



Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth: Limited representation in school support personnel journals☆



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ABSTRACT

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth experience harassment and discrimination in schools and these experiences lead to increased negative social-emotional outcomes. Youth who can identify at least one supportive adult at school report better outcomes than youth who cannot identify a safe adult. Yet, many educators report feeling uncomfortable or unprepared to support LGBT youth. One reason for educators' discomfort may be that content related to issues unique to LGBT youth is sometimes missing or covered minimally in university training programs. We hypothesized that LGBT content may be covered minimally in school support personnel journals, as well. This study analyzed eight school support personnel journals across the disciplines of school counseling, school nursing, school psychology, and school social work for LGBT content published between 2000 and 2014 to gain a better understanding of the visibility of LGBT issues in the research. Results suggested that there has been a lack of presence of LGBT issues in journals across disciplines. These results also suggest a need for an intentional focus on issues relevant to LGBT youth in school support personnel journals. Thus, the article concludes with an introduction to two articles in this special topic section, including Russell, Day, Ioverno, and Toomey's (in this issue) study on teacher perceptions of bullying in the context of enumerated school policies and other supportive sexual orientation and gender identity related practices and Poteat and Vecho's (in this issue) study on characteristics of bystanders in homophobic bullying situations. The broad goal of these three studies is to increase visibility of critical LGBT issues in school support personnel journals.

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1. Introduction

Attending school is a pivotal experience for most youth. It is where they develop friendships, learn social norms, and prepare for adulthood. For many youth, attending school is a positive experience. They learn in safe and supportive environments, develop trusting relationships with educators, and have access to many of the opportunities their educational environment provides. Yet, for youth who experience systematic harassment, discrimination, and bullying, school can be an unsafe place in their lives (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Indeed, numerous studies document that schools can be hostile and unsafe environments for LGBT youth (Heck, Lindquist, Machek, & Cochran, 2014; Kosciw et al., 2014). For instance, Poteat, O'Dwyer, and Mereish (2012) studied 380 adolescents' use and hearing of homophobic comments over time and found that while females reported a

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decrease, males reported an increase in hearing homophobic epithets as they progressed through high school. Those males who reported using homophobic epithets also reported engaging in sexual orientation-related bullying (Poteat, O'Dwyer, & Mereish, 2012). In Kosciw et al.'s (2014) national survey of over 8500 LGBT youth, 71.4% reported hearing "gay" used in a negative way frequently or often by other students at school and 51.4% reported hearing homophobic comments from school staff. Unfortunately, 61.6% of LGBT youth who reported bullying or harassment to adults in schools said that the adults did nothing in response (Kosciw et al., 2014). This is particularly concerning because rates of absenteeism, poor academic achievement, lower self-esteem, depression, and suicidal ideation all increase among LGBT youth who attend unsafe schools (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Hostile climates for LGBT youth are not unique to the school setting. A recent study of LGBT youth service accessibility within health and human services suggested that lack of acceptance, discomfort disclosing sexuality, and lack of adult awareness of services were significant barriers to youth accessing much needed services (Acevedo-Polakovich, Bell, Gamache, & Christian, 2013). LGBT youth face other challenges as a result of discrimination. They are at an increased risk for homelessness often because of parent rejection (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). Data suggest that mental health outcomes such as depressive symptomatology, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts are higher among LGB youth (Seil, Desai, & Smith, 2014). Seil et al. (2014) analyzed the Youth Risk Behavior Survey from 8910 youth in New York City. Their results suggested that the prevalence of each mental health outcome measured was higher for LGB youth than it was for their heterosexual peers. Further, Burton, Marshal, and Chisholm's (2014) analysis of the mental health and academic outcomes of 108 youth, of which 26% identified as sexual minority, suggested that depression and anxiety were stronger predictors of absenteeism for sexual minority youth than for their heterosexual peers.

Disparities in mental and physical health within LGBT communities persist into adulthood (Mayer, Garofalo, & Makadon, 2014), mostly as a result of social determinants such as limited enumerated laws that protect against bullying and discrimination in schools, a shortage of healthcare providers who are culturally competent in LGBT health, and until recently, legal discrimination in access to marriage, employment, and adoption (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014a). There are emerging data suggesting that LGBTQ and gender non-conforming youth may experience disparities in discipline experiences such as being punished more severely for public displays of affection and not conforming to gender norms (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015). While educators cannot eliminate all disparities experienced by the LGBT community, educators have the power to improve the school climate for LGBT youth and therefore aid in reducing some of the negative short- and long-term outcomes for this population.

