

METHODS TO ENSURE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR
HOMOSEXUAL STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL:
A LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

By

Regina Durand Wehner

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Masters in
Guidance and Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

Investigation Advisor

The Graduate School
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Burkhardt", is written over a horizontal line.

Investigation Advisor

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ABSTRACT

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Methods to Ensure a Safe Environment for Homosexual Students in High School: A
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Literature Review and Analysis

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The purpose of this study was to examine various methods used in schools to provide a safe environment for homosexual students. Homosexuality and some of the effects on teenagers was discussed throughout the paper.

A history of literature regarding homosexuality, homosexual adolescents, and measures school administration can take was examined. This literature review uncovered studies that revealed a safe environment for gay/lesbian/transgender youth is much needed. These studies included many statistics of abuse and harassment homosexual student face in schools every day.

Several methods were examined for school administrations to take action regarding homosexual students. Schools should provide training for staff while also responding quickly and effectively to degrading comments. Homosexuality should be included in multicultural teaching and support systems formed, such as groups. Gay and lesbian students must be allowed entrance into school sponsored events and be treated equally. Two specific programs, Project 10 and the Massachusetts Commission, were examined in detail as models for other schools. These preventative measures are identified to attempt to provide a safer environment for homosexual students in the nation's schools.

The suggested measures were analyzed and several programs were addressed based on possible effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the measure. Outside factors within the school system were also taken into account when examining the proposed suggestions. Though a thorough review of literature revealed very little research on the effectiveness of programs to promote acceptance and safety of homosexual students, what research has been done indicated that support groups and specific programs were a positive impact in the students' lives. Possible recommendations and future research include more extensive research regarding support groups, more empirical data for Project 10 results, and more statistics regarding the suggestions given to schools.

Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to the homosexual students who silently suffer throughout their school years. Even though the fight may not become easier as an adult, you may finally begin to have people listen to you. Your fight is just beginning, but you are shaping the world in which we live. Keep your strength, hold your head high, and never be ashamed to be who you are.

I would like to thank everyone that helped me through this tumultuous time in my life. Dr. Howard Parkhurst, my advisor, who put up with our long distance correspondence with ease, thank you. Thanks to my friends and family who have pushed me forward when I was dragging my feet. And finally, I want to thank my husband, Matt, who has been my constant companion, the strength that pushed me up, and anchor that held me down. I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual* are used to classify individuals according to the gender of their sexual preference. A philological combination of Greek and Latin essentials, homosexual came to be the term placed on individuals who love others of the same sex (Bullough, 1979). Many descriptors have been attached to homosexuality, such as illness, sin, disturbance of behavior, crime, way of life, or a normal variation of sexual conduct (Bullough, 1979). Throughout history, homosexuality has been present in most civilizations. "Homosexuality existed in ancient Egypt, in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, in ancient China, and in ancient India" (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999, p. 2).

Gay and lesbian relationships are reasonably common, but they still do not obtain general acceptance by society (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999). "Some studies suggest that as many as ten percent of Americans are lesbian or gay." (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999, p. 175). The Human Rights Watch states that more than two million students in school are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or perceived to be so (Bailey, 2003). According to Frankfurt (2000), every school contains some homosexual students, no matter what the population percentage. Weiler (2003) estimates that ten percent of all students are considered totally homosexual.

Many attitudes have changed considering being gay was firmly prohibited and thought to be dangerous as recently as the 1950's (Ross, 2003). For most, being homosexual means a total lifestyle and way of thinking. It has also become important to publicly recognize one's homosexuality to support one's sexual preference (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999). The public recognition, or "coming out," is connected

to existing as a sexual minority and possessing a positive self-identity (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000).

According to Ross (2003), homosexuality is not an illness or a path followed by adolescents or adults; it is simply a normal variation of sexuality that may be genetically predetermined. Most researchers and individuals struggle over the debate of the origins of homosexuality. Some believe that homosexuality lies in biological or psychological categories (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999). The initial researchers alleged that homosexuality was hereditary, but the psychological perspective soon replaced these beliefs. Most researchers today, along with many homosexuals, have returned to the biological foundation and claim that homosexuality is inherent; people are born gay or lesbian (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999).

Although much research claimed that homosexuality was inborn and not immoral or a sin, most of the public still had very strong disagreements with homosexuality. The disagreement between both parties was enflamed on Friday, June 27, 1969, which marked a milestone for the gay liberation movement. The Stonewall Inn, a popular gay men's bar in Greenwich Village in New York City, was regularly invaded by police because of the patrons of the bar. Normally docile, the clientele of the bar became outraged and fought the police, who blockaded themselves in the bar (Bullough, 1979). Although only a few arrests were made, the situation did not end there. The next evening, an assembly of homosexuals and supporters collected at Sheridan Square to dispute the police action (Bullough, 1979). "Confrontation went on for four more nights before things quieted down, but the gays were no longer content to be as docile as they had been, and out of the Stonewall riots came the Gay Liberation Front." (Bullough,

1979, p. 63). According to Bass and Kaufmann (1996), Stonewall indicated the moment when homosexuals began making demands and stopped asking for forgiveness.

