

Coming Out or Forced Out: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,  
Transgendered, and Questioning Youth

Issues in the Schools

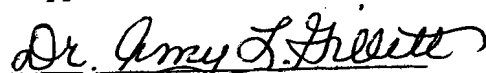
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**ABSTRACT**

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth are more visible than in years past. Heightened visibility brings with it the need to address issues of concern regarding GLBTQ youth. One such area of concern to GLBTQ youth involves school climate. GLBTQ students are in need of support in our schools. It is this researcher's intent to highlight GLBTQ issues in the schools and also address what can be done to administer support in the schools.

A survey was conducted involving 84 pre-service education students enrolled in a Multiculturalism course at a mid-western university. The results showed that some GLBTQ issues were not known by those surveyed. This finding highlights the fact that more education on GLBTQ issues is needed for all who plan to work in the schools.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth are more visible than in years past. Heightened visibility brings with it the need to address issues of concern regarding GLBTQ youth. One such area of concern to GLBTQ youth involves school climate. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) sought to survey and document the experiences of GLBTQ students in America's high schools. In 2004, they published their findings. Kosciw (2004) found that 90% of the 887 GLBTQ youth surveyed reported hearing homophobic remarks in their school frequently. "Fag" or "dyke" used in a belittling way, or the use of the word "gay" to mean something that is deemed unpleasant as in "that's so gay," were reported most frequently. More alarming was that less than a quarter of the youth stated that the staff stepped in most or all of the time, even though they were well within earshot of the remarks.

Kosciw (2004) also found safety to be an issue for those surveyed. Three-quarters reported that they did not feel safe in their present school. The students felt their safety was in jeopardy because of one or more personal attributes, most often due to the sexual orientation they identified. Numerous youth skipped or avoided classes because of their unsafe feelings about the environment, resulting in lower grade point averages than their heterosexual counterparts.

Experiences of harassment and assault in schools were also addressed. Kosciw (2004) found that the majority of the GLBTQ youth surveyed stated they had at least some experience of verbal harassment brought on by their identified sexual orientation. A quarter of the youth reported that the harassment took place on a regular basis. Though

less commonly reported, over a third of the youth also reported experiencing some type of physical harassment because of their sexual orientation.

Other research harvested similar results to Kosciw's (2004) findings. Kipke et al. (1995) found that as many as 40 % of homeless and runaway youth were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. GLBTQ youth are also at increased risk for suicide. In 1989, a study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that gay and lesbian youth were two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts, and they may account for up to 30 % of completed youth suicide (cited in Gibson, 1989).

These findings illustrate that most GLBTQ students across America are experiencing turmoil in their daily lives, whether on school grounds or not. GLBTQ youths are being harassed, overlooked, and often unheard. GLBTQ youth often feel alone, underrepresented, and ignored, which as the research illustrates, can lead to depression, thoughts of suicide, attempting suicide, or completing suicide (Gibson, 1989). This is a problem that cannot be ignored. A good place to start addressing the problems of GLBTQ youth is in the schools.

Though GLBTQ youth are becoming more visible, schools are slow or hesitant to provide the support GLBTQ youth request and deserve. A possible solution is to provide support for a school-based support group, such as a gay/straight alliance (GSA). School-based support groups can provide a safe, informal place where students can talk about their feelings and experiences; learn about homophobia and how it affects everyone; educate each other and their school community about issues relating to sexual orientation and identity; and have fun and participate in activities (Reid, 2002).

School-based support groups for GLBTQ youth have, however, been prejudged and misunderstood since they first were pioneered. Over the past decade, controversies surrounding students' sexual orientation have become increasingly common in schools across the United States (Underwood, 2004). The controversy has become increasingly apparent when students try and form a support group on school grounds, such as a gay/straight alliance. Opposition and discrimination of GSA's is often the product of ignorance. Most individuals are not aware of what a GSA is. If members of a community are not informed as to what a GSA is, then they most likely are not going to understand the need for such an alliance.