1.1. Role of school support personnel

Educators serve a critical role in the school experiences of all youth (Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012). Having a positive relationship with an educator can directly relate to academic success and indirectly relate to social-emotional regulation (Spilt et al., 2012). Relationships with educators are especially important for LGBT youth, who may be alienated by their peers (Diaz, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2010; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; McGuire Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Ploderl, Faistauer, & Fartacek, 2010). Elze (2003) surveyed 136 LGBT youth about their perceptions of their own sexual orientation, their experience with school violence, and supportive factors in their lives. The majority of these youth experienced some form of victimization and sought support and safety from school staff. In an analysis of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data, Russell and colleagues (2001) found that same-sex attracted youth who reported positive relationships with their school staff also reported fewer school troubles than their peers who reported less positive relationships with school staff. McGuire and colleagues (2010) examined school climate for transgender youth specifically and found that these youth experienced persistent harassment, yet support from school personnel increased the students' feelings of safety (McGuire et al., 2010). Feelings of school safety among gay and bisexual males have been significantly related to access to supportive educators (Ploderl, Faistauer, & Fartacek, 2010). In a 10-year review of the National School Climate Data, LGBT youth consistently reported that access to resources such as a supportive adult or a gay-straight alliance mitigated the effect of orientation-based harassment and discrimination (Kosciw, Bartkiewicz, & Greytak, 2012). The results of Duong and Bradshaw's (2014) study of 951 LGB youth suggested that youth who experienced bullying were more likely to report engaging in aggressive behavior and suicidal behaviors, while youth who reported feeling connected to an adult at school were not as likely to report aggression and suicidal ideation. Seil et al. (2014) reported that LGBT youth who did not have a supportive adult connection at school reported the poorest mental health outcomes. The data from all of these studies highlight the need for educators to have the knowledge, skills, and competence to support LGBT youth in schools.

1.2. Lack of training for educators

Although research suggests that educators may serve as a protective factor for LGBT youth, data indicate that educators may feel underprepared or uncomfortable supporting LGBT youth in schools (Mahdi, Jeverson, Schrader, Nelson, & Ramos, 2014; Mudrey & Medina-Adams, 2006). Educators report that LGBT issues may be underrepresented in university training programs and professional development (Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004; Brener et al., 2011). Underrepresentation of LGBT issues in training opportunities may result in a lack of competence to work with LGBT youth. Educators may lack the resources necessary to increase their knowledge and skills to create a supportive and affirmative school environment. For this reason, it is imperative that education about LGBT youth begins in pre-service programs, both through training and research. In general, LGBT youth

appear to be missing from pre-service and in-service educator training (Barozzi, & Guijarro Ojeda, 2014). In Sherwin and Jennings' (2006) study of 77 public university secondary teacher education programs, they found that almost half of the teacher education programs did not include content related to sexual orientation in their coursework. Gorski, Davis, and Reiter (2013) conducted a content analysis of 41 syllabi from multicultural education courses in the U.S. and found that content related to sexual identity was absent in almost half of the syllabi reviewed. A content analysis of LGBT content in multicultural education textbooks suggested that representation was inconsistent, with some textbooks dedicating up to an entire chapter to issues unique to LGBT individuals to other textbooks that only included brief reference to LGBT issues (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011).

Teacher educators and pre-service educators who identify as LGBT have reported that not only is LGBT content limited in the curriculum but the climate in many pre-service programs does not encourage discussion about LGBT issues (Hermann-Wilmarth & Bills, 2010). The lack of LGBT content in training programs may result in pre-service educators feeling undertrained or uncomfortable meeting the needs of LGBT youth and families in practice (Wyatt, Oswalt, White, & Peterson, 2008). For example, Mahdi, Jeverson, Schrader, Nelson, and Ramos's (2014) study of 183 school health professionals, including 57 school counselors, 83 school nurses, and 43 school social workers employed in public schools in a Southwestern state found that school nurses reported the least knowledge about LGBT issues. Also, few respondents in any discipline were aware of community-based organizations that could support LGBT youth or adults. Although it is promising that additional data are being collected to explore school support personnel's knowledge of LGBT issues, the results of this study suggest that significant training needs remain (Mahdi et al., 2014).

