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Amanda Starfield
Adult Support for Lesbian,
Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender, Queer and
Questioning (LGBTQQ)
Youth in High School

ABSTRACT

The present study explored how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth seek and gain support from adults in high school. A convenient snowball sample of forty-four LGBTQQ youth was gathered through email. The email contained a link to a questionnaire designed based on previous research and administered through Survey Monkey. Participants were required to meet three inclusion criteria: be between the ages of 18-27, 'out' as a member of the LGBTQQ community for a minimum of 1 year in high school, sought support from an adult in high school on an issue related to sexual orientation. The sample (participants and adults) was predominantly White and gender conforming (male and female). Identified adults were also evenly split between being perceived as Heterosexual versus LGBTQ. The study provides further evidence of the efficacy of support. The more helpful an adult was rated the higher the improvement in self-esteem, depression, isolation and hopelessness. The study demonstrated that gender and sexual orientation had an influence in regards to help seeking, however, did not reflect the quality of support received. There were differences in the types of support provided by LGBTQQ versus Heterosexual adults and social mirroring occurred through both sexual identity, as well as process variables such as being open, accessible,

empathic, and a visible support to the LGBTQQ community. The study reinforces the importance of having LGBTQQ adults in high school and more largely communicates that all adults can be helpful in the lives of LGBTQQ youth.

ADULT SUPPORT FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUEER
AND QUESTIONING (LGBTQQ) YOUTH IN HIGH SCHOOL

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2008

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore the following question: Among high school LGBTQQ youth, do perceived similarities or differences in racial, gender or sexual identity correlate with support-seeking behaviors or the support obtained from adult caregivers, teachers, or other school staff?

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQQ) youth comprise from 3 to 10 of every 100 high school students (Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). The literature points to this group as a target for victimization and discrimination (Radkowsky & Siegal, 1999; Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Wyss, 2004). Rates of suicide, depression and hopelessness are significantly higher for LGBTQQ youth than for their heterosexual peers (Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). While these youth are an at risk population, a growing number of studies are exploring their resiliency (Bringaze & White, 2001). A variable of considerable importance in the literature has been access to social support. These supports have largely been explored within family, peer groups, and the LGBT community. LGBTQQ youth look for certain types of support from their communities, such as emotional, informational or financial resources (Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999). School systems that advocate for LGBT students whether through policy, instrumental teachers and administrators, or gay-straight alliances (GSA) have

been associated with higher school performance and school belonging, less absence from school, and less disruptive behavior in school (Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Koswic & Dias, 2006).

A consistent theme throughout the literature is the particular importance for LGB youth to know older successful LGB adults, a theory known as social mirroring (Bringaze & White, 2001; Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999). Social mirroring has its roots in the mirror neurons of the brain (Iacoboni, 2007). Mirror neurons reflect the biological way that people become connected. The ability to connect to another person's experience contributes to the development of empathy (Iacoboni, 2007). This correlates to LGB youth who are looking to find images of themselves in the larger society. In developing an identity that does not fit with mainstream culture, those mirrors may be even more important.

The present research on mirror neurons appears to provide an important perspective as to how LGBTQ youth identify support. Research on therapist postural mirroring and client perceived rapport suggests that when the therapist's posture mirrored that of the client, higher moments of empathy were reported from the client (Sharpley et al., 2001). Thus, supporting that mirroring extends to behaviors. The potential implications of this are intriguing, for example, if a student witnessed an anti-homophobic statement issued from a teacher, the parts of the brain that tell the student that this adult is empathetic could be activated; thereby providing the student with some sort of working knowledge that this teacher is someone who could perhaps provide support or assistance. Consequently, we find a biological link between people that signifies the essential

nature of the importance of social connectedness towards social and psychological well-being.

The present study will begin with a review of the literature (Chapter II) on LGBTQQ youth and the influences of support and social mirroring. Chapter III will review Methodology. Chapter IV will discuss findings and Chapter V will contain a discussion on implications, study limitations, and the need for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of the literature on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQQ) youth is necessary in order to establish what is already known about their experiences in high school. Moreover, to elucidate the risks of being LGBT and how support has been shown to buffer the impact of such risks. As stated in the previous chapter, LGBTQQ youth experience rates of suicide, depression and hopelessness that are significantly higher than for their heterosexual peers (Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005).

Consequently, looking more closely at the role of adults in this high school environment can enable a discussion about one way youth can access support. It remains unclear what behaviors or beliefs signal to LGBTQQ youth that an adult would be able to provide them with support. Thus, the literature intends to lay the framework to address if, among high school LGBTQQ youth, perceived similarities or differences in racial, gender or sexual identity correlate with support-seeking behaviors or the support obtained from adult caregivers, teachers, or other school staff.

In order to review the literature impacting how social mirroring interacts with support-seeking behaviors of LGBTQQ youth, the chapter will be broken up into the following sections: 1) Who is LGBTQQ?; 2) Sexual Identity Development;

3) Experiences of Predominantly White LGBTQ Youth; 4) Experiences of LGBTQ Youth of Color; 5) The Influence of Gender Expression; 6) Resilience Through Support; 7) Characteristics of Support and Supporters; and 8) The Social Mirror: Characteristics and Process.

Who is LGBTQ?

The literature refers to this population as 'sexual minority youth,' 'queer' or a combination of the letters that represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) identities. 'Queer' can act as an umbrella term and notes a deviation from what is heteronormative; it references that which does not follow 'normal' or 'acceptable' gender or sexual practices. The letters allow for a range of individual identities, each attached to their own history, to be represented. As a guide, this review of the literature will use LGBTQ. When a certain population is not followed within the research being discussed the letters will be amended. For example, there is little research which includes those that are 'questioning'. In that instance it would read LGBTQ with the remaining Q representing 'queer'.