In 1965, the first demonstration was held outside the White House as gays and lesbians picketed to end discrimination against homosexuals (Bass & Kaufmann, 1996). Militant protests arose in 1965 in San Francisco when a fund-raising ball sponsored by the Council on Religion and the Homosexual was raided by police (Bass & Kaufmann, 1996). More protesting occurred in 1967 at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, along with more police raids in Los Angeles (Bass & Kaufmann, 1996). "By the time the Stonewall riots took place, homosexuality had become a matter for public discussion, and the formerly hostile opinion to it had been undermined" (Bullough, 1979, p. 75). The Stonewall riots began to indicate a change in the homosexual movement when support groups for gays went public, and formerly taboo words like "gay," "homosexual," and "lesbian," emerged (Bullough, 1979). As the movement took hold for many homosexuals, they charted the path for gays and lesbians in the 1970's and 1980's.

The gay liberation movement owes some credit to the raised awareness of the civil rights movement, antiwar movements, and the women's liberation movement that came before (Bass & Kaufmann, 1996). Since the Stonewall riots, the gay liberation movement has developed at a rapid rate (Bass & Kaufmann, 1996). By June 1970, 5,000 to 10,000 marched at the Christopher Street parade to commemorate the Stonewall riots; by 1975 events were organized in dozens of cities (Comstock, 1991). The number of homosexual organizations grew from fifty to over eight hundred in four years, and the number was in the thousands by the 1970's (Comstock, 1991). The American Psychiatric Association eliminated homosexuality from its listing of illnesses in 1973, finally

removing a stigmatizing label for gays and lesbians (Bass & Kaufmann, 1996). "Not only was the number of visible lesbians and gay men increasing, their organizations spoke out and demanded recognition, respect, and equality in previously forbidden realms-at home, in school, with their biological families, and in the media" (Comstock, 1991, p. 22).

Now, gay and lesbian adolescents are following this same uncharted territory. They are discovering how to have relationships in school, how to present significant others to parents, and how to learn about love while learning about life and survival skills (Lipsky, 1998). "One development was the formation of the Gay-Straight Alliance that would have three functions: help straight students understand that they had gay peers; demonstrate that gay teens were supported by their schools; and end the students' isolation by helping them recognize that they weren't alone" (Lipsky, 1998, p. 20). In the beginning of the 1990's, there were no Gay-Straight Alliances in schools, but by 1997, 400 were formed across the country. Many describe the Gay-Straight Alliances as positive ways for gay and lesbian teens to gain support and information at school without completely coming out of the closet (Torrance, 2000). The formation of these clubs has been met with protests, but the Equal Access Act signed by President Reagan in 1984 ensures that all groups have the right to meet at school (Archer, 1996).

Feelings of same-sex sexual attraction are normal developmental stages, but for three to ten percent of adolescents, the romantic desirability of the same-sex will continue to grow. According to Bailey (2003), adolescents start to come to grips with issues of gender identity and homosexuality in middle school grades. During these teen years, many gay and lesbian adolescents have heterosexual dating experiences, but most claim

hesitant reactions towards them (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999). While it may not lead to sexual activity, full realization of sexual identity typically happens by the age of fifteen or sixteen (Weiler, 2003).

In the mid-1980's, the gay adolescent civil-rights movement began because of a survey conducted by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (Lipsky, 1998). The survey studied youth suicides and found that gay teenagers were three times more likely than straight teenagers to attempt suicide. According to Vare and Norton (1998), close to 1,500 homosexual youth kill themselves every year. This number began to raise awareness of the difficulties homosexual youth were experiencing, and advocates for homosexual youth rose up everywhere (Lipsky, 1998).

Because the gay youth civil-rights movement has begun, gay teens are addressing their sexuality at earlier ages (Lipsky, 1998). But the amount of bullying, anti-gay harassment, and prejudice against homosexual students has not decreased. "For example, a 1997-1998 survey of outstanding high school students listed in *Who's Who Among American High School Students* found that nearly half (48%) admitted they were prejudiced against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, and two-thirds (66%) said that depiction of same-sex relationships on television or film was offensive" (Ryan, 2001, p. 224). A recent survey showed that teens who identify themselves as gay or lesbian are more likely to have attempted suicide, are five times more probable to be absent from school, and four times more likely to be threatened with a weapon (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999). A survey of 249 lesbian, gay, and bisexual teens revealed that 62% had been verbally harassed, thirteen percent had been hit while teachers had verbally harassed 23%, and 37% had lost friends because of their same-sex preference

(Baker, 2002). A study conducted in high schools by the American Association of University Women discovered that being called 'gay' upset students more than any other form of sexual harassment (Baker, 2002). Baker (2002) claimed that continued research showed that verbal and physical harassment towards students thought to be homosexual was widespread and frequently occurred in high schools, middle schools, colleges and even elementary schools

These exhausting and harsh assaults take place on several levels and take a considerable toll, both socially and psychologically, on homosexual students (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Across the nation, gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth endure a tremendously aggressive climate (Frankfurt, 2000). A study conducted in 1997 in Des Moines, Iowa, reported antigay remarks, like "faggot," "dyke," and "homo" could be heard 25 times a day or every 14 minutes on the average (Frankfurt, 2000). In many cases, the students used these words without knowing how they may influence their peers (Frankfurt, 2000). According to Frankfurt (2000, p. 29),

Given a hostile climate that often goes unchecked, GLBT students are not likely to feel they belong to the school community, and the rest of the community perceives that these students are somehow easily dismissed. As a result, GLBT students are four times as likely as the general student population to report being threatened with a weapon at school and tend to drop out at a rate of 26% each year.

