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The Sexual Orientation Disclosure Experience of LGBT-Identifying Adolescents and Its Impact on Health Outcomes: An Integrative Review of the Literature

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BACKGROUND

Health, both physical and psychological, can be affected by the stressors of identifying as GLBTQ and coming out. It is important that healthcare providers, especially those working in the psychiatric setting, to not overlook an individual's disclosure experience when treating an LGBT-identifying patient because this event may have significant weight on an individual's psychiatric diagnosis and presentation.

In expanding our understanding of the psychological and behavioral aspects of the LGBT-identifying individual, we are better able to approach healthcare decisions aimed at this culture. This is not to say that this subculture is in need of their own isolated plan of care, but rather it is so that healthcare providers are able to provide culturally competent and dignified care for all diverse populations.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this literature review is to identify how reactions toward disclosure of sexual orientation by LGBT adolescents affect their health status and maintenance.

This information informs the healthcare community and the LGBT persons' support system to assist in culturally competent care in both the acute and long-term care of this specific population. More importantly, this emphasizes the lasting impact that a simple reaction may have on an LGBT individual and the health decisions they make following their perception of either discrimination or acceptance.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does an LGBT-identifying adolescent's experience following the disclosure of their nonconforming sexual orientation influence their overall health outcomes and future health maintenance?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is conducted under the precepts established by **the transactional model of stress** as described by Sheldon Cohen. **Figure 1** is an adaptation of two similar variations of Cohen's theoretical framework using the core concepts vital to understanding this conceptual model (Cohen, 1992; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

This conceptual model flows in a cause-and-effect manner initiating with a potentially stressful event. This study defines this assumed potentially stressful event as one's negative disclosure experience. As noted by the figure, social support has the potential to intervene during the appraisal process to alter the proceeding sequence of events. Depending on the manner in which social support intervenes or fails to intervene, the subsequent perceived stress and its associated responses are averted or perpetuated. If social support successfully intervenes, the perceived stress is averted thus avoiding the latter consequence, which is termed as disorder (Cohen, 1992; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Figure 1



FINDINGS

STRESS, PSYCHOPATHOLOGY AND SUICIDE

- Parental rejection intensifies the adolescents' stress caused by stigma yielding a series of "internal conflicts, relational problems, negative attitudes, coping/emotion regulation, and cognitive process, compromising the proper development of the child and increasing the risk of psychopathology" (Baiocco et al. 2014, p. 1812).
- Borderline features were more prevalent in homosexual-identifying adolescents as compared to their heterosexual-identifying counterparts (Reuter et al. 2015).

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- Higher amounts of disclosure does not correlate with higher substance use, but rather negative reactions were more critical in determining substance-use outcomes in these LGB youth.
- Disclosure experience within the family context is a significant predictor of future substance-related behavior
- Perceptions of general acceptance or rejection in childhood were not associated with substance abuse, but rather the perceived rejection by their parents following disclosure of sexual orientation was related to the consequential substance abuse (D'Amico & Julien, 2012).
- A major protective factor against illegal drug use associated with stress was a positive reaction from the mother following the youth's self-disclosure of their LGB sexual identity (Padilla, Crisp, & Rew, 2010).

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND GROWTH

- Those who disclosed their sexual identity to more individuals across diverse roles (e.g. parents, siblings, teachers, coaches, etc.) scored lower on internalized homonegativity.
- Strong in-group ties within the LGBT community limits the amount of internalized homonegativity that an LGB individual experiences
- LGB adolescents are more likely to report depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation than heterosexual adolescents.

METHODS

A computerized search of the following databases was used in order to compile the necessary material to successfully conduct this literature review: PsycINFO, ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health Database, and the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Health Literature (CINAHL).

DISCUSSION

- Minorities in general are at greater risk for health problems as a result of the social stress and discrimination they face related to prejudice and stigma
- The actual "coming out" event is not typically seen as the stressor, but rather it's the proceeding acceptance or rejection that determines the outcomes of the adolescent.
- Accepting reactions may come in the form of an actual experience of acceptance when adolescent discloses his/her sexual identification, or it may come in the form of strong in-group ties.
- Parental rejection is the most important experience that shapes an LGBT adolescent's disclosure experience.

CONCLUSION

- The research presented in this literature review is a testament to the reality that LGBT adolescents must face in order to gain full disclosure of their sexual identity.
- LGBT individuals are not immune to the discrimination that they face, and health promoting individuals need to be at the forefront advocating for those who are not able to advocate for themselves.
- The research is clear that **social support buffers and protects LGBT adolescents from stress-related responses.**
- More research needs to be conducted on how we can better accommodate transgender individuals, as they currently face societal attacks led by lack of understanding.