1.3. School support personnel

While we know that training needs for pre-service and in-service educators exist, national professional organizations for many disciplines within education explicitly express their support for LGBT advocacy through position statements, codes of ethics, and interdisciplinary collaborative efforts. Support from a national professional organization can help guide university trainers and in-service professionals as they incorporate LGBT content into their work. The efforts of national organizations for the school support disciplines of school counseling, school nurses, school social workers, and school psychologists are described next. Personnel in these four disciplines provide support to all students related to social/emotional competence and physical and mental health, so it can be argued that their presence is particularly important to LGBT youth given our understanding of the social/emotional needs of this population. Support personnel from other disciplines work in schools but their roles are either mostly academic in nature (e.g., school librarians, teachers) or they work primarily with certain populations of students (e.g., speech/language pathologists).

1.4. School counseling

The American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) both encourage school counselors to advocate for LGBT youth via advocacy competencies and position statements. ASCA's position statement entitled, "The Professional School Counselor and LGBTQ Youth" lists 13 ways school counselors should advocate for LGBT youth in schools (ASCA, 2013). The school counseling literature highlights the responsibility of school counselors to support LGBT youth in the school environment (Curry & Hayes, 2009; DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009; Hohnke & O'Brien, 2008; Pope, 2003). For example, Stone (2003) provided 18 specific steps a school counselor can take to support LGBT youth, from including LGBT-related books in the curriculum to implementing violence prevention activities. Callahan (2001) described school counselors' responsibility to advocate for and support LGBT youth in schools, while also providing practical strategies that school counselors could implement when working with LGBT youth.

1.5. School nursing

In 1994, the National Association of School Nurses adopted a supportive position statement outlining the responsibility of the profession to support LGBT youth in schools (National Association of School Nurses, 2012). A 2012 revision to the position statement states that school nurses should:

- Recognize health risks that are disproportionately high for sexual minority students;
- Provide health services that are safe, private, and confidential;
- Make referrals for evidence-based care; and
- Identify and advocate for policies in the school environment to assure physical, psychological and social safety of sexual minority students and students with gay and lesbian parents. (p. 2)

Furthermore, the position statement references the responsibility of the school nursing profession to support both LGBT youth and LGBT parents by stating that, "School nurses are uniquely positioned to model respect for diversity, provide confidential health services for sexual minority students in a safe environment, and reduce stigma for students with gay or lesbian parents" (pg. 2). Other calls to action related to supporting LGBT health issues in nursing are emerging (Keepnews, 2011).

1.6. School psychology

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) *Principles of Professional Ethics* (2010) states:

In their words and actions, school psychologists promote fairness and justice. They use their expertise to cultivate school climates that are safe and welcoming to all persons regardless of actual or perceived characteristics, including...sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression...

NASP disseminated a position statement describing six specific actions school psychologists should take to support LGBT youth in schools (National Association of School Psychologists, 2011). NASP partnered with many other professional organizations, including the American School Counselor Association, the American School Health Association, and the School Social Work Association of America to endorse *Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation*, which is a brochure containing accurate information about sexual orientation for professionals (Just the Facts Coalition, 2008). Scholars within school psychology have described both the ways in which the school psychology ethical code supports advocacy for LGBT youth and the specific ways in which school psychologists may advocate for LGBT youth in schools (Bahr, Brish, & Croteau, 2000; Murphy, 2012).

1.7. School social work

Social work has a broad commitment to social justice and advocacy for marginalized populations (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). The accrediting body for university social work training programs explicitly requires that accredited training programs prepare pre-service social workers to support the needs of diverse populations, including diversity defined by sexual orientation and gender identity (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2008). School social work is a specialty within the field of social work. School social workers adhere to the same practice and ethical guidelines set forth by the NASW and CSWE.

Despite this support from the professional organizations of the four school support disciplines, it has been our experience that visibility of issues unique to LGBT youth within the research literature has been low. Given the importance of the research literature in guiding practice, training, and policy, next we examine what is known about the representation of LGBT youth issues in research.

1.8. LGBT content in peer-reviewed journals

Analyses of LGBT content have been conducted within marriage and family therapy journals (Clark & Serovich, 1997), counseling journals (Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, & Ruprecht, 1992; Singh & Shelton, 2011), and psychology journals (Huang et al., 2010). Those content analyses suggest that the number of articles with LGBT content has been small but the numbers seem to be increasing (Clark & Serovich, 1997; Huang et al., 2010). One reason for the limited inclusion of LGBT issues in past research may be related to difficulty conducting research with LGBT individuals and/or difficulty finding journals that will publish on this topic. Regarding LGBT youths' representation in the literature, researchers may have difficulty locating LGBT youth to participate in research studies (Worthington & Navarro, 2003). Also, in some geographic areas, LGBT youth may be an oversampled population, experience research fatigue, and be unwilling to consent to participation in additional research projects (Worthington & Navarro, 2003). Another reason why LGBT issues may be less represented in the general research literature is that general professional journals may be perceived to be less friendly to LGBT content so authors may choose to submit related articles to LGBT-specific journals (Scherrer & Woodford, 2013). LGBT-specific journals serve an important purpose for scholars of LGBT research; however, readership for LGBT-specific journals may be less than it is for primary discipline journals. Finally, another reason LGBT youth issues may not be adequately represented in the general research literature is our culture's historical bias toward and systematic exclusion of LGBT individuals from civil rights protection, employment discrimination protection, and marriage equality in the United States (Hackimer & Proctor, 2014).