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) reported that over 68% of homosexual students felt unsafe at school due to their sexual preference (Weiler, 2003). There are more awareness, support, and counseling services, but young

homosexuals are still tormented with ridicule and rejection (Strong, DeVault & Werner Sayad, 1999). The belief that a school may not seem to have any homosexual students may be a sign of the oppressive or intimidating atmosphere in the school, inhibiting these students from sensing enough security to admit their sexuality (Riddle, 1996).

Assumptions

It is assumed that the school population typically consists of some homosexual and/or bisexual students, given the widespread nature of homosexuality in the general population. It is also assumed that these students have personally experienced some forms of harassment, prejudice, or discrimination due to their perceived sexual orientation.

Problem Statement

As the statistics show, the majority of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender youth are threatened and unsafe in the school environment. Given that an assumed percentage of the school population is gay or lesbian and has experienced some type of intolerance, this paper intends to research what methods are suggested to combat this problem and analyze the effectiveness of the methods.

Definition of Terms

Anti-gay prejudice - a strong dislike, fear, or hatred of gay men and lesbians because of their homosexuality.

Heterosexism - "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any

nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (Herek, 1992, p. 89).

Heterosexual bias - seeing the world in heterosexual terms and ignoring homosexuals

Homophobia/transphobia - an irrational fear or phobia of gay men, lesbians, and transgender individuals.

CHAPTER TWO

A Review of the Literature

Gay and lesbian teenagers have begun addressing their sexuality at earlier and earlier ages (Lipsky, 1998). Some reasons for this include the gay liberation movement, surveys claiming high suicide attempts, formation of support groups, and slow forming acceptance of the homosexual population. Homosexual adolescents have experienced high rates of physical, mental, and emotional abuse for years in the public schools (Frankfurt, 2000). Given the assumed percentage of homosexual students and the harassment they endure, this paper intends to research and analyze the effectiveness of methods suggested to combat this problem.

Many changes take place during adolescence, including cognitive, physical, and psychological changes, which can cause confusion and stress. A part of this complicated time is discovering sexual identity. "Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth can begin to feel different from their same gender peers as early as kindergarten although there is no sexual connotation to those feelings" (Weiler, 2003, p.11). Historically, researchers argued that gay youth did not exist, but presumed that children were neutral and formed sexual orientation later in life (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). Researchers did not begin to publish pragmatic articles regarding gay adolescents until the 1980's (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). Today, there is an estimated 10% homosexual population in schools, but many schools do not offer protection or information regarding the makeup of humans' sexual orientation (Weiler, 2004). According to Birden (2002), in any classroom, there will likely be one or two lesbian or gay students, at the very least.

As stated by Van Wormer and McKinney (2003, p. 411), "Many researchers agree that the prevalence of homophobia is by far the most damaging influence on lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth." Coming out as gay or lesbian can have many problems that are magnified for adolescents due to aggression, persecution, or hostility in schools (Pearson, 2003). According to Harrison (2003), the stress of trying to be considered 'normal' may generate feelings of loneliness and apprehension of being discovered. Homosexual youth swiftly learn that school regularly signifies mockery from staff, violence from peers, and denial from administration to discipline such incidences (Van Wormer & McKinney, 2003). So often, school teachers stay silent when anti-gay comments are used, while parents react to homosexual children with harassment and sometimes violence (Comstock, 1991). According to Van Wormer & McKinney (2003), the United States Department of Health and Human Services found gay and lesbian adolescents commit suicide two to three times more often than other youth. These higher numbers may be due to parental rejection, teacher harassment, or peer abuse.

"Many teachers, however, remain unaware of the truths regarding the extent to which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning abuse is occurring, the consequences of such verbal and physical violence on both the abused and the abusers, and the increasing probabilities of damage to educational opportunities and psychosocial development" (Birden, 2002, p. 53). Graziano (2003) claims that available studies have consistently shown that our educational system has become blind and mute on the topic of homosexuality.

School Administration

Schools, personnel, and all staff are required by law and the Constitution to protect all students, including gay and lesbian, from harassment (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). According to Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh (2000), school districts have a responsibility to move past the expression of anti-harassment procedures to actual execution and implementation of programs to provide a secure learning environment. It can only be believed by a true idealist that change is possible for homosexual students without the vigorous and intellectual involvement of the teachers (Birden, 2002).

There are many suggestions that have been provided in research for school administrators to assist gay and lesbian students. One idea discussed by many is providing training for all faculty and staff (Bailey, 2003). This training can take many forms, but above all, it must educate staff about the needs of homosexual adolescents. Weiler (2003) states that it is imperative to supply constant training, discussing the legal responsibilities staff have to look after and treat lesbian, gay, and bisexual students with respect. This training should be for all school personnel, such as teachers, custodians, office staff, coaches, bus drivers, and other support staff (Weiler, 2003). Some training sessions provide a summary of social and psychological research conducted about homosexuality, to give staff a greater understanding of the subject (Gevelinger & Zimmerman, 1997). This forum also offers the participants a chance to discuss personal uneasiness, anxiety, ignorance, and expectations (Gevelinger & Zimmerman, 1997). "Ensuring that the school has accurate information on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and

transgender youth is an important step in creating a more inclusive school community” (Frankfurt, 2000, p. 30).

