

School Psychology Research Collaboration Conference

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Personal Research Agenda

Previous Scholarly Efforts

Previously, I developed a research proposal that would investigate the effect of a homophobia intervention for secondary students - a replication and extension of a study conducted in Australia; however, I have been unable to pursue this project. One research project currently underway examines the impact of sexual orientation and gender expression as those factors may impact young college students' academic and psychosocial functioning. This project is has been accepted for a presentation at the National Association of School Psychologist 2009 Conference and will be used as a preliminary model for research with middle and high school students.

In order to support my research and recruit participants, I have begun work on creating a national network of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (GLBTQ) youth support groups. Currently, I have recruited 27 organizations that serve GLBTQ youth from 18 different states. These organizations have agreed to review and participate in studies that they feel are consistent with their mission, promote positive outcomes for youth, and provide insight into service needs for youth. In addition to my research activities, I have also recently become the co-chair of the NASP GLBTQ committee. This position has given me the opportunity to participate in the efforts of a national organization in addressing the needs of GLBTQ youth and has helped to inform my knowledge of various resources, organizations, and enriched my research interests.

General Interest

Presently, I am interested in researching the experiences of sexual minority youth in schools and how those students balance the pressures of school, family, and societal heterosexist expectations. School climate surveys conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2008) indicate that sexual minority youth perceive the school environment as a hostile environment – experiencing verbal, physical, and sexual harassment with little intervention from school personnel or family members resulting in lower academic achievement and less aspirations to obtain post-secondary education. However, these reports do not test empirical relationships, but provide basic survey

and anecdotal data regarding perceptions of the school environment. They fail to address specific relationships among variables such as gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, academic achievement, harassment, social development, and other psychosocial outcomes. I have also become very interested in models of sexual identity development for teens, specifically the differential developmental trajectory model proposing a very complex, comprehensive view of the development of same-sex attracted individuals (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Specific Research Questions

My research agenda can be characterized into two distinct areas – the first involves identifying/characterizing variables that affect psychosocial and academic development of GLBTQ youth and the second focuses on the impact of anti-homophobic interventions for secondary school students. Specific questions include: 1) How do gender expression and sexual orientation affect the psychosocial and academic functioning of GLBTQ youth?; 2) What is the relationship among a youth's sexual orientation, gender expression, gender, and disclosure status (“out,” “not out,” or “out to some”) and levels of physical harassment, verbal harassment, and sexual harassment?; 3) Do adult models of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1979) fit youth sexual identity development?; and 4) What are the effects of an anti-homophobia intervention on secondary students' perceptions and behaviors toward sexual minority populations?

Future Directions and Implications

Within the next three to five years, I envision myself developing these into self-sustaining lines of research funded initially through internal grants from my university, and then expanding to obtain funding from possible sources such as the American Psychological Foundation (e.g., Wayne Placek Award), National Institute of Mental Health, Center for Disease Control, the Ford Foundation (through its focus on adolescent sexuality), and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Research efforts will be coordinated through the GLBTQ youth network I have created as well as the NASP and Division 16 of the APA. This work would hopefully lead to a better understanding of GLBTQ youth and to better train school psychologists.

References

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Abstract

Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression:

Effects on Secondary Students Psychosocial and Academic Functioning

Although diversity issues abound in research literature today in the field of school psychology, one group that has been historically overlooked is sexual minority youth. Adolescents have been found to judge the acceptability of peers not only on sexual orientation, but also in terms of the conformity to gender-typical norms. Approximately 75% of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth (GLBTQ) reported hearing homophobic or sexist remarks at school, with only 20% of students reporting that school personnel intervene frequently when hearing such remarks. Additionally, approximately 60% of GLBTQ youth report feeling unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation, with 38% reporting feeling unsafe due to their gender expression. These students reported they are more likely to miss school or classes, and less likely to pursue post-secondary education. Given this type of environment, and based on previous research, it is clear that sexual minority youth may be at risk for drug/alcohol abuse, depression, and suicidal ideation/attempts.

The proposed study seeks to examine the relationship of age, gender, sexual orientation, disclosure of sexual identity, and gender expression (i.e., conformity) predict psychosocial outcomes (e.g., harassment, internalizing problems, externalizing problems) and school problems. Participants will be recruited from a variety of community mental health, support groups, and organizations who work with sexual minority youth throughout the United States. It is expected that sexual orientation and gender expression will be associated with a significant proportion of the variance related to harassment, internalizing problems, externalizing problems, and school problems. Identification of specific variables that lead to difficulties in these areas may help to identify areas where targeted interventions should be addressed in schools.

Vision of a Collaborative Multi-site Research Program

Specific Issues and Questions to be Addressed

The initial study I propose will address issues related to youth's experiences of harassment, psychosocial difficulties, and academic difficulties as they relate to age, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, and disclosure of sexual orientation. Specifically, the following questions would be addressed: 1) To what extent to age, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, and disclosure of sexual orientation predict verbal harassment? Physical harassment? Sexual harassment? Internalizing problems? Externalizing problems? School problems?