In December, 1999 El Modena High School in Orange, California was at the center of this heated debated. According to Bull (2000), parents began to express their concerns to the school board in regards to some students forming a GSA. The Orange Unified School District's board decided to vote on whether or not the newly formed GSA could meet on school grounds. In the wake of the parents' complaints, the school board unanimously voted to prohibit the alliance from meeting on school property. The students took action and filed suit against the school district. A federal district court overturned the ban, and the alliance was allowed to hold their meetings on school grounds. The school was forced to treat the alliance like any other club, thus allowing them to meet on school property. This was a landmark case in which most schools facing resistance from the community refer.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study is to highlight that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth are more visible than in years past. With that said,

schools are slow or hesitant to provide the support GLBTQ youth request and need. A possible solution is to provide support for a school-based support group, such as a gay/straight student alliance (GSA). The controversy surrounding GSA's is largely because people are not informed as to what a GSA is. GSA's provide a safe and informal place where students can talk openly about their experiences and feelings; learn about homophobia and how it affects everyone; educate each other and their school community about issues relating to sexual orientation; and have fun and participate in activities. It is this author's intention to examine, through a literature review, GLBTQ youth and the struggles they face. It is also this author's intention to survey pre-service teachers at an upper-midwest university regarding their perceptions of GSA's to illustrate the need for educating the public about GSA's and their importance in the school system. Data will be collected through a survey during the 2006/2007 school year.

### *Objectives*

There are five objectives this study will attempt to highlight. They are:

1. Determine the level that GLBTQ youth are being harassed and ignored in schools across America.
2. Determine the level that GLBTQ youth are not receiving the support they request and deserve from the schools they attend.
3. Determine perceptions of GSA's by pre-service university level students.
4. Define what a GSA is.
5. Document the benefits GSA's can have on our school system.

### *Definition of Terms*

There are two terms that need to be clarified. These are:



*GLBTQ* – This acronym is used to describe gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning youth.

*GSA* – This acronym stands for gay/straight student alliance, which is a support group GLBTQ youth and their allies.

*Assumptions and Limitations*

It was assumed that the individuals taking the survey were honest and accurate in their responses. It was also assumed that access to the population for the survey was available to the researcher. A limitation was that for some reason they were not honest in filling out the survey. Another limitation was that the subjects might have answered how they thought they should answer, not how they truly felt. An additional limitation was that the survey was only administered to students enrolled in a specific upper-midwestern university; therefore generalizability of the findings should be used with caution.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### *Introduction*

This chapter includes a section on the extent of the problem of harassment GLBTQ youth face at school, and a section defining a GSA and exploring its benefits.

### *Extent of the Problem*

Ideally school should be a safe, supportive environment where students are encouraged to explore their thoughts, acquire skills, and prepare to enter the world as productive members of society. Unfortunately, GLBTQ youth often face harassment to the point where it shatters this ideal environment (Nichols, 1999). Some GLBTQ students go to school everyday feeling alone and misunderstood. On top of the internal turmoil some GLBTQ students face, most are the target of constant verbal harassment, and even physical harassment. One such student, Chris, described his experience in the schools:

I got called faggot and fairy every day. I kept my head down. I became a wall.

I learned how to not let it soak in until I got home. And even then, I could sometimes not deal with it for months at a time. Then I'd have one big breakdown where I'd put my fist through the glass coffee table or throw a clock against the wall. And I'd scream at my mother and wouldn't let her touch me, wouldn't let her hug me.

I didn't talk in class because I was afraid they would tease me. I slouched around in black jeans and black turtleneck, sunglasses, a black hat. Didn't want to be seen. And got C's and D's. (Bass & Kaufman, 1996, p. 194)

Another student, Devan, was so unhappy with school that he left: "Because people gave me such a hard time, school was really miserable for me. And I had no concept of how important education was... Earning money wasn't a concept to me at the time. I just had no desire to go back to school and suffer anymore" (Bass & Kaufman, 1996, p. 195).