Another important step for administration is to respond to degrading comments and slurs. Many teachers can reduce the possibility of violence by disrupting demeaning comments and name-calling (Wessler, 2003). Every school must have a policy in place regarding name-calling or other varieties of harassment that include, in specific wording, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender students (Bailey, 2003). Weiler (2003) suggests a school-wide document of “zero tolerance for anti-gay harassment, hate epithets, and slurs” should be created or included in a general school safety endeavor. It could also be important to include gay or lesbian staff in policies regarding nondiscrimination as role models for the homosexual students (Weiler, 2003). But more importantly, these policies must be enforced on a consistent basis by teachers, administration, and all staff members (Weiler, 2003). The staff can do this by actively overruling abuse or remarks that are made (Bailey, 2003). Teachers should also be aware of inclusive language regarding homosexuality (Taylor, 2000). This can be done by stating ‘spouse’ rather than ‘husband/wife’, ‘date’ instead of ‘boyfriend/girlfriend’, or ‘parent’ as a substitute for ‘mother’ and ‘father’ (Taylor, 2000).

These efforts can also focus on teaching the students that hate and hurting others are wrong and will not be tolerated (Gevelinger & Zimmerman, 1997). Bailey (2003) states that students are at an important time in their development, morally and cognitively, and school personnel have the duty to make them understand the value of differences. One way to do this is by providing correct information concerning sexual identity, maturity, and famous homosexuals throughout history (Weiler, 2003). But

before this, teachers must struggle with personal feelings concerning homosexuality, because much research shows that they often put up with gay bashing and homophobic comments (Crocco, 2001). Teachers and educators are in the position to make sure that every student belongs and feels that he/she matters as an individual, even the gay or lesbian student (Wessler, 2003). "Attitudes correlate with knowledge, so developing a sound knowledge base by reading or interacting is important" (Uribe, 1994, Summer, p. 169). A fear that has been expressed by educators is that talking about homosexuality will somehow 'create' it (Uribe, 1994, Summer). There is no evidence of this, but clinical knowledge points out adolescents will benefit from accurate information regarding sexuality (Uribe, 1994). Uribe (1994, Summer) also asserts that students benefit from unfailing messages that homosexuality does not establish an individual's value.

All schools should embrace gay and lesbian topics in the description of multiculturalism in order to support and foster the confidence of homosexual students (Graziano, 2003). According to Swartz (2003), homosexual matters can be presented in the classroom like other multicultural subjects, by writings, discussions, and literatures. Bailey (2003) suggests that the school administration inspect school libraries and develop the property to include homosexual fiction and nonfiction. The libraries are often the primary place gay and lesbian youth go for information, but there are usually little to no references on these issues (Bailey, 2003). Being informed is the initial step for school staff to produce a protected, positive environment for homosexual adolescents (Vare & Norton, 1998).

A large intervention for gay and lesbian students includes providing a support system for these students. It is important to recognize one or more trained staff persons to act as a safe person (Weiler, 2003). This can be a source of accurate information about issues such as gender identity or sexual orientation. Bailey (2003) recommends that it can be a faculty member, a counselor, a teacher, or school psychologist, but he/she must have proper sources and the motivation to lend a hand. Research discovered that many school counselors feel counseling a homosexual student regarding sexual orientation issues would be gratifying professionally (Tharinger & Wells, 2000). It is also important that the designated staff person be well-informed of the successful approaches when working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth; be up-to-date on community resources; and knowledgeable about executing anti-bias curriculums in schools (Weiler, 2004). This trained source must stay nonjudgmental and ensure that any information shared will remain confidential (Harrison, 2003). Students must know who this staff member is and putting rainbow stickers or safe zone posters on doors, walls, or windows are effective methods of identifying the safe person (Weiler, 2003).

Another support system for gay and lesbian students comes in the form of groups. Most of these groups are registered with the National Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) as official groups. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network is a national organization that contains more than 90 chapters (Bailey, 2003). The Network does not sponsor clubs, but does supply educational information to groups that register with the network (Reid, 2002). GLSEN provides training for staff, books, materials, and many other resources about homosexual issues (Bailey, 2003).

One popular group registered with the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network is the Gay Straight Alliance, or GSA. In October of 1995, students wanted to start a group to support gay and lesbian students and their heterosexual allies in Salt Lake City, Utah (Lee, 2002). Even though this was met with much difficulty, it became the first Gay Straight Alliance in the United States. GSA's must have a faculty adviser and be treated just as every other club in the school (Frankfurt, 2000). Today, over 400 of these support groups are present in schools across the nation (Frankfurt, 2000). "GSA's can play a major role in the daily lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth by creating a safe arena within which students can develop positive relationships with their peers and build relationships with understanding adult mentors" (Lee, 2002, p. 13). GSA's unique quality is that the members are not required to reveal their sexual orientation to be part of the group, which maintains comfort levels (Frankfurt, 2000). GSA's have been shown to develop confidence and encourage constructive school adjustments, as well as provide support and camaraderie to their members (Weiler, 2003). In both middle schools and high schools, a gay-straight alliance could be used as a diversity group open to students feeling isolated because of race, religion, physical attributes, or any other factor (Bailey, 2003). "Whenever possible, small discussion groups should be instituted, not to define an adolescent's sexual orientation but to provide a place where students can have access to unbiased information" (Uribe, 1994, Summer, p.171).

Another important group in the lives of young homosexual students is Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). This group is recognized for assisting parents to learn how to embrace their homosexual children (Gideonse, 1997).