To explore the inclusion of published research on LGBT youth issues within school support personnel journals, we conducted a brief content analysis of journals in the disciplines of school counseling, school nursing, school psychology, and school social work. Specifically, we aimed to answer the following: Within the school support personnel literature, what has been the representation of LGBT-related articles and given the importance of data-based decision making across all four disciplines, and were the articles empirical or conceptual?

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

The research team, comprised of the two authors, along with two school psychology graduate students, conducted a content analysis on articles published in journals within the four school support personnel disciplines. The research team independently and manually coded LGBT-related articles from 2000 through 2014 in the following journals: *Professional School Counseling*, *Journal of School Counseling*, *Journal of School Health*, *Journal of School Nursing*, *School Psychology Review*, *Journal of School Psychology*, *Children & Schools*, and *The School Social Work Journal*. The school counseling profession has two journals specifically targeting their practitioners (Bauman, Siegel, Falco, Szymanski, Davis, & Seabolt, 2003) and the school social work and school nursing professions have two North American journals each for their practitioners. For an equal comparison between the four disciplines

(albeit a potential limitation of the analysis), only the top two school psychology journals according to 2013 impact factor, *Journal of School Psychology* and *School Psychology Review*, were included in this data analysis. Impact factor is arguably the most objective measure of journal quality (Floyd et al., 2011). The time span of 2000–2014 was selected to keep our focus on current rather than historical trends in the published literature.

2.2. Article identification and coding

The four members of the research team screened all articles in the eight journals published during the 15-year timespan for LGBT content. During the screening process, the members of the research team manually reviewed each article in the eight journals for primary focus on LGBT issues. Primary focus was defined as the article's central focus being on issues related to sexual orientation. Book reviews, commentaries, editorials, introductions, and articles describing professional conferences were not included in the analysis. After articles were screened for LGBT content, we noted whether the articles were empirical or conceptual. We calculated intercoder agreement (ICA) during the coding process and achieved 100% ICA across four researchers.

3. Results

The total number of articles published between 2000 and 2014 varied across journals and across disciplines. During the time frame examined, the eight journals published a total of 4091 journal articles. The percentage of LGBT-related articles published in each journal ranged from .3–3%. The journals in Table 1 are organized by discipline, with the two school counseling journals listed first, next are the two school nursing journals, then are the two school psychology journals, and the last two journals represent school social work. Most journals published a total of 2–9 LGBT-related articles between 2000 and 2014. *School Psychology Review* was the outlier with 14 LGBT-related articles published between 2000 and 2014.

Recognizing the importance of empirical data on our understanding of LGBT youth and adult experiences, we coded articles by type, empirical or conceptual. Across disciplines, there was a relatively even distribution of conceptual and empirical articles with each discipline publishing a slightly higher number of empirical articles (see Fig. 1).

4. Discussion

LGBT content was underrepresented in professional journals across all four disciplines included in this study. The results suggest that the percentage of LGBT-related articles published during the 15-year timeframe ranged from .3–3% of the total articles published across journals. The limited coverage of LGBT issues in journals is concerning given what we know about the poor social/emotional and academic outcomes for LGBT youth who experience bullying and victimization in schools. Also, the literature tells us that school personnel may receive minimal training on LGBT-related topics within university training programs, so the dearth of LGBT-related information covered in university training programs and the minimal content covered in professional journals may lead to critical gaps in educators' knowledge, skills, and support of LGBT youth.

The objective of this special section of the *Journal of School Psychology* is to be intentional about filling this gap and bringing attention to issues unique to LGBT youth by publishing empirical manuscripts examining aspects of the school experience for these youth, specifically school safety. Empirical manuscripts from scholars who study LGBT youth issues in schools are published in this special section. First, Russell, Day, Ioverno, and Toomey (2016–in this issue) examined teacher perceptions of bullying in the context of sexual orientation and gender identity school safety implementation practices, such as professional development, consistent discipline practices, and enumerated school policies. Their article provides a unique look at the association between institutional level policies and teacher perceptions of bullying.