Experiences such as these are common among GLBTQ youth. Kosciw (2004) worked on a recent survey published by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) to examine the experiences of GLBTQ youth in the schools. Kosciw (2004) found that 90% of the 887 GLBTQ youth surveyed reported hearing homophobic remarks in their school frequently. "Fag" or "dyke", used in a hurtful way, or the use of the word "gay" to mean something that is supposed to be foul as in "that's so gay," were reported most frequently. Almost 82% reported hearing homophobic comments from other students, while 18.8% reported the same homophobic remarks from staff. These statistics are both alarming and should not be ignored. GLBTQ students are being bombarded with homophobic comments in a place where such language should not be tolerated.

Other researchers have looked at the psychosocial implications of schooling as it relates to homosexuality. Remafedi (1987) studied adolescent gay and bisexual males and found that 69% stated a history of school problems related to their sexual orientation. Of those studied, 70% reported verbal abuse brought on because of their sexual orientation, and 10% reported both verbal and physical abuse. Seventy-five percent of the participants revealed that their performance at school suffered because of the

harassment, 39% reported truancy as a crisis, and 28% dropped out because of the constant harassment.

Even when GLBTQ students feel they are not in jeopardy of being physically harassed in their school, they may not be ready or comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation in school, therefore may not be able to participate in school activities as fully as their heterosexual counterparts (Kosciw, 2004). For example, over a third of the youth surveyed by Kosciw (2004) said they would be uncomfortable going to a school function, such as a dance or prom, with a date of the same sex. This research shows that even when GLBTQ students feel safe, they do not feel fully accepted to engage in some school activities.

GLBTQ youth are also at a higher risk of committing suicide. According to Gibson (1989), GLBTQ youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than other young people, and they may account for up to 30 % of the completed youth suicides. The report stated, "the root of the problem of gay youth suicide is a society that discriminates against and stigmatizes homosexuals while failing to recognize that a substantial number of its youth has a gay or lesbian orientation" (p. 110).

These studies suggest that GLBTQ youth have unique risk factors that not only put their education at risk because of verbal and physical harassment, but also their very lives. The problems GLBTQ youth face are numerous, and society should no longer turn its cheek. Something needs to be done. GLBTQ students deserve to walk down the halls of their school without fear of being harassed. The GLBTQ community is not going away, and the problems they face should not be ignored.

### *Defining a Gay/Straight Student Alliance (GSA)*

Curriculum in schools is sometimes informal and carried out not only by staff, but by the student body themselves (Cotterell, 1996). Some argue that homophobia is embedded in our schools and has been evident for many years (Reed, 1994).

Homophobia is a good example of how a concept can be taught informally. If a student yells out a homophobic remark and is not reprimanded by a staff member, staff is essentially telling the other students that it is okay to use such language, thus sending out an informal message that homophobia is acceptable.

A way to combat homophobia in the schools is for the school to adopt a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of harassment. Having a policy is an important tool for making schools safer for all students: GLBTQ students and their heterosexual counterparts. In adopting a policy, it sends a clear message that victimizing behaviors will not be tolerated (Bass & Kaufman, 1996). Kosciw (2004) found that almost 60% (59.9%) of those he surveyed stated that their schools did have a policy and procedure dealing with reporting incidences of harassment; however, a considerable percentage of GLBTQ youth did not know if their school had a policy. It is imperative that the policies regarding harassment are discussed with the students, and followed through consistently in order to combat homophobia in the schools.

Many feel it is the responsibility of schools not only to provide a safe environment for all students, but to teach them about homophobia and tolerance of diversity in order to prepare them to be productive members of society (Anderson, 1994). A possible solution to the problem is for a school to provide support for a school-based support group, such as a gay/straight student alliance (GSA).

A GSA is a club run by students which provides a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation, and work to end homophobia in their schools and in their community (Reid, 2002). Many GSAs function as a support group and provide safety and confidentiality for all students regardless of sexual orientation. In addition to support, some GSAs work on educating themselves and the entire school community about gender identity issues and sexual orientation. Over the past ten years, GSAs have continued to increase in schools all across America (Reid, 2002).

