized by researchers as being particularly

important for working with LGB youth (Lemoire & Chen; Stone, 2003). Other strengths

of the person–centered approach relevant to working with sexual minority adolescents

highlighted by Lemoire and Chen include: adopting the client's perspective, emphasizing

the notion of self-concept, believing in the client's potential for self-growth, ensuring that

the growth process is client-directed, and encouraging an internal locus of evaluation.

As with any approach, the person-centered approach to counseling also has its

limitations. Lemoire and Chen (2005) assert that the approach may need to expand to

meet some of the special needs of this population. However, if the principles of

unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence are used with varied helping

techniques, such as explicit identity formation and exposure to positive, age appropriate

sexual minority communities, this approach could prove to be very beneficial to LGB

adolescents (Lemoire & Chen).

Bibliotherapy

Homophobia has two forms, covert and overt (Elia, 1993; Vare & Norton, 2004).

The overt form involves the devaluing of homosexuality and LGB individuals through

defamation. The covert form involves the failure to acknowledge the existence of LGB

people. LGB students are marginalized within the school environment and the system

often fails to recognize how these individuals encounter the school environment

(Mayberry, 2006). The vast amount of homophobia in schools often results in these

students hiding their sexual orientation, making them a silent minority (Morrow, 1993;

Muller & Hartman, 1998). According to Vare and Norton, bibliotherapy can be used as a

way to break the silence by providing a means for discussing the difficulties and hurt in the lives of LGB youth. Providing appropriate books also helps affirm their identity and promotes a healthy exploration of a LGB orientation. As previously mentioned, including books with stories and information about LGB people and events also helps to promote a safer school climate for sexual minority youth (Stone, 2003).

Group Counseling

Yalom (1995) identified various therapeutic factors at work in group counseling (as cited in Corey & Corey, 2006). According to Muller and Hartman (1998), the therapeutic factors of universality, hope, and interpersonal learning makes this form of counseling a critical source of support for LGB youth. These groups provide LGB adolescents, whom are often isolated from their peers, with a way to build positive school support systems. A sense of support and positive peer interactions help foster healthy identity development and act as protective factors for the well-being of LGB youth (Morrow, 1993, 2004). These groups can be strictly for LGB students or can involve heterosexual members. However, during member selection, counselors need to look for any signs of heterosexism or overt homophobia among potential heterosexual members (Horne & Levitt, 2004). Individuals with strong biases against homosexuality would be potentially harmful to the well-being of LGB members and should not be selected for involvement in the group.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

Researchers have pointed to the relationship between bullying or harassment and LGB students (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; Pollock, 2006). LGB youth are commonly the targets of bullying, therefore, counselors need a way to

deal with bullying situations (Pollock). According to Young and Holdorf (2003),

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is an effective strategy in supporting students vulnerable

to bullying. This approach to therapy focuses the attention of the counselor and student

on solutions rather than problems. It searches for prior success and exceptions to the

problem, skills and positive qualities of the student, and what they would like to see in

the future (Young & Holdorf). Counselors imply competence and positive qualities

through the strategic phrasing of questions and other techniques. Moreover, the tone of

the sessions are respectful, curious, optimistic, and empowering (Young & Holdorf).

These are all important qualities for counselors to convey during a session, especially

when working with students that have been victimized. Young and Holdorf assert that

this approach to counseling is an effective strategy that works quickly with students

needing assistance in a bullying situation. They maintain that it is an inclusive strategy

that provides new ways of empowering students and faculty to bring about positive

changes in the school environment.

Conclusion

The school environment is often a cold and hostile place for LGB students. A

large percentage of these youth report being verbally harassed or physically assaulted

because of their sexual orientation. Hearing homophobic remarks in schools is a

common occurrence for most students. This type of school environment has been shown

to have a relationship with an increased risk for suicide, school dropout and truancy, and

substance abuse among sexual minority youth.

It is important to note that homophobia is not only detrimental to LGB students,

but it creates a school environment that is unsafe for all students (Elia, 1993; Dupper &

Meyer-Adams, 2002). According to Dupper and Meyer, "anti-gay prejudices and

homophobia can make any student who defies the narrowly defined gender roles a target

for violence and harassment" (p. 361). Therefore, because it is the school's responsibility

to provide an environment that is safe and conducive to learning for all students, it is the

job of counselors and all school personnel to make a collaborative effort to address

homophobic attitudes among students and faculty (Dupper & Meyer-Adams; GSLEN,

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