Three years after the Stonewall riots in New York, Jeanne Manford marched in the Gay Pride Parade, holding a sign that claimed "PARENTS OF GAYS UNITE IN SUPPORT OF OUR CHILDREN" (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001). Soon after, groups were spread throughout the country, and in 1981 several groups came together as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001). Parental acceptance and support is crucial to advancing the mental and physical well-being of homosexual persons (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001). "PFLAG, an organization dedicated to this goal, has as its mission the support for family members, education of the public, and advocacy for equal rights for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals" (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001, p. 681). For young people, losing their parents' love may be the largest fear of 'coming out,' and PFLAG has long symbolized conquering that fear (Gideonse, 1997). The mission of PFLAG is to: provide support to family, educate the masses, and advocate for equality for homosexual individuals (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001).

Many other homosexual support groups exist, both at the national and local level. No matter what group is used, it should assist by providing research, data, and support (Gevelinger & Zimmerman, 1997). These support groups often reach out to the community and invite speakers to the meetings or school events to discuss homosexuality. Many people feel uncomfortable about this topic, and therefore have little information on the realities of being homosexual (Frankfurt, 2000). Outside speakers are useful to answer questions and dismiss myths, not only to the students, but to the whole community also (Frankfurt, 2000). Frankfurt (2000) has found that such speakers usually provide useful information and dispel some discomfort surrounding the subject of homosexuality.

Administration must guarantee homosexual students the same admission to school-related events (Weiler, 2004). Activities such as clubs, teams, and other social events should be overtly accessible to every student (Weiler, 2004). But Weiler (2004) suggests that proms or 'date' events be decided by the homosexual student since this can be an uncomfortable situation. The decisions should be based upon choice, though, and not the result of feeling unwelcome or uncomfortable at the prom (Weiler, 2003). Art shows, film festivals or drama productions are other great extra-curricular activities where gay characters can be positively represented (Riddle, 1996). Coaches must be sensitive to homophobia in sports and in the locker room and should prevent anti-gay slurs, since these extra-curricular activities most often cause the most stress for homosexual students (Riddle, 1996).

School administration should be alert, but wary of interventions regarding sexual

diversity (Weiler, 2003). Weiler (2003) suggests meeting with educators who have developed successful school cultures for gay and lesbian students. Most importantly, the school should reaffirm that it receives all students as they are and guarantees a safe learning environment (Weiler, 2004).

Specific Programs

Project 10

Dr. Virginia Uribe has been a life science teacher at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles for thirty years (Shaw, 1995). Uribe began a program called Project 10 in response to one openly gay African-American student experiencing harassment and persecution (Shaw, 1995). Along with a group of teachers, Uribe was stimulated by the administration to develop this model, named after Kinsey's 1948 estimation that ten percent of the population is exclusively homosexual (Uribe, 1992). The intent of the teachers was to decrease the effects of discrimination against homosexual students by producing a standard program to counsel both homosexual and heterosexual youth (Harbeck & Uribe, 1992).

The focus of this model is to educate, to reduce abuse, to prevent suicide, and to provide accurate information about AIDS, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases (Uribe, 1994, Summer). These objectives are carried out through various methods, from workshops for staff to support groups at each high school (Uribe, 1994, Summer). Project 10 strives to be perceptive to awareness of both homosexuality and heterosexuality (Rowe, 1993). This is primarily a dropout prevention plan that realizes sexual minority adolescents are at-risk for dropping out due to issues related to sexual orientation (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). The program contains a dual

approach including an examination of the quantity and outcome of stigmatization of homosexual students and a realistic method for working with self-identified gay youth in schools (Harbeck & Uribe, 1992).

Three obstacles had to be met, according to Harbeck and Uribe (1992), to begin Project 10.

First, we had to break through the wall of silence surrounding homosexuality so the target group could be reached. Second, a safe, supportive atmosphere had to be provided so youngsters could talk about their sexuality in a nonthreatening way. Third, a nonjudgmental posture had to be developed to serve as a guideline in dealing with gay and lesbian youth (Harbeck & Uribe, 1992, p. 51).

Shaw (1995) states that the project began with rap sessions at lunch time where students explored their identities, society, and how to improve their lives (Shaw, 1995). Some openly homosexual students were invited to meet at lunch time informally every week, and the group soon grew to twenty-five regulars (Harbeck & Uribe, 1992). Support groups are the core of Project 10, with goals of improving self-esteem, providing affirmation, and addressing issues like drugs, alcohol, high-risk sexual behavior, staying in school, college, and getting a job (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). The majority of the groups meet once a week after school, at lunch hour, or during a class (Uribe, 1994, Summer).

Project 10 is made up of primarily males, various races, and diverse family backgrounds (Uribe, 1994, Summer). Participation is voluntary, but confidentiality is required and maintained throughout the group's meetings (Uribe, 1994, Summer).

"Youth join Project 10 primarily because they question the heterosexual conditioning to

which they perpetually have been exposed” (Rowe, 1993, p. 511). Counselors are present to promote student analysis of feelings and evasion of fear regarding thoughts other than heterosexual normalcy (Rowe, 1993). Within the groups, there exists no advocacy for sexual experimentation, but rather for intellectual breakthroughs pertaining to one’s own sexual orientation (Rowe, 1993).

At the beginning of the 1985-1986 school year, Project 10 began to operate in rising levels of visibility, including a brochure for the community, a trained core group of staff, and an article in the *Los Angeles Times* for local publicity (Harbeck & Uribe, 1992). Harbeck and Uribe (1992) claim that the reaction was extremely encouraging, with less than ten negative calls in the beginning. The district did not distribute resources, so the program relied on outside funding and becoming a nonprofit corporation (Harbeck & Uribe, 1992). The money raised helps to support library supplies, advertising costs, a hotline, awards, and scholarships for the members (Harbeck & Uribe, 1992). This mission has stretched to thirty out of fifty high schools in the Los Angeles District and is currently being imitated by other districts (Shaw, 1995).