The benefits of GSAs are plenty, and are starting to show up in research. Kosciw (2004) found that “youth whose schools had GSAs were less likely to have reported feeling unsafe: 60.9% of youth from schools with GSAs reported feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation compared to 68.3% of youth from schools without GSAs” (p. 40). School-based support groups benefit GLBTQ youth in that they feel connected to a group and are also aware of a safe place to talk about issues they are facing.

It is important to recognize that GLBTQ students are not the only ones who benefit from school-based support groups such as GSAs. Part of the component of the club is that it offers a proactive stance in combating homophobia in the school and in the community. They do this by advertising in the hallways, putting up banners during their local GLBTQ pride week, bring in guest speakers, and educating the student body on homophobia. A huge piece of a GSA is to be visible for the entire school to see that GLBTQ youth deserve to be heard and seen because: the more you see, the more you know, and the more you know, the less you hate.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### *Introduction*

GSA's are often misunderstood by the general public. It is this author's intent to delve deeper into individual's perceptions of GSA's to see if there are any underlying themes involving people's perceptions of this type of school-based support group. This chapter will include information about how the sample was selected, a detailed description of the sample, and the survey being used. Data collection and data analysis will also be discussed. The chapter will conclude with the methodological limitations.

### *Subject Selection and Description*

Students enrolled in a mid-western university Multiculturalism course EDUC-336/536 were asked to participate in this study. The course had four sections, with 89 possible participants. There were 84 individuals who participated in this survey. The course was made up mostly of pre-service teachers pursuing an undergraduate degree in education, and some master's level students in the Guidance and Counseling program and School Psychology program. These students all plan to obtain degrees which will allow them to work in the schools. The researcher followed the guidelines the university set up regarding research participation prior to conducting my research. The survey was handed out in person during their class period with the professor's permission. Consent was also addressed along with the survey. All students had an equal chance of participation, regardless of their sexual orientation.

### *Instrumentation*

The survey entitled: Perceptions of Gay Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning Youth Issues in the Schools, was constructed by the researcher. The survey

had 13 questions and used a Likert scale. The participants were asked to circle the number that corresponded to their belief/perceptions. The survey was designed to be easy to fill out, and did not take more than 10 minutes. A copy of the finalized survey is located in Appendix A.

### *Data Collection*

Permission was sought from the university prior to collecting data. This occurred during the spring semester of 2006/2007. Once permission was granted, individuals who were enrolled in the course were selected to receive the survey. A meeting was set up with the professor of the course to discuss the ins-and-outs of the survey. We then set up dates to administer the survey. Each of the four class sections was included. Once in the classroom, the researcher discussed consent to participate in the approved research. The finalized consent form is located in Appendix B. A brief description of the researcher's objectives were discussed, as well as risks and benefits, time commitment, confidentiality, right to withdraw, and IRB approval. No signed consent form was needed. Participants were also informed that if any concerns or uneasy feelings were brought up by the survey, to contact the counseling center on campus. Handouts with the contact information if needed were given to all participants. The survey was handed out and when the participants finished, they put the completed survey in a manila envelope in the front of the room. If the student did not want to participate, they were asked to put the non-completed survey in the manila envelope. This was done to protect the participant's confidentiality and their right to withdraw. The participants were allowed ample time to complete the instrument and the manila envelope was collected by the researcher at the end of the class.



*Data Analysis*

Frequency and percentages were run on the data to address the research objectives.

*Limitations*

A limitation of the survey was that it had no measures of validity or reliability because it is was unique to this study. Students from only one university participated, therefore the results may not be generalized to other students in other demographic areas.

## Chapter Four: Results

### *Introduction*

A survey was given to pre-service educators in order to gain access to their perceptions of GLBTQ students and their perception of GSAs. It is this author's intent to delve deeper into individual's perceptions of GSAs to see if there are any underlying themes involving people's perceptions of this type of school-based support group. This chapter will include results of the data collection broken down through each of the 13 questions on the survey.

