Problem Solving and Self-Esteem Efforts on GLBT Students

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Introduction

According to Hatzenbuehler (2011), “… suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth aged 15 to 24 years, and LGB youth are more likely to attempt suicide compared with their heterosexual peers”. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) adolescence are often pushed to suicide and depression by a plethora of risk factors within their microsystems.

For GLBT youth, studies have found that stressful life events due to sexual orientation were highly related to distress, anxiety, and depression (Floyd, 2002). A recent survey by The National School Climate Survey found that 1,732 GLBT adolescents experience bullying, harassment, and abusive remarks based on their sexual orientation (McGuiness, 2008). The harassment, judgment, and hate-crimes that GLBT students often face are severe risk factors, which deteriorate individual self-esteem and push students towards a “tipping point”. Many GLBT adolescents are not resilient enough to overcome their negative environmental conditions.

GLBT individuals need to be equipped with self-esteem to counteract destructive relationships in their lives. GLBT adolescence additionally need to practice developing problem solving and coping skills to handle the victimization they encounter. An intervention that addresses these needs will serve to limit depression and suicide.

Theoretical Basis

The theoretical basis for our intervention program is the 5 C’s of Competency. The 5 C’s of Competency are five characteristics that highlight the major differences between low-risk and high-risk youth. According to McWhirter et al. (2007), the 5 C’s are: critical school competencies, concept of self, connectedness, coping ability and control. The 5 C’s are important for all youth, but they are of crucial importance for GLBT youth who are already at a heightened risk level because of their sexual orientation. Critical school competence focuses on
basic academic skills and survival skills. It is the ability to read, write and perform basic math skills, but also coping skills, social skills and positive peer relationships. Many GLBT youth find themselves isolated due to lack of acceptance and social support necessary to help get through difficult times.

Self-esteem refers to “how good we feel about ourselves or how much we value ourselves given our self-concept” (McWhirter et al., 2007, p. 114). Galliher et al. (2004), notes that GLBT youth have typically been found to have lower self-esteem than non-GLBT youth. It is crucial that GLBT youth have positive self-esteem and a positive view of their sexual orientation. Studies have found that positive self-esteem is associated with disclosure of one’s sexual identity, it is not enough to buffer against the many other stressors. (Galliher et al., 2004).

Connectedness refers to a sense of belonging, communication, and building relationships with others. A lack of connectedness can lead to feelings of isolation and rejection and potentially greater mental health problems (McWhirter, 2007). Those who are open about their sexuality frequently experience disapproval and rejection by family and peers. Those who have not disclosed their sexual identity may feel as though they are living a lie, leading to feelings of isolation and rejection. As a result of this lack of connectedness with family and peers, GLBT youth are at a heightened risk for substance abuse, depression, and suicide (McWhirter, 2007).

Coping ability is particularly important for GLBT youth as they navigate the rejection and isolation they receive from their peers. GLBT youth are frequent targets of hate crimes and many report verbal and physical assault from home (McWhirter, 2007). Many schools do not provide GLBT students with the support that they need and the school environment is often a hostile place filled with derogatory comments and bullying. Improving GLBT youth’s ability to cope
with these stressful environments can help decrease the likelihood that they’ll turn to other, more
dangerous forms of coping such as substance abuse and dropping out of school.

Control is an important but difficult skill for youth to learn. It is important for youth to
learn the decision-making progress and how to remain goal oriented. As GLBT youth “come
out” or become comfortable with their sexuality, external factors can influence the direction of
one’s future. It is important for GLBT youth to remain control of their life during these years
and not turn to dangerous forms of coping.

**Intervention Program Outline**

Our GLBT intervention program is centered by a group therapy approach in order to help
students develop problem solving and coping skills to help build their self-esteem and build self-
control. According to Radkowsky and Siegel (1997), a group setting creates a sense of
community allowing the GLBT students to feel less isolated and provides a location to discuss
differences in sexual identity, experiences and challenges of “coming out.” This program’s goal
is to help students become more comfortable with their identity, develop strategies to deal with
social pressures and build a positive peer environment.

For this program, student participates will be identified by school personnel. These
students will receive a letter outlining the program and will have to submit the form with their
signature to show their willingness to participate. Students will be divided into groups of ten
with two school personnel leading each group. Students will participate in this program for one
year and meet once a week during lunch. The program will be divided into three parts to help
students grow within the 5 C’s of Competency. The first segment of the program will focus on
students developing a concept of self and coping skills. The focus will be on discussing the
different sexual identities, stereotypes, and developing optimism towards situations students are
encountering inside and outside of school. This portion of the program will include many group discussions and activities to help students share perceptions, experiences and ideas.

The second segment of the program will focus on developing connectedness within the group, peers and the school. McWhirter et al. (2007), explains how training within communication skills between peers, learning to be assertive and building resistance are key to helping at-risk students develop positive relationships. Students will be role-playing different situations they may encounter including topics of bullying, coming-out, and negative interactions among peers and family.

The third segment will conclude with the students using the skills they have learned to build their critical school competence and demonstrate their level of control through different problem solving situations. This segment will focus on students showing their problem solving skills by describing alternative approaches to different problems and explaining why they chose the solution they executed. Using these skills, the group of students will develop an awareness day activity for the school. They will choose a topic (bullying, stereotypes, gender identity, etc) and develop an activity to raise awareness that would be carried out within the school.

Measures & Data Collection

In order to assess students competence and problem solving ability; the Problem Solving Inventory (PSI) will be used (Heppner, Witty & Dixon, 2004). It contains three subscales, which evaluates an individual’s aspects of problem solving including an individual’s perceived ability to solve problem, tendency to either approach or avoid a problem and assess the level of emotional control while determining a solution.

The measure that will be used to assess self-concept and self-esteem is the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (R-SEC) (Rosenberg, 1965). The measure contains five positively worded and
five negatively worded statements. The R-SEC is one of the most utilized measures of self-esteem tests the social science field.

The measure that will be used to assess connectedness and relationships is the Adolescent Social Self-Efficacy Scale (S-EFF) (Connolly, 1989). The S-EFF is a tool that was developed to use with adolescents in order to assess their self-efficacy in various peer related situations including: social assertiveness, performance in public situations, participation in social groups, aspects of friendship and intimacy, and giving or receiving help.

In order to assess the student’s social support, the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) will be used (Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1983). The SSQ is an assessment of an asking the individual to list people that they can turn to in a particular situation and the rate their satisfaction with the available support.

Upon receipt of the consent and assent forms, baseline data and evaluations questionnaires will be administered and collected. Five data collections will occur over the course of this program, at the beginning of the study, following each segment and one month after the completion of the final segment. Table 1 shows the forms assessment given during each portion of the program.

**Table 1**: Forms of assessments given to participants throughout the intervention program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment of Intervention</th>
<th>Type of Assessment Given</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline (before beginning of sessions)</td>
<td>Demographic information (grades, attendance, disciplinary actions, extracurricular activities), R-SEC, S-EFF, PSI, SSRS-T and SSQ questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Segment 1 Completion</td>
<td>R-SEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Segment 2 Completion</td>
<td>S-EFF</td>
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<tr>
<td>After Segment 3 Completion</td>
<td>PSI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final (1-2 months following completion of program):</td>
<td>Demographic information (grades, attendance, disciplinary actions, extracurricular activities), R-SEC, S-EFF, PSI, SSRS-T and SSQ questionnaires.</td>
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Work Cited