Project 10 was the original program of this nature, but may be used as a model for other schools (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). This program may be changed to accommodate a school or district’s needs, but should contain the following components: (a) a central setting in the school district containing resources; (b) a salaried coordinator; (c) training workshops for staff regarding homophobia and special needs for homosexual youth; (d) maintaining on-site teams where students can go for information and support; (e) building library collections of gay and lesbian subjects; (f) developing and implementing nondiscrimination and anti-insult decrees; (g) advocacy for

homosexual youth through committees, agencies, parent-teacher groups, and community programs; and (h) interacting with neighborhood organizations, parents, unions, and other educational associations (Uribe, 1994). The model of support Project 10 offers is being sought after by educators all over the country (Uribe, 1994, Summer).

Project 10 was followed by the establishment of the Gay and Lesbian Education Commission (GLEC) in 1992 (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). This commission was approved by the Los Angeles Board of Education and counsels the board concerning the particular requirements of homosexual students and employees (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Project 10 now operates under the umbrella of the Gay and Lesbian Education Commission. This commission is concerned with the following: (a) recommending to the board methods to check and restrict harassment of homosexual students; (b) contributing with the evaluation of resources used in the schools; (c) suggesting development of encouraging services for homosexual youth, parents of gay adolescents, and for homosexual parents; (d) informing about methods of addressing staff on sexual orientation issues; (e) arranging, executing, and attending parent/community outreach and other special gatherings; (f) consulting when needed; (g) advising on mission or activities intended to develop educational curriculum related to homosexual matters; (h) supporting an increase in communication between the district and the community; (i) counseling the school board on current legislation affecting homosexual students; (j) appraising the convenience and usability of services for and by gay and lesbian adolescents; and (k) making contacts with other authorities to create and preserve exchanges of ideas on homosexual youth issues (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000).

The Gay and Lesbian Education Commission also support a yearly youth convention in Eagle Rock, California, on the campus of Occidental College (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Titled Models of Pride, this conference offers a location for students to gain knowledge from and support one another (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). According to Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh (2000), the Los Angeles Board of Education has established guiding principles, bureaus, and measures to aid in the defense of sexual minority students. Some such procedures are a No Name Calling and No Discrimination Policy, area workplaces for managing harassment cases, district-wide methods for dealing with complaints from gay and lesbian students, and a statement process pursuing homophobic events and hate crimes (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). The Los Angeles School District has also made staff training obligatory to raise the awareness of procedures when reacting to and reporting episodes of harassment (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Henning-Stout, James, and Macintosh (2000) claim that a program has been established as well that includes family diversity, heroes and role models of an assortment of backgrounds, eradication of name calling, and deterrence of hate crimes.

Massachusetts Commission

William F. Weld, governor of Massachusetts, signed an administrative order in 1992 producing the country's first Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). This committee was established as a reaction to the rising suicide rates among homosexual adolescents (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). According to Henning-Stout, James, and Macintosh (2000), one of the goals of the commission, which functions at the state level, is to eliminate

intolerance and inequity against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth. This commission was authorized to give suggestions to the governor, state and private agencies regarding the establishment of plans and strategies to assist Massachusetts' homosexual youth (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). The commission launched its initial report, "Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth," in February of 1993 (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Five open hearings were held in Massachusetts, and the report tackled the problems young homosexuals face in school (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). By December of that year, the Gay and Lesbian Student Rights Bill was approved in Massachusetts (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Simultaneously, Massachusetts adjusted the law relating to instructive privileges for public school students to include sexual orientation (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Massachusetts has also become a director in assisting other states' schools to cultivate safe learning atmospheres for their homosexual populations (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). According to Henning-Stout, James, and Macintosh (2000), five main concerns are outlined during this process: training, services, curriculum, policies, and community outreach.

Massachusetts students have an unparalleled authorized option against inequity because of this historic law, the option of instigating grievances against school districts for discrimination or harassment (Portner, 1994). Until this time, no other state had approved such a legal option (Portner, 1994). Massachusetts Department of Education's Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students began sponsoring one-day workshops with the goal of producing secure surroundings for gay and lesbian youth (Portner, 1994). According to Portner (1994), eight workshops were held with seven

more planned, and one hundred of the three hundred and fifty districts sent delegates.

These workshops provide assistance setting up support groups, such as the Gay/Straight Alliance and provide information regarding other issues (Portner, 1994). They are also used for brainstorming strategies related to the state's recommendations that schools should: (a) develop protection policies for homosexual students against aggression, hostility, and discrimination; (b) train teachers about prevention of suicide and violence; (c) launch a support group; (d) offer therapy for the gay or lesbian student's family members (Portner, 1994). Portner (1994) also explains that the state is providing grants from \$500 to \$2,000 to fulfill these recommendations, and although the schools have individual discretion, many have hired speakers, taken field trips, and purchased food for support meetings.

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction

Every school in the United States has a considerable number of homosexual students, given that it is generally accepted that ten percent of the population is homosexual (Riddle, 1996). Feelings of being different than peers can begin as early as kindergarten for most homosexual students (Weiler, 2003). Recent studies have disclosed that the age in which adolescents come out regarding their sexuality has been decreasing over recent years (Riddle, 1996). The gay youth civil rights movement has begun, which may be compelling gay teens to address sexuality at an earlier age (Lipsky, 1998).

With the raised exposure to gay and lesbian peers, bullying and anti-gay harassment is prevalent. Numerous surveys and studies have produced alarming statistics on the amount of violence homosexual students endure in schools. Homosexual teens are more likely to attempt suicide (Strong, DeVault, & Werner Sayad, 1999); 62% have been verbally harassed; thirteen percent have been abused (Baker, 2002); and antigay slurs like “faggot,” “dyke,” and “homo” can be heard every fourteen minutes in an Iowa school (Frankfurt, 2000). The increased threats to homosexual students have made this population extremely vulnerable in the school system to excessive absences, dropping out, drug abuse, and prostitution. Studies have consistently shown that our school systems are blind and mute regarding homosexuality (Graziano, 2003).

Schools and staff are mandated by law and the Constitution to protect every student, including homosexual students (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Many suggestions and ideas have been offered in research for administrations to better

serve gay and lesbian students. These suggestions were examined throughout literature, as well as two specific programs developed specifically to assist homosexual students. Project 10, a primarily dropout prevention program, is focused on educating, reducing abuse, preventing suicide, and providing accurate information regarding AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (Uribe, 1994, Summer). The Massachusetts Commission is the country's first Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, established as a reaction to the increasing suicide rates among this population (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). Both were reviewed for effectiveness and impact on the homosexual youth population.

Conclusions

Although homosexuality is not a recent issue, the matters related to homosexuality in the classrooms are. Therefore, little research exists regarding most of the suggestions provided in this paper. Minimal research was found on the subject of support groups for homosexual adolescents and their effects.

A qualitative study was conducted in a Salt Lake City High School with seven members of the country's first Gay Straight Alliance. This study claims that "although many GSA's are emerging across the country, little research has been done that evaluates the impact they have on the lives of the individual students who participate in them" (Lee, 2002, p. 14). The researcher used qualitative methods to examine various aspects of the students' lives and collected data through interviews, documents, and personal reflections (Lee, 2002). The study appears to be unique and distinct because it is one of the first and because it focuses exclusively on the impact of membership of a school support group (Lee, 2002).

The key findings in the study were organized around the seven questions used to gather data about the impact of support groups (Lee, 2002). Lee (2002) claims that the participants felt their academic accomplishments improved after becoming members of the Gay Straight Alliance. Overall, the members came to school more often, wanted to see new friends from the group, and made more attempts to work at school (Lee, 2002). Another key discovery was the members' belief that relationships with teachers, peers, family, and school administration had been positively impacted (Lee, 2002). The students became more visible and began to develop positive relationships with adults because of the support of the Gay Straight Alliance (Lee, 2002).

Lee (2002) also claims that the students became more secure being labeled *gay* or *lesbian*. Some researchers propose that these support groups are crucial to combat aggression, and the participants all confirmed that the GSA helped make the "coming out" transition easier (Lee, 2002). The responses included that they were able to at last be honest with themselves, not be ashamed any longer, and cultivate a sense of pride (Lee, 2002). In the same thread, the results claimed that the participants now felt safer and less hassled because of the group (Lee, 2002). The members experienced safety in numbers resulting in decreased name calling and no assaults (Lee, 2002).

The last two findings were more abstract, focusing on the students' feelings in the school and society. The participants claimed the Gay Straight Alliance provided them with a sense of belonging to the school (Lee, 2002). They felt a part of the school, rather than apart from, and began taking pride and respect in the school (Lee, 2002). In society, the members of the Gay Straight Alliance believed they could contribute in a positive way and make a difference in society (Lee, 2002). Many claimed the group gave them a

sense of personal power (Lee, 2002). Because this particular group was the pioneer for all Gay Straight Alliances, the members all claimed they have already made a change in the world (Lee, 2002).

This study is extremely important to better understanding support groups for gay and lesbian students. The key findings are congruent with many researchers' belief that support groups assist homosexual students on multiple levels. The participants confirmed the positive impact in their personal and social lives because of the Gay Straight Alliance. The results show an impressive need for support groups in schools for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Analysis proves that homosexual students flourish when gathering support (Lee, 2002).

However, the study did lack diversity of contributors. The study consisted of only seven members of fairly similar backgrounds in Salt Lake City, Utah. In order for the results to be generalized, a wider sample of participants must be performed. Students from a variety of cities and states, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic class are necessary to obtain an accurate picture of the Gay Straight Alliance's impact. This study was also limited in time, for it only covered two years of the members' lives. To establish if a Gay Straight Alliance has considerable impact over time, it is important to conduct a follow-up study with the participants.

Research regarding Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is similar to that of the Gay Straight Alliance; it is lacking. It is proven that the presence or absence of parental support can have a large impact on homosexual individuals (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001). It was also found that "family support significantly reduced the psychological stress and symptoms resulting from victimization

experienced by gay teenagers” (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001, p. 683). Although few actual quantitative studies exist exploring the impact of PFLAG, individual members experiences have still been utilized. Goldfried & Goldfried (2001) claim to be strong advocates of psychotherapy, but personal experience has convinced them that PFLAG is a great deal more effective alternative. The group provides members with a broad point of view and vast knowledge about homosexuality. Many personal experiences “led us to conclude that referral to PFLAG should be the intervention of choice in fostering parental acceptance” (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001, p. 687).