### *Item analysis*

**Question 1: I feel comfortable interacting with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth.**

Of the participants, 4.8% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 80.9%. Those who answered neutral made up 14.3% of those surveyed.

**Question 2: I would feel comfortable if a student disclosed his or her sexual orientation to me.**

Of the participants, 6% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 76.2%. Those who answered neutral made up 17.9% of those surveyed.

**Question 3: I am familiar with resources available for GLBTQ youth.**

Of the participants, 63.1% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 10.8%. Those who answered neutral made up 26.2% of those surveyed.

**Question 4: I am an advocate for GLBTQ students.**

Of the participants, 26.2% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 31%. Those who answered neutral made up 42.9% of those surveyed.

**Question 5: GLBTQ issues should not be discussed in the schools.**

Of the participants, 67.9% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 10.7%. Those who answered neutral made up 21.4% of those surveyed.

**Question 6: I have heard youth using GLBTQ terms in a derogatory way (i.e. "that's gay").**

Of the participants, 7.2% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 91.7%. Those who answered neutral made up 1.2% of those surveyed.

**Question 7: If I heard a student using GLBTQ terms in a derogatory way (i.e. "that's gay"), I would stop it.**

Of the participants, 28.6% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 50%. Those who answered neutral made up 21.4% of those surveyed.

**Question 8: I have used GLBTQ terms in a derogatory way (i.e. "that's gay").**

Of the participants, 23.8% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 63.1%. Those who answered neutral made up 13.1% of those surveyed.

**Question 9: I am in favor of a school-based support group for GLBTQ students and their allies, such as a gay-straight alliance (GSA).**

Of the participants, 7.2% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 69%. Those who answered neutral made up 23.8% of those surveyed.

**Question 10: I m familiar with the purpose of a school-based support group, such as a GSA.**

Of the participants, 26.2% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 45.3%. Those who answered neutral made up 28.6% of those surveyed.

**Question 11: I am familiar with the activities involved with being a member of a GSA.**

Of the participants, 61.9% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agreed/strongly agreed was 14.3%. Those who answered neutral made up 23.8% of those surveyed.

**Question 12: I would be willing to be a member of a GSA.**

Of the participants, 40.4% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who agree/strongly agreed was 30.9%. Those who answered neutral made up 28.6% of those surveyed.

**Question 13: A GSA should not be allowed in the schools.**

Of the participants, 67.6% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who strongly agreed with the statement was 2.4%. Zero percentage

of those surveyed disagreed with the statement. The percentage of those who answered neutral made up 29.8% of those surveyed.

## Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### *Introduction*

Research illustrate that most GLBTQ students across America are experiencing turbulence in their daily lives, whether in school or not. GLBTQ youths are being hassled, disregarded, and often unheard. GLBTQ youth often feel alone, underrepresented, and ignored, which as the research illustrates, can lead to depression, thoughts of suicide, attempting suicide, or completing suicide (Gibson, 1989). This is a problem that cannot be ignored. A good place to start addressing the problems of GLBTQ youth is in the schools. The chapter that follows will include limitations, conclusions, and recommendations from the survey conducted.

### *Conclusions*

Though the majority of the pre-service educators surveyed felt comfortable interacting with GLBTQ youth, and if a student disclosed his or her sexual orientation, it was alarming to find out that only 31% agreed/strongly agreed that they were an advocate for GLBTQ students. Kosciw (2004) found that 90% of the 887 GLBTQ youth surveyed reported hearing homophobic remarks in their school frequently. "Fag" or "dyke" used in a hurtful way, or the use of the word "gay," to mean something that is supposed to be foul as in "that's so gay" were reported most frequently. Almost 82% reported hearing homophobic comments from other students, while 18.8% reported the same homophobic remarks from staff. GLBTQ students are being bombarded with homophobic comments in the schools. If the staff does not feel they are advocates for GLBTQ students, how can we expect such hateful language to cease? Educators have a

unique ethical code in which the profession has set up. It involves being an advocate for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation.