Context and Participants Required

Given the difficulties in recruiting or gaining access to sexual minority students within the school setting, I have created a national network of different agencies (community mental health centers, church organizations, research institutes, etc.) that provide services or work with this population. To date, over 27 organizations from California, to Texas, to Connecticut have offered to be a part of this collaborative research effort. These organizations were chosen due to their willingness to support research with sexual minority youths. Organizations within this network serve up to 200 youth in their respective programs. Several of these organizations partner with other research organizations such as the Pennsylvania State University, University of Denver, and the Hetrick-Martin Institute. Youths in these organizations range in age from 10- to 24-years-old. The diverse geographic locales of these organizations as well as their unique focus (i.e., support group, runaway/homeless shelters, school partners, etc.) will add to the richness of the data collected for this project.

Ideally, this research would be conducted in the school setting in an attempt to reach all students who may identify as a sexual minority individual. Youths who seek services through local support groups, Gay-Straight Alliances, church organizations, etc. may ultimately be different than those youth with no social support system or those youth who are "closeted" to the parents, teachers, peers – the world. This research is very difficult given the controversial nature of sexual orientation and gender expression as viewed by numerous school districts throughout the United States. While these constraints may limit

research on this population, I believe the outlined plan of partnering with youth organizations can begin to illuminate more issues impacting sexual minority youth.

Estimate of the Number of Participants

Based on a power analysis, a sample size of 647 individuals would be necessary to achieve an acceptable Type I error rate ($\alpha = .05$, power = .80). To account for any attrition, missing data, or other factors, a total goal sample size of approximately 700 participants would be set. Having recruited 27 organizations that are willing to participate in a large-scale, national research study, I believe I will obtain a sufficient number of participants. A regression analysis will be conducted to examine the relationships of variables.

Advantages and Challenges of a Collaborative Multi-site Research Project

One of the greatest advantages of a collaborative multi-site research project, specifically the described project, is to obtain a sample that may more closely resemble youth at the national level. Studies conducted in one locale or with one organization may have limitations in the generalizability of the results obtained. An even greater advantage to a collaborative project will have the potential to help build future collaborative initiatives and assist organizations in providing a “bigger picture” of what trends and factors are affecting sexual minority youth. Yet another advantage pertains to the wealth of ideas generated when multiple sites are involved in a project. The exchange of ideas in reviewing the research findings with multiple sites could possibly lead to even more ideas for future research questions, and public agencies could use of the research results to help identify new programs that may help meet the needs of sexual minority youth, or to advocate for sexual minority youth.

While much can be gained from this type of collaborative research initiative, there are challenges that must be addressed. As more and more sites may participate in a project, the detailed aspects involved in research may grow exponentially. With more sites, there must be greater coordination in ensuring that the research questions, methods, and measures are acceptable to all sites. Each site may have a different capacity in dealing with research proposals (i.e., review boards, consent requirements, privacy/confidentiality issues, consent/assent procedures, etc.) as well as different laws across various states that

may limit minors' participation in research activities. In addition to these challenges, the actual collection and management of data on a large-scale. Sufficient resources must be in place to ensure timely collection, problem-solving, data storage issues, analysis, and dissemination of findings. I believe my participation in the SPRCC will ensure that I can successfully meet the challenges of this project and contribute valuable information to the scientific community.

Estimate of Budget

Category	Funds Needed	Explanation
<i>Salaries/Wages</i> Release time/ Compensation for PI	\$6000	Release time for summer to prepare the grant proposal and initial draft of literature review and methods.
Research Assistant	\$10hr X 20 hrs wk 34 Wks = \$6800	This position will assist coordinating the communication among multiple sites, data scoring/entry, and possibly assistance in manuscript production.
<i>Maintenance/Operations</i> Copy costs	 \$350	 This figure is the amount needed to duplicate non-copyrighted materials.
Postage	\$650	This figure is the amount needed to ship materials to and from data collection sites.
<i>Materials</i> Behavior Assessment System for Children-2 (BASC-2) Self-Report of Personality Adolescent (SRP Adolescent 12-21)	 \$1000 (\$33.50 for pkg of 25 + shp/hdlg)	 The BASC-2 SRP Adolescent is the dependent variable for this study. It has shown good reliability and has data regarding the validity of its scales for children.
Conformity to Feminine Norms (CFNI)/ Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI)	\$0 (only copying costs)	The CFNI and CMNI are reliable instruments in measuring conformity to gender-typical norms for adults. To date, no study has examined this instruments use with adolescents.
Background Questionnaire	\$0 (only copying costs)	Background Questionnaire will be used to obtain information regarding the participant's age, gender, ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, disclosure status, and experiences of verbal, physical, and sexual harassment.
Total Costs		\$14800