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays is a powerful group in the lives of the heterosexuals surrounding a homosexual individual. But not enough research exists regarding its direct impact on the homosexual person. There have been numerous research studies concerning the power a family’s acceptance or denial has on the life of a homosexual. Most findings point to a direct link between family support and the future psychological well-being of a gay or lesbian individual (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001). But not enough research has been conducted linking the parents’ participation in PFLAG and the emotional stability of their gay or lesbian son or daughter.

Students have indicated through testimonials that Project 10 is valuable to them in numerous ways (Uribe, 1994). Success has also been measured by attendance increasing, higher academic performance, family relationships improving, and a group of males attending AIDS education programs (Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000). According to Shaw (1995), the major thing a student gains from Project 10 is the knowledge that he/she is not alone, which dispels the sense of isolation. “Positive results of Project 10 substantiate the belief that low-cost remedies to anti-gay prejudice and

discrimination are possible, that controversy surrounding this issue can be minimized, and that a commitment to human rights and the needs of these young people demands that remedies be pursued” (Harbeck & Uribe, 1992, p. 54).

Project 10 is a groundbreaking dropout prevention model aimed at the high at-risk population of homosexual students. This model contains eight essential components that must be adhered to in any school or district. While some of the components are easily conducted within the school, others are expensive and may be difficult to implement. For example, the Project 10 model requires a salaried coordinator, a central resource setting in the district, training workshops for staff, and maintaining on-site teams for information and support (Uribe, 1994). All of these necessitate extra money, time, and manpower from the district and the schools. This may be more than a particular district is able to spend.

Every suggestion given by the research is an important and necessary step for school districts to take, but it is not always that simple. Schools are facing numerous difficulties such as school violence, teen pregnancies, increased standardized testing, and tighter budget constraints. These obstacles and many more can add up to cause stress and difficulty within the schools and the staff. Exterior circumstances must be taken into consideration along with the ideas offered in research.

Schools are mandated by law to protect gay and lesbian students, but the exact methods for doing so are not mandated. Training sessions for all school personnel is a widely suggested method of expanding knowledge base and experience regarding homosexual students. But one or two day training assemblies cost in both time and money. This can become a hardship for a school that is already stretched thin. It is

suggested that homosexuality be included in multicultural lessons, and books be displayed in the media centers. But once again, this costs valuable money that may not be available. Many school administrations are forced to make decisions such as these when balancing budgets. When resolutions must be made about which classes to keep, which teachers to keep and which support staff to keep, education regarding homosexuality may not be high on the list.

Another difficulty that arises with the researched suggestions is human implementation. Many of the ideas involve the teachers and staff creating open arenas for communication and acceptance. But these personnel often have very strong feelings on the issue of homosexuality. Religious reasons, moral reasons, or fear of the unknown are all factors for individuals to fear gay and lesbian students. If a teacher fears, loathes, or disagrees with a student's lifestyle, it could be difficult for the teacher to control personal biases. The cause of homosexuality, whether it is a choice or biological, may still be a debate for a number of people, making it difficult to accept homosexual students.

Although teachers and staff are supposed to treat every student equally and refrain from personal opinions, this may be a difficult task. This human weakness may cause great difficulty for the homosexual population in a school. Multicultural courses teach that all people are humans and should be treated equal, but homosexuality can be a grey area for some individuals. Homosexuality and issues related to it are still a strong subject for controversy in many social arenas.

It is necessary for things to change in the school systems, for the sake of the students. Many schools are sources of hostility and violence towards gay or lesbian

students, which must stop to ensure protection of all students. But exactly what and how these changes are to take place is still debatable. Much research has been conducted, resulting in numerous suggestions to make schools better places. But all of these suggestions need either money or personal commitment. Unless the federal government is willing to increase budgets for these accommodations, many may not happen. And the personal feelings and prejudices may be difficult to change without more societal acceptance.

Future Research

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding homosexual youth in the school system, but most focus specifically on the hostile atmosphere and the aggression these students must face. Although it is extremely important to know the full extent of the atmosphere the students face, more research is necessary in other areas as well. This researcher suggests that more research must be conducted on participants of homosexual groups such as Gay Straight Alliance. Further research is also necessary regarding groups such as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays and how heterosexual involvement assists a homosexual individual. In order to accurately assist this population, research is necessary in many areas of support groups. Suggested areas are: how groups change a student's self-confidence, how they assist and/or hurt the participants, how other's opinions are altered due to groups and how these support groups affect the rest of the school. Support groups for minority populations are widely revered as positive, but much more research is necessary to determine if this is true with the homosexual adolescent population.

More empirical data is also necessary for dropout rates and depression levels for students involved in Project 10. Students who have participated in Project 10 in Los Angeles or in a repeat of the project should be compared to similar students not in the project. The comparison could examine differences in self-confidence, grades, attendance, and overall attitude. This comparative study could provide much credibility to endeavors of this nature with homosexual students.

The majority of the suggestions provided in research have not been studied thoroughly or empirically. Studies must be conducted regarding the suggestions to determine the true impact. For example, statistics are necessary to prove that having a safe staff person helps the homosexual population feel more comfortable and informed. Another study that may be performed is to determine if a no name calling policy changes the attitudes in the school. Numerous studies could be carried out surrounding this topic and the suggested improvements schools should make for homosexual students. These are just a few of the many examples needed for future research. If these statistics were available, advocates for homosexual youth would have much more leverage for implementing such policies.

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