An additional finding from this survey found that almost 92% of the participants have heard youth using GLBTQ terms in a derogatory way (i.e. “that’s gay”), which backs up Kosciw’s (2004) research, that derogatory and hurtful language is very present in today’s school climate. An overwhelming majority of those surveyed admitted to hearing such language by youth, but only about 50% agreed/strongly agreed that if they heard a student using such language they would stop it. This result can maybe be explained by the language in which those surveyed have used. In question eight, almost 64% of those surveyed stated that they themselves have used GLBTQ terms in a derogatory way. The same offensive terms trying to be eradicated from student’s mouths may be identical to those uttered by staff. This is an alarming finding that needs to be addressed.

In respect to gay-straight alliances (GSAs), most participants were in favor of such a group, almost 69% agreed/strongly agreed, while only almost 7% strongly disagreed/disagreed with such a support group. The support was there, but the participants did not seem to know what a GSA is or does. Almost 30% reported that they were not familiar with the purpose of a GSA, and only almost 14% agreed that they were familiar with the activities involved with being a member of a GSA. One may conclude, from these findings that there is not a lot of information about GSAs being taught to pre-service educators.

An additional finding is that a little less than half of the participants, 40%, would not be a willing member of a GSA. It is interesting that even though most admit to not

knowing the purpose of the support group or the activities that members take part in, they still would not be willing to being a member. It is not just the members who benefit from such a support group, but the school and community as well (Bass & Kaufman, 1996).

### *Recommendations*

There are many individuals who are involved in a student's life. It is this researcher's recommendation that all individuals working in the schools address GLBTQ students' needs and desires. This section will be broken down into specific recommendations for a variety of professionals working in the school system.

### *Administrators*

Administrators play an integral part in the school system. One recommendation to address GLBTQ issues in the school is as simple as not assuming heterosexuality. Constant assumption of heterosexuality leaves GLBTQ students and staff invisible. Such invisibility is detrimental to ones sense of self and belonging. The school itself and its staff must be inclusive in their language and attitudes. GLBTQ people are found on every staff, in every classroom, and every parent-teacher conference. It is imperative to not assume heterosexuality.

Another recommendation for administrators is to provide training for faculty and staff. In order for the staff to feel equipped to deal with GLBTQ issues, they need to know the basics. Providing such training may help staff become more aware of the issues of the GLBTQ community. It may also help them develop sensitivity skills when dealing with a GLBTQ student or parent. Issues are constantly changing in the GLBTQ community, and it is important to keep up in order to better understand the needs of GLBTQ youth and their families.



### *Teachers*

Teachers have a wonderful opportunity to connect with students on a regular basis. Teachers don't usually have the luxury of choosing who is going to be in their classrooms, and chances are teachers will come across a GLBTQ student, a student with a GLBTQ guardian, or a GLBTQ staff member. One recommendation to address GLBTQ issues is to inform teachers on GLBTQ issues and about anti-GLBTQ bias. Teachers can learn about GLBTQ history, culture, and current concerns by reading journals and books, attending a GLBTQ lecture, or simply having a conversation with openly GLBTQ people. The first step is to inform. No other steps can be achieved without the foundation of knowledge.

Another recommendation is for teachers to create a safe and equitable classroom. This can be done by using inclusive language that applies to everyone (for example, "date" rather than "boyfriend" or "girlfriend"). The classroom should not be a place where hurtful language should exist, so challenge derogatory language used in the classroom. Ignoring such language is very damaging to everyone involved. Also teachers can create a safe environment by inviting GLBTQ guest speakers into their classrooms, or simply by putting up GLBTQ friendly posters or signs. This is an effective way to display that the class room is a safe place for all.

A recommendation for those who are education pre-service teachers, such as the classes I surveyed, would be to spend more time simply informing the students on GLBTQ issues. As found in their study, most of the participants were not informed on issues within the GLBTQ community. How can we expect these pre-service educators to be advocates for GLBTQ students if they are not informed themselves?