Gender is a separate variable from sexuality. It is also an important factor to consider within the lens of a pervasively hetero-centric culture. Transgender or gender non-conforming youth may or may not be heterosexual depending on to whom they are attracted. At the same time, since gender non-conforming youth may conflict with traditional gender roles and norms, they would not fall within hetero-normative culture. Some of these youth refer to themselves as 'queer'. It should be noted that North American culture may group gender and sexuality

within the same category. While the constructs are related they do remain separate attributes.

Sexual Identity Development

A study conducted by the Safe Schools Coalition noted that of 15 million adolescents, 1 million are homosexual or bisexual in their attractions or orientation. This did not necessarily mean that they identified as gay (Reis & Saewyc, 1999). For some youth questioning their attractions, also referred to as 'identity confusion' (Troiden, 1993), is part of the coming-out process. However, heterosexuals also must learn to understand their sexual identity (Carver, Egan, & Perry, 2004).

Sexual identity development is a process that unfolds over a lifetime (Smith, 2004). As noted in Bringaze & White (2001) more recent sexual identity development models have moved to use the term 'phase' rather than 'stage' in describing a more fluid developmental process (p. 165). What has been noted is the importance of certain milestones, such as first sexual encounter or 'coming out' (the disclosure of identity) (Smith, 2004; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999).

LGBTQQ youth are coming out at an earlier age to reveal that they do not consider themselves heterosexual, in the traditional sense of being solely attracted to the opposite sex. The literature reveals that males tend to express their sexual identity in elementary and middle school, while often females are not 'out' until high school (Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). On average, youth are coming-out to themselves between the ages of 16 and 17 (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999).

Understanding sexuality is a significant part of the development process. If this understanding lies outside the norms, there can be implications for mental health, physical well-being, and school performance. The following sections will look more closely into the experiences of LGBTQ youth, and begin to unfold existing knowledge of support as a means to resilience.

Predominantly White LGBTQ Youth

Verbal harassment is a daily occurrence for most LGBTQ youth (Koswic & Dias, 2006; Radkowsky & Siegal, 1999; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; D'Augelli, 2006). Physical and sexual assault are also highly prevalent. Though most likely to occur in the home (Savin-Williams, 1994), harassment by peers is a factor that can make the school environment unbearable (Rivers, 2000).

Isolation and alienation from family, community, and peers are the two factors most considered and feared by sexual minority youth (Radkowsky & Siegal, 1997; Savin-Williams, 1994; Vincke & Van Heeringen, 2002). It is the factor most considered when 'coming-out', as many youth have been kicked out of homes and disowned by their families. In a 1988 study conducted by Martin and Hetrick "95% [of LGB youth] felt frequently isolated from their peers because of their own feelings of 'differentness'". Attempting to pass as heterosexual is a real option that LGBTQ youth consider in order to avoid social isolation and harassment (Savin-Williams, 1994, p. 263).

The stress of isolation and discrimination for LGBTQ youth influences psychological well-being, as well as an ability to function in the external

environment. Rates of depression, hopelessness, suicide and drug use are higher among sexual minority youth as compared to their heterosexual peers (Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997; Vinke & Van Heeringen, 2002; Jordan, 2000). Lifetime victimization experiences (verbal abuse, threats of violence, assault, sexual assault and total victimization) have been positively correlated with higher rates of suicidal thinking (D'Augelli, 2006). This same study notes that the longer youth had experienced victimization, the higher their rates of suicidal thinking (D'Augelli, 2006).

Research has identified a link between the acceptance of sexual identity and the development and maintenance of alcoholism (Kus, 1988). In general, low-self esteem, as well as school failure or lack of interest in school, are two main risk factors for the development of substance abuse (Kandel, 1982; Kumpfer, 1989). This puts LGBTQ youth at increased risk on multiple levels. Substance abuse may be a means for these youth to cope with psychological and social distress, or perhaps a connection into the sexual minority community. Though gay-straight alliances and community centers have grown to provide social networks in some communities, social life continues to be dominated by the bar scene (Jordan, 2000).

Skipping school is a common way that LGBTQ youth attempt to escape the daily pressure of being 'different'. Those who experience more victimization are more likely to feign illness or play truant from school (Rivers, 2000; Koswic & Dias, 2006). Those youth who were less absent from school displayed better

grades and significantly fewer thoughts of self-harm and suicide (Rivers, 2000).

LGBTQQ Youth of Color

White middle-class samples of high school and college students provide the overwhelming majority of literature on LGBTQQ youth (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). This section's purpose is to address the lack of representation of youth of color in this population as demonstrated in the current literature. Moreover, this section will highlight racial dynamics within the LGBTQQ community that influence experiences of youth of color, as well as provide an explanation for their lack of representation.

McCready (2004) discusses the normalization of Whiteness as one of the main challenges contributing to the alienation of youth of color from California High School's (CHS) Gay-Straight Alliance from 1996 through 2000. Melanie Suchet (2007) elucidates on the construct of Whiteness,

What does it mean to be white? For most people, that is a strange question for which they have no answer. Whiteness is that which is not seen and not named. It is present everywhere but absent from discussion. It is the silent norm. The invisibility of whiteness is how it maintains its natural, neutral, and hidden position (p. 868)

Consequently, Whiteness takes on the power and privilege of being the 'norm' and the standard by which others are measured without even needing to 'claim' this position (Suchet, 2007). The LGBTQQ community is no exception, whereas Whiteness is the unspoken norm. As such, it leads to the assumption that White LGBTQQ youth have identities that are 'more understandable' (McCready, 2004, p. 47).

Thus, in predominantly White LGBTQQ organizations and communities, the White members of the group create the norm. As discussed by Suchet (2007) this is historically rooted in the construction of Whiteness. She notes that Whiteness continues to be maintained by 'power relations' and 'institutions' whereas this superior position means maintaining "A dominant belief in our view of the world" (p. 870). Thus, highlighting the view of the LGBTQQ community is understood from the dominant White perspective. This privileges the White identities and alienates LGBTQQ youth of color (McCready, 2004), thereby elucidating one crucial way in which these youth face racism within the LGBTQQ community in addition to homophobia from their own racial or ethnic groups (Han, 2007; Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Leck, 2000).

Dube & Savin-Williams (1999) note that sexual minority youth of color often describe feeling as if they must choose between their sexual identity and their ethnic identity. That is, for many of these youth being heterosexual becomes an inclusion criterion to remain a member of their racial or ethnic group (McCready, 2004). For these youth, claiming an LGBTQQ identity could mean choosing to separate from their racial or ethnic identity.

Since racial/ethnic identity is a central part of adolescent development, the risk of 'coming out' means not just the potential of losing their family and friends, but also membership into their community. For African-American youths, this means risking the loss of their 'fictive kinship,' the historically rooted collective social identity (Fordham, 1996). Since Whites have historically held the locus of power and control, fictive kinship enables the African-American community to

regain their power through bounds of a greater or collective identity. There are norms and expectations in order to be a part of this identity in the same way that Whiteness is "A system of beliefs, policies and practices" (Suchet, 2007. p. 868). At CHS, the inclusion criterion for the Black students was heterosexuality. To affiliate with the GSA was to associate with a group in which Whites established the inclusion criteria (McCready, 2004). Moreover, to affiliate with the GSA then threatens cultural and racial bonds in favor of Whiteness. This could mean choosing a system that oppresses your identity, a racist system.

So how do LGBTQ youth of color find an environment that values all of their identity? Developing an integrated sense of self involves accepting sexual identity in the frame of a racial or ethnic identity (Greene, 1997; Manalansan, 1996; Savin-Williams, 1998). It is an ability to hold both sexual identity and racial identity together in the context of all the parts of the person. Thus, this developmental process will also vary based on the racial/ethnic group, geographic region, the degree of acculturation, religious affiliation, and economic status (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Koswic & Dias, 2006). Family dynamics and fears of isolation continue, as within the White-dominant sample, to be a prominent theme for these youth; such that they can be significant barriers to developing this integrated sense of self (Green, 1997; Chung & Katayama, 1999; Fong, 1994).

In Asian cultures, the concept of Yin-Yang is about balance. Male and female is a balance, thus man-man or woman-woman is 'against nature' (Chung & Katayama, 1999, p.23). Han (2007) discusses that the absence of language

contributes to Asian and Latino gay males feeling invisible. It becomes challenging to explain who they are, and often the existing language exhibits negative gay stereotypes (p. 62).

Dube and Savin-Williams (1999) report that "Fewer than half of ethnic minority youths reported disclosure to family members" (p. 1396). Interestingly, this same study found that the youth overcame their competing identities (on the one side homophobia from family and ethnic communities, and on the other side racism from gay communities.). This finding was consistent across their sample population (Asian-American, Latino, African-American, White middle-class college students), which demonstrated to Dube and Savin-Williams that the integration of identity does not necessarily imply disclosure (1999).

Consequently, there is a complicated picture of development that these youth will experience. Simultaneously, these youths experience racism within the gay community compounding the pressure to maintain family and fictive kinship. At first glance this is a daunting picture, however, many of these youth are figuring out how to successfully integrate their identity. Adults' understanding of the developmental tasks for LGBTQ youth of color could impact their ability to provide effective support. Will youth of color look for someone with a similar racial/ethnic identity? Would this be in keeping with their fictive kinship, or perhaps threatening membership with their community? If these youth sought someone with a similar identity, would they find it more helpful? In order to further understand the experience and needs of these youth, the following will more

specifically review the experiences of LGBTQ youth of color within the high school environment.

School Experiences for LGBTQ Youth of Color

Verbal Harassment is also a daily experience for LGBTQ youth of color. Koswic & Cullen (2001) discuss that "Nearly half of GLBT youth of color report verbal harassment based on both their sexual orientation and their race/ethnicity" (p. 55). The 2003 National School Climate Survey (Koswic & Dias, 2006), the most comprehensive study of school-related experiences of LGBT youth of color ($n = 236$), notes that the majority (91.1%) of youth reported frequently hearing homophobic statements and one-third reported frequently or often hearing racist statements (Koswic & Dias, 2006). "Fewer than 2% reported never or rarely hearing either kind of remarks" (p. 8). The report goes on to reveal that "half of the youth of color reported some experience of verbal harassment related to race/ethnicity, about 10% reported physical harassment and about 5% reported physical assault" (p. 12).

Reports of harassment varied based on the racial composition of the schools. "LGBT youth of color were less likely to report verbal harassment related to their race/ethnicity when attending schools that mostly had students of their own race/ethnicity ... and more likely to report physical assault related to their sexual orientation." (p. 13)

Though incidents based on race/ethnicity were less common than incidents of physical assault related to sexual orientation and gender expression, youth are experiencing the combined impact of racism, homophobia and

heterosexism. When asked about harassment based on gender expression, race, and sexual orientation, the majority of youth of color reported that their harassment was due to their combined personal characteristics (p. 14).

Harassment results in LGBTQ youth of color not feeling safe in their schools. In line with the school truancy literature for our predominantly White samples, due to feeling unsafe one-third of LGBTQ youth of color in the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) sample skipped class in the last month and 1/3 skipped a day of school in the last month (Koswic & Dias, 2006).

Influence of Gender Expression on Experiences of LGBTQ Youth

As difficult as it is for LGBTQ youth to differ in sexuality, gender norms are equally ingrained in society. 'From Teasing to Torment,' a school climate survey of all students and teachers (that is not exclusive to the LGBT community), discusses that gender is linked to perceptions of sexuality (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005). The most noted reason for being harassed was appearance and LGBT students were more likely to report verbal harassment for how they look and because of their gender expression, i.e. 'how traditionally masculine or feminine they act' (p. 4).

Those LGBTQ youth who conform to gender norms tend to be less targeted than those youth who are gender non-conforming (Wyss, 2004). Gay male youth who exhibit a more feminine presentation experience significantly more bullying than their more masculine gay male peers (Friedman et al., 2006). Additionally, as Friedman et al. (2006) explored, increased bullying in high school

is significantly correlated to suicidality ($r = .50, p < .01$) (Friedman et al., 2006, p.622).

A qualitative study conducted by Shannon Wyss (2004) provides insight into the presentation and behavior of gender non-conforming sexual minority youth. The youth note the use of avoidance as a primary means of survival. Another relevant characteristic was the use of bravado - dressing and acting tough to keep others away (2004). Additionally, many of the youth, "Put on a false 'front' of looking and acting like the gender associated with their birth sex" (p. 722). Some were prepared to defend themselves either verbally or physically, and none experienced school as a safe place. Six of nineteen respondents experienced sexual assault in high school ranging from verbal attacks, to grabbing and rape (2004).

Fighting Alienation: Resilience through Support

Despite the identified risk factors for LGBTQ youth, many of these youth develop into healthy, happy, productive members of society (Bringaze & White, 2001; Holmes & Cahill, 2004). A common variable among these youth has been the existence of social support (Bringaze & White, 2001; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999; Vincke & Van Heeringen, 2002; Yakushko, 2005).

LGBTQ youth with access to social support experience fewer of the risk factors associated with an oppressed status. While social support for these youth may not be able to stop bullying and discrimination, it has been demonstrated to mediate the effects of such bullying (Friedman et al., 2006). Social support has

been related to better school performance, more school belonging, and less absence or truancy (Rivers, 2002; Murdoch & Bloch, 2005). It is also associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Yakushko, 2005) and decreased suicidality (Friedman et al., 2006).

Vincke & Van Heeringen (2002) discuss that it is not simply the use of social support, however, the perceived availability of social support that is connected with less experience of depression and hopelessness, as well as higher levels of self-esteem. This supports relationships between school belonging and school environment explored by Murdock and Bolch (2005). Teacher support was found to buffer the effects of victimization and homophobic schools. Students experiencing a homophobic school climate, social support from teachers and with lower rates of victimization reported a psychological sense of belonging that was just as high as the students who neither experienced support from teachers or a homophobic environment (p. 168). The GPA (Grade Point Average) of these groups was parallel to the GPA for the students who were highly supported by all aspects of their high school. Students without any support, those classified as 'highly vulnerable' displayed significantly lower GPAs, sense of school belonging and higher rates of disruptive behavior (as measured by school discipline, i.e. getting suspended).

Characteristics of Support and Supporters

In order to examine social support, it has been defined in a range of ways. In quantitative studies (Bringaze & White, 2001; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Williams, Connolly, Peplar & Craig, 2005), social support has been defined by

relationships with mothers, best friends and the size of friend networks. Measurements such as the Social Provisions Scale (Yakushko, 2005) and the Social Support Scale for Children and Adolescents (Murdock & Bolch, 2005) have been used to calculate these supports. Qualitative studies reveal a range of people from peers to members of their LGBTQ community who provide social support.

There are four main types of social support for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth that are identified in the literature: emotional, informational, concrete or instrumental, and appraisal (Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999). Notably, LGBTQ youth obtain these supports differentially across peers, family, community and school officials such as teachers and counselors.

LGBTQ youth have identified several characteristics of the support they received. Two of the characteristics include role modeling (Bringaze & White, 2001; Nesmith, Burton, Cosgrove, 1999) and 'parentified figures,' that is adults who are sought to provide advice, nurturing and act as a role model (Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999, p. 101). The support provided by these figures included introduction to the gay and lesbian community (Nesmith, Burton, Cosgrove, 1999; Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). LGBT adults have noted the importance of knowing healthy, happy and successful LGBT adults when they were youth (appraisal support).

Bringaze and White (2001) conducted a study on 'out' lesbians in positions of leadership and the factors which supported their coming out process.

These successful women noted associations with the gay and lesbian community (appraisal), self-help resources (informational), individual counseling (emotional), support from family, and their relationship to a religious or spiritual affiliation.

Peer groups tend to be the primary source of emotional support during adolescence (Nesmith, Burton, Cosgrove, 1999; Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). As Murdock and Bolch note, "It is not one aspect of school climate alone, but a student's combined personal experiences that affect their academic success" (p. 168). As such, what support do adults in the school provide to contribute to this larger picture?

Adult Support in School

Students in the 2005 National School Climate Survey reported on the response of school personnel to reports of harassment. The majority of students did not report incidents to school authorities (58.6%). Almost a third of students did not believe anything would be done to address the situation, about one-fifth did not think the incident was serious enough and 16% noted that the staff were homophobic. Considering those students who did make reports to school personnel, only 9.3% reported that the incident was taken seriously and actions were taken to address the situation. In schools with effective interventions, these interventions impacted the larger student body's experience, such that there were lower frequencies of verbal harassment based on sexual orientation or gender expression (Koswic & Diaz, 2006).

On the other hand, 9 out of 10 students reported knowing at least one member of their school personnel who was supportive of LGBT students.

The presence of school staff contributed to ... a greater sense of safety, fewer reports of missing days of school, a greater sense of belonging at school, and higher incidence of planning to attend college. The results further indicate that having a 'critical mass' of supportive staff, more than simply one or two, is what may produce the best outcomes from LGBT students. (p. 8-9)

Adult support in school has been studied largely within the context of teachers and counselors. Murdock and Bolch (2005) asked participants about the perceived supportiveness of their school as a whole, which includes implications toward administration, however, the research did not explore adult relationships within this context. Additionally, literature aimed at counselors explores experiences of LGBTQ youth and implications for practice. While the lesbians from Bringaze and White's 2001 study stated therapy was a key element in their coming out process, it is unclear in the high school context if LGBTQ youth will seek support in this arena and, if so, if they will do so for issues regarding their sexual orientation.

Teachers have received mixed reviews. Some youth have been afraid to be 'out' to teachers for fear of retaliation (Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). In River's (2000) study on school absence and truancy, one quarter of respondents noted being bullied by a teacher. At the same time, other LGBTQ youth identify a teacher as someone who helped them through high school by either providing a role model of a healthy adult sexual minority, emotional support, introducing them to information on sexuality or even introducing them to the LGBTQ community. Interestingly enough, supportive teachers appeared to be either 'out' or perceived as a member of the LGBTQ community themselves.

While it is clear that role models play an important role in providing support, it is not clear what role matching plays in an ability to identify support or find that support helpful. Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove (1999) did find that supporters who were themselves a sexual minority were viewed to give more support overall than heterosexual supports, particularly in regards to informational support. At the same time, this did not correlate with a match in sexual orientation.

Thus, it becomes apparent how essential it is to have LGBTQQ adults in the lives of LGBTQQ youth. Moreover, that the more support, the greater the network, the more these adults can be a means to resiliency. At the same time, the data on visible LGBT supports in high school does not match up with the mixed experiences of LGBTQQ youth. This raises important questions about what makes an adult approachable. The following section will explore social mirroring as a means to understanding the process of seeking and utilizing support.

The Social Mirror

People are designed with mirror neurons that are activated when both performing and observing an action (Iacoboni, 2002; Wolf et al., 2001). They are found in the language, motor, and limbic (emotion) areas of the brain (Iacoboni, 2002). Iacoboni 2002 found that action representation (e.g. watching a hand movement or facial expression) mediates the recognition of emotions in the other even during simple observation. Thus, demonstrating that mirror neurons act as a link between people; it is the biological connection of shared experience, also

described as a 'social glue' (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). This shared experience leads to the development of empathy (Iacoboni, 2007; Wolf et al., 2001), hence establishing a connection between empathy and social mirroring (Iacoboni, 2007).

Examining what mediates this 'social glue' becomes important to understanding how empathy could be developed for LGBTQQ youth in high school. Research has explored two facets of our 'social glue', our physical/group characteristics (e.g. biological sex or race), or the process through which we interact (e.g. the tone of voice or how we position our bodies). As the idea of a 'social glue' is in itself a construction of biological and environmental factors, there is likely an interaction between both our process and our presenting characteristics.

Thus, what type of social mirror, what type of behavior or appearance needs to be perceived by LGBTQQ youth in order to 1) seek support and 2) find it helpful. The following will review what is known about these different categories of research. First by examining what is known about the social mirror based on identity matching and then going on to discuss more process oriented research.

Results on Social Mirroring: What You See or How You Act?

Research on client matching has been preformed in primarily two types of arenas, with adults and in some type of therapeutic settings (Watkins & Terrell, 1988; Bowman et al., 2001; Hall et al., 2002), whether real or simulated. These findings should be carefully applied to an adolescent population who may or may not be seeking support for mental health. Moreover, no literature was found that

explores sexual orientation as a variable of significance. Those studies that explore sex and gender do so within the binary of 'male' and 'female'.

Notably, the main body of research on identity matching in treatment has explored sex and gender, often as interchangeable variables. There are only a handful of studies which explore other aspects of identity matching, such as race, ethnicity, and language (Gim, Atkinson, & Kim, 1991; Atkinson, Ponce, & Martinez, 1984; Hall et al., 2002; Sanhu, Reeves, & Portes, 1993). Due to the variability of measures and outcomes, the literature has not drawn any clear conclusions about the influence of identity matching in a treatment setting (Bowman et al., 2001; Gim, Atkinson, & Kim, 1991; Atkinson, Ponce, & Martinez, 1984). It has been related to perceived amounts of cultural sensitivity, counselor credibility, treatment dropout rates and length of treatment.

Bowman (1993) suggests that since the results for client-counselor matching based on sex are so mixed, the safest stance to take is understanding sex as a poor predictor of therapy outcome. He demonstrated this by conducting a meta-analysis of the 64 related studies conducted between 1957 and 2000 (Bowman, et al., 2001). A more recent study found that a gender match for children and adolescents at initial assessment was associated with a greater number of sessions and less dropout (Hall, Guterman, Lee & Little, 2002).

Interestingly, there is a preliminary understanding that a greater specificity of social location may produce more significant results. For example, level of acculturation may act as a mediating variable, particularly for Mexican-American

and Asian-American clients (Gim, Atkinson, & Kim, 1991; Atkinson, Ponce, & Martinez, 1984).

More significant findings have been correlated to the process of social interaction rather than a set social variable. Using the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (BLRI) Daya Sandhu, Glen Reeves and Pedro Portes (1993) measured level of empathy and trustworthiness between Native-American adolescent males who were paired with ethnically different female master's students in counseling. They found that nonverbal mirroring significantly increased empathy towards a culturally different counselor as compared to a non-mirroring condition. Similarly, research on therapist postural mirroring and client perceived rapport found that when the therapist's posture mirrored that of the client, higher moments of empathy were reported from the client (Sharpley et al., 2001).

Consequently, even despite differences in social identity, empathy and rapport have been shown to be greater when other means of mirroring are present. The question raised becomes, what other types of mirroring need to be present for LGBTQQ youth. Does having a shared social identity make it more likely for these process-orientated variables to be similar? How would a Latina Lesbian know that she could approach a Caucasian Heterosexual Male for support? The inconclusive and mixed results of characteristic matching coupled with the significant findings of nonverbal and postural mirroring, leaves open our understanding of how we can develop empathy.

Are LGBTQ youth more likely to seek adults who mirror their own identity? If so, is this exhibited through identity variables such as sexual orientation, gender and race? Or is there a process to demonstrating support for the LGBTQ community? The focus of this study is to provide a preliminary understanding of the help-seeking and use behaviors of LGBTQ youth by exploring their relationships with adults in high school through the lens of social mirroring.

Conclusion

The current study aims to expand on knowledge about how LGBTQ youth find and utilize support from adults in high school. Moreover, to explore the intersections of race and gender as they may impact an individual's ability to access supports that match their own identity, lack knowledge of the issues impacting their need for support or information connecting them to other members of their community. That is, how do these variables of social location influence 1) the identification of support; 2) types of support provided; and 3) perceived helpfulness of this support.

The literature presented clearly states that support buffers the impact of depression, isolation, school belonging, hopelessness and self-esteem. It is the intention of this study to expand on how adults can make themselves available, accessible and useful so that the potential for support may broaden. The literature notes the key role of knowing older successful LGBT adults. At the same time, if behavior and belief can mirror empathy towards LGBTQ youth, it

can extend access to adults who may not mirror their sexual orientation, gender or race.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Social support has been found to buffer the risks of growing up as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQQ) youth in high school. The present study intends to build upon knowledge regarding what types of support these youth are receiving from adults in high school; to further understand how this support is identified; and to measure if the support received impacted the risks associated with LGBTQQ youth in high school. Moreover, to examine what role gender, sexuality, and race play in support seeking and the perceived helpfulness of support. That is, with research indicating the importance of LGBTQQ youth knowing older successful LGBTQQ adults, would matched social identities between student and adult provide a higher likelihood of support seeking, more received support?

Due to the breadth of research conducted on LGBTQQ youth, a questionnaire was designed based on this research to reach as many of these youth as possible. In addition to exploring support seeking, types of support and the impact of support on risk factors, such as school belonging and hopelessness, demographic information and direct questions related to the impact of social variables on support were also explored. For example, participants were asked to rate to the degree (on a Likert Type Scale) to which the perceived sexuality of the adult impacted their ability to ask them for support.

Participants

The sample that this study aimed to gather were Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQQ) youth between the ages of 18 to 27 who were at least 'out' to themselves in high school, and while in high school sought support based on their sexual orientation. Originally the goal was to find the most recent high school graduates, however, due to a low response rate the age range was extended from 18-22 to 18-27. The intent was to gather a sample of 50 participants who represented a range of racial, gender and sexual backgrounds.

All participants were contacted through an email with a link to the questionnaire (See Appendix B). The email was sent to anyone known to the researcher. These included friends, family, and colleagues. The researcher's own demographics and connections to the LGBTQQ community enabled access to the desired population, as well as connections to others familiar with this sector of the LGBTQQ community. The email described the purpose of the study and provided the criteria for participation. It requested that they participate or pass the email on to others who may be able to participate.

Informed Consent (See Appendix C) was given online through Survey Monkey. This outlined the purpose of the study, benefits and risks to participation, their rights as a participant, as well as providing resources for support. Participants could withdraw at anytime from the questionnaire and could skip any questions they did not want to answer. The Human Subjects Committee of Smith College School for Social Work approved the research study (See

Appendix A), the informed consent (See Appendix C), as well as the above-mentioned email (See Appendix B).

Skip logic was applied so that respondents who clicked 'NO' and did not agree to the terms of consent were forwarded to the last page of the survey. This page provided resources for support and thanked them for their participation.

Data Collection

A questionnaire was designed based on previous research (see Appendix D). Demographics were gathered on age, gender, sexuality, and race for the participant, as well as the perceived demographics of the adult from whom they sought support. Questions were asked regarding the types of support received, such as 'how much emotional support did this adult provide?', the perceived influence of demographic variables on an ability to seek support, and the degree to which the support influenced common risk factors, such as school belonging and feelings of hopelessness. Responses were scored on a Likert type scale where 1 is 'Not at all' and 5 is 'A Great Deal'.

Procedure

The sample was gathered through a snowball of convenience. Due to needing a large sample from this oppressed population, a convenient (available) sample allowed access to a wider range of participants. An email (See Appendix B) was sent to friends, family and colleagues either known to meet inclusion criteria or with connections to members of the LGBTQQ community. This email

requested for the email to be passed on to other possible participants, consequently snowballing the email from participant to participant.

While the goal was to gather a wide demographic range of participants, the sample was predominantly white and female by both sex and gender. This will be further examined in the findings, as well as the discussion. The use of a convenient sampling method likely impacted this result.

A raffle (see Appendix E) was used as incentive to participate. It was designed as a second survey and a link to the raffle entry was provided at the end of the questionnaire. Participants were asked only for an email address and were eligible to win one of three \$25 gift cards from Amazon.com.

Analysis

Participants were given the option of describing two adult relationships, however, only the first adult was used in the analysis. There were not enough of these second adults to conduct a separate analysis, and it was agreed with the research analyst that adding these relationships to the first could confound the data.

In order to examine social mirroring, the data was divided and coded in a couple of different ways. The first was to use the question 'did you seek an adult with a similar identity to your own?' to compare those who stated 'yes' to those who stated 'no'. T-tests were run according to types of support received, the impact on risk factors and overall support.

Based on all participants identifying as LGBTQQ, in order to test for matching based on sexual identity, participants who sought support from a

perceived LGBTQQ adult were compared to those who sought support from a perceived Heterosexual adult. T-tests were again run according to types of support received, the impact on risk factors and overall support.

Testing for effects based on gender involved coding both the participants and adults on a 'gender conforming' versus a 'gender non-conforming' identity. Gender conforming identities included the binary of 'male' and 'female' or 'man' and 'woman'. Gender non-conforming identities included 'gender queer', 'masculine female' and 'gender non-conforming'. T-test were run comparing the experience of gender conforming versus non-conforming participants, participants who sought support from a gender-conforming versus non-conforming adult, and, lastly, by grouping participants who sought an adult with a similar gender identity versus those who sought support from an adult with a different gender identity. As with the following measures the T-tests compared the experience of types of support, risk factors and overall support.

Testing for effects based on race was not possible due to the sample demographics. The aim was to use the same method as described for gender.

There was one open-ended question that asked participants to describe three relevant characteristics of the adult. The researcher coded this question. In order for a theme to be relevant at least 5 participants (12.5% of the sample) needed to note it in this section.

There are some obvious limitations to this method of analysis, for example, only with gender are distinct matches formulated between the social categories of gender, race and sexuality. Furthermore, all of the groups held

within the LGBTQQ community are put together, whereas there can be variation in the experience of these groups.

Based on the inconclusive nature of past research on social mirroring and categories of gender and race, the effects of these variables on LGBTQQ youth in high school is unknown. The qualitative data on sexual identity mirroring indicates that that LGBTQQ youth may experience significantly more support from LGBTQQ adults. These results are expected to be demonstrated more so in the categories of 'emotional' and 'appraisal' (role-modeling) support. The following chapter will review the results of the questionnaire.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The following will review the collected questionnaire data. The hope is to understand if there is a relationship between perceived similarities in racial, gender and sexual identity and the support sought from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth and obtained from adults in high school. The chapter will begin by reviewing who responded to the questionnaire. It will describe the adults, their demographics, how they were identified as a potential supporter, and the types of support they provided. It will also describe how these youth noted the impact of the support on possible risk factors, such as school belonging and hopelessness. The chapter will conclude with a description of how gender, race and sexuality influenced support seeking behavior, as well as correlated to types of support that were received.

Respondents

Seventy-eight people began the questionnaire, of whom forty-four met the inclusion criteria and completed the questionnaire. They were between the ages of 18 to 27, sought support from an adult in high school on an issue related to sexuality and 'out' to at least themselves as LGBTQQ for a year in high school. Their ages ranged from 18 to 27, with a mode of 19 and a mean of 20.8. The biological sex of the sample was 82.9% female. There was a range of expressed gender identity, 58.5% identified as female, 9.8% as male and 7.3% as queer.

Thirty-five of forty-four respondents identified as White (79.5%). The six remaining participants of color noted their racial identities as Asian, Black, Brazilian, Hispanic, Mixed and Native American. See Table 1 for expanded demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u>Percent</u>
Biological Sex		
Male	7	17.1
Female	34	82.9
Gender Identity		
Female / Woman	26	63.4
Male / Man	5	12.2
Bisexual	2	4.9
Genderqueer / Queer	6	14.6
Masculine Woman	1	2.4
Unsure, More Masculine	1	2.4
Racial Identity		
Asian	1	2.3
Black	1	2.3
Brazilian	1	2.3
Hispanic	1	2.3
Mixed	1	2.3
Native American	1	2.3
White	35	79.5

*N = 40

Sexual orientation was described through a Likert-type scale, whereas 1 is 'Not At All' and 5 is 'A Great Deal'. For example, participants were asked how much they 'questioned your attractions' in high school or were 'attracted to

people of the same-sex'. The raw scores are demonstrated in Figure 1 and the mean scores can be seen in Table 2. The majority of participants note having been attracted to people of the same-sex (81.8%) or same-gender (77.5%) a 'Quite A Bit' or 'A Great Deal'. At the same time 79.5% also noted questioning their attractions to the same degree.

Figure 1

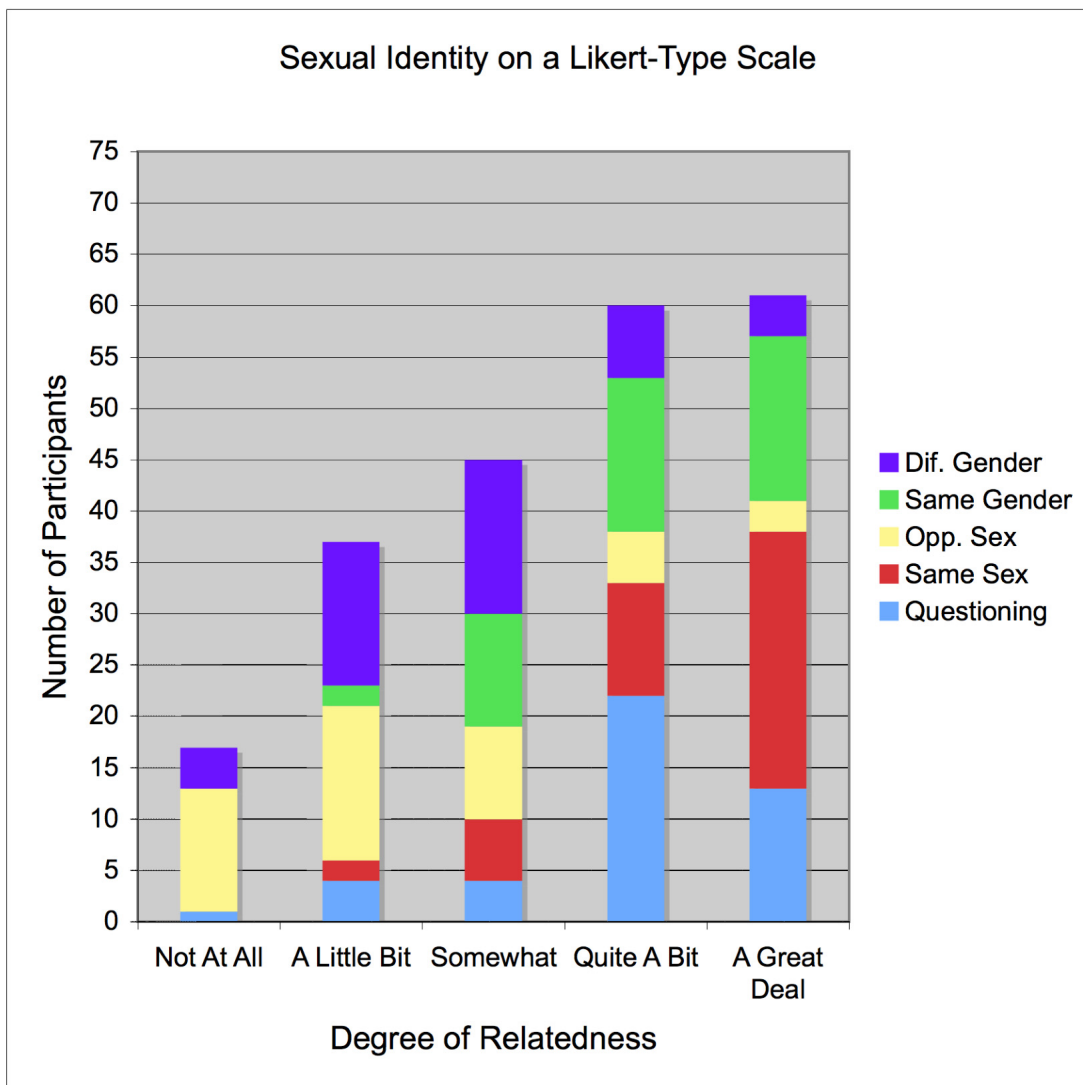


Table 2

Ratings of Participant Sexual Identity on a Likert-type Scale

	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Identified with Bio Sex	4.05	.987
Identified with Gender	3.75	.943
Attractions		
Questioning	3.95	.987
Same Sex	4.34	.888
Dif Sex	2.36	1.203
Same Gender	4.02	.902
Dif Gender	2.84	1.098

Likert type scale used in which 1 = Not at All and 5 = A Great Deal. *N* = 44

Participants went to high schools located in the Northeast (68.2%), West (11.4%), South (15.9%), and Midwest (4.5%) (See Figure 2a). There was a range of settings from the suburbs (53.5%), rural (20.9%) and urban areas (25.6%) (See Figure 2b). Eight-five percent noted being the racial majority in their schools.

Figure 2a

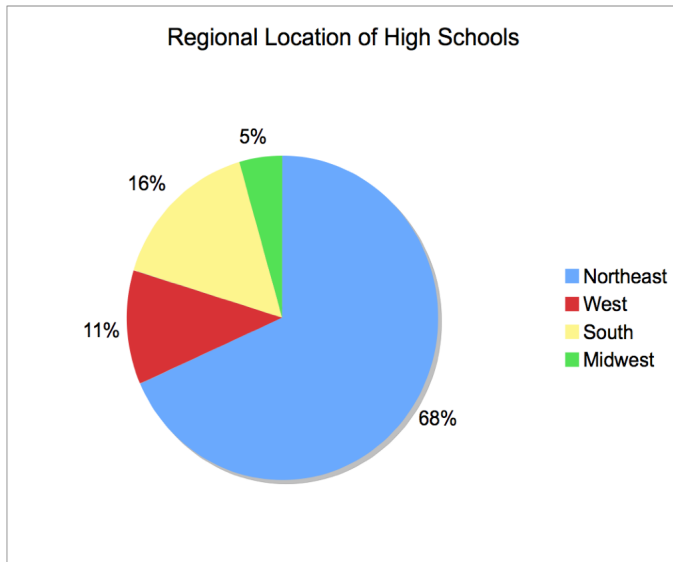
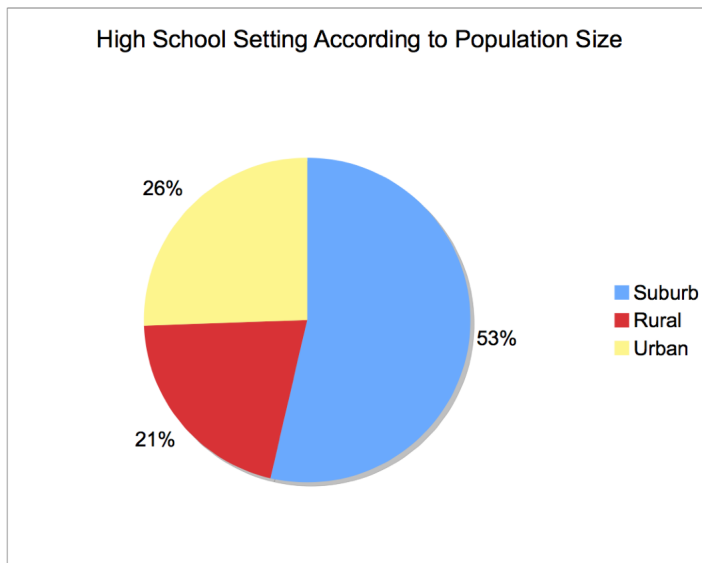


Figure 2b