The second article examined the characteristics of bystanders that may be associated with more active defending behaviors in situations where LGBT youth are bullied (Poteat & Vecho, 2016–in this issue). Specific characteristics of bystanders examined in the study included leadership, courage, altruism, justice sensitivity, sexual orientation, number of LGBT friends, and gender. Bystanders may serve a critical role in intervening and reducing the occurrence of bullying. Learning more about the characteristics of bystanders that may relate to active defending responses in bullying situations may guide educators as they attempt to foster

Table 1

Percentage of LGBT-related articles per journal.

Journal title	Total # of articles	# of articles with LGBT related content	Percentage
Journal of School Counseling	274	7	3.0%
Professional School Counseling	594	8	1.0%
Journal of School Health	1130	9	0.8%
Journal of School Nursing	643	2	0.3%
Journal of School Psychology	431	2	0.5%
School Psychology Review	512	14	3.0%
Children & Schools	329	2	0.6%
School Social Work Journal	178	3	2.0%
Total	4091	47	1.0%

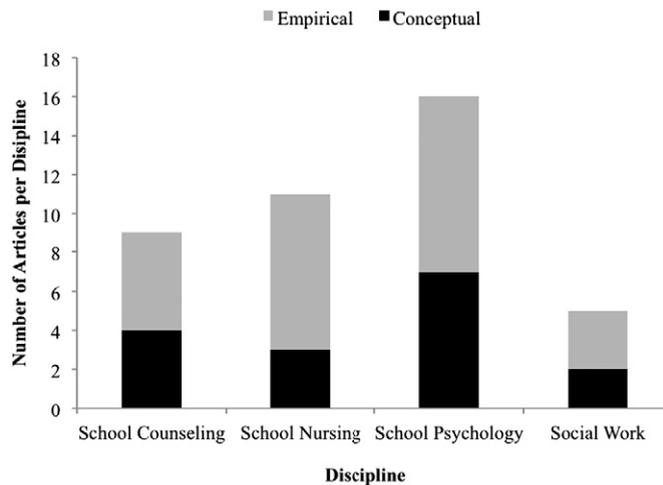


Fig. 1. Number of LGBT-related empirical and conceptual articles by discipline.

these characteristics and behaviors in schools. Both of these articles dig deeper into the context of school safety for LGBT youth in schools.

4.1. Moving forward

We are in the midst of a cultural shift related to visibility and recognition of issues unique to LGBT youth and adults. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights recently committed to collect nationwide data on anti-LGBT bullying through its Civil Rights Data Collection, a survey used to inform national policy (Valentine, 2013). Additionally, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) established a national task force on bullying. The anti-bullying curriculum HHS developed includes a module for LGBT youth (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014b). The White House website also includes resources targeted toward LGBT youth who have been bullied and harassed (The White House, 2013). In 2015, the Supreme Court ruling in favor of marriage equality provided the LGBT community with a hard fought civil right (Obergefell et al. v. Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health et al., 2015).

The general public is more accepting of LGBT issues as well. According to the General Social Survey, a survey of adults living in the U.S., attitudes toward homosexual behavior remained relatively stable between 1973 and 1991, with 69.7% of respondents in 1973 noting that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex was always wrong and 72.1% of respondents in 1991 answering the same way. Of respondents answering the same question in 2010, only 43.5% reported that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex was always wrong (Smith, 2011). These data are consistent with a Quinnipiac University Poll (2013) that found that 62% of Americans polled reported that they agreed with the Supreme Court's ruling in June 2013 that same-sex couples should be entitled to federal benefits.

LGBT youth are more visible in U.S. schools (Elias, 2007). LGBT youth are coming out younger (Shilo & Savaya, 2011) and there are an increasing number of LGBT-related resources (e.g., gay/straight alliances) available to students (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2015). Issues affecting LGBT youth are receiving attention in the media (Rowe, 2010) and in policy. We are confident that this cultural shift will lead to increased visibility of issues unique to LGBT youth in the research literature and in school support personnel training programs. Given the challenges experienced by LGBT youth who are bullied and harassed in schools, the research literature must adequately and regularly inform our university trainers and pre-service educators on how to support these youth. The articles in this issue of JSP move us one step closer to having an advanced understanding of LGBT youth experiences in schools and how to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for these youth.

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