### *Guidance Counselors*

This researcher recommends being a role model for students. Actions speak louder than words. The most effective way to get rid of GLBTQ bias is to consistently behave in ways that embrace everyone's diversity and condemns discrimination of any kind. Guidance counselors are usually afforded more time to walk the halls and to see what is really going on in the hallways and lunchrooms of the school. If guidance counselors hear hate speech, stop it. Be consistent in addressing the issue, and make sure that students know that hate speech is not allowed, whether in school or not.

Providing support for students is an excellent way to address GLBTQ issues in the school. Gay-straight alliances (GSAs) offer students a sense of belonging as well as the chance to positively change the climate in their school. GSAs welcome membership from any student, regardless of sexual orientation. Consider being a GSA advisor and helping students in the school to form a group that provides support and understanding. Support groups are a great way to promote equality.

### *Further recommendation*

This researcher recommends that more research be conducted on GLBTQ youth issues in school. The topic is important to address at all stages of schooling, from elementary through college. Only when more research is done can we begin to see what issues are effecting our GLBTQ youth. It was this researcher's intent to shed some light on a topic that needed to be addressed, and to highlight that education and advocacy need to be in place for all staff dealing with students. Whether we are educating primary school aged children, or pre-service teachers, GLBTQ issues should not remain invisible.

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## Appendix A: Survey

**Pre-Service Teachers Perceptions of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning Youth Issues in the School: A Survey**

**Directions:**

Circle the number that corresponds to their belief/perceptions. When you have finished you may put the survey in the manila envelope provided. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in the survey you may turn it in blank.

**STRONGLY DISAGREE      DISAGREE      NUETRAL      AGREE      STRONGLY AGREE**

**1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5**

1) I feel comfortable interacting with gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered, or questioning (GLBTQ) youth.

**1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5**

2) I would feel comfortable if a student disclosed his or her sexual orientation to me.

**1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5**

3) I am familiar with resources available for GLBTQ youth.

**1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5**

4) I am an advocate for GLBTQ students.

**1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5**

5) GLBTQ issues should not be discussed in the schools.

**1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5**

6) I have heard youth using GLBTQ terms in a derogatory way (i.e. "that's gay").

**1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5**

7) If I heard a student using GLBTQ terms in a derogatory way (i.e. "that's gay"), I would stop it.

**1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5**



Appendix B: Consent Form



## **Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research**

**Title:** Coming out or Forced: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning Youth Issues in the Schools

**Investigator:**

Eric Motzko

Phone number: 715-505-4892

E-mail address: [motzkoe@uwstout.edu](mailto:motzkoe@uwstout.edu)

**Research Sponsor:**

Dr. Amy Gillett

Phone number: 715-232-2680

E-mail address: [gilletta@uwstout.edu](mailto:gilletta@uwstout.edu)

**Description:**

It is this researcher's objective:

1. To research and determine whether gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning (GLBTQ) youth are receiving the support they request and deserve from the schools they attend.
2. Determine the level of which GLBTQ youth are being harassed and ignored in schools across America.
3. Document the perceptions of Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs).
4. Document benefits GSAs can have on our school system.

**Risks and Benefits:**

With every research project comes risks and benefits. One possible risk in completing this survey is that the survey may cause you to question your beliefs dealing with sexual orientation. One possible benefit is that the survey may cause you to become more aware of known bias when it comes to sexual orientation.

**Time Commitment and Payment:**

The commitment to completing this survey is approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

**Confidentiality:**

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in this survey. Your name will not be included on any documents. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of this information.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into the investigator.

**IRB Approval:**

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have

any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subjects, please contact the IRB Administrator.

**Investigator:**

Eric Motzko

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**Advisor:**

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**Statement of Consent:**

By completing the following survey you agree to participate in the project entitled, *Coming out or Forced: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning Youth Issues in the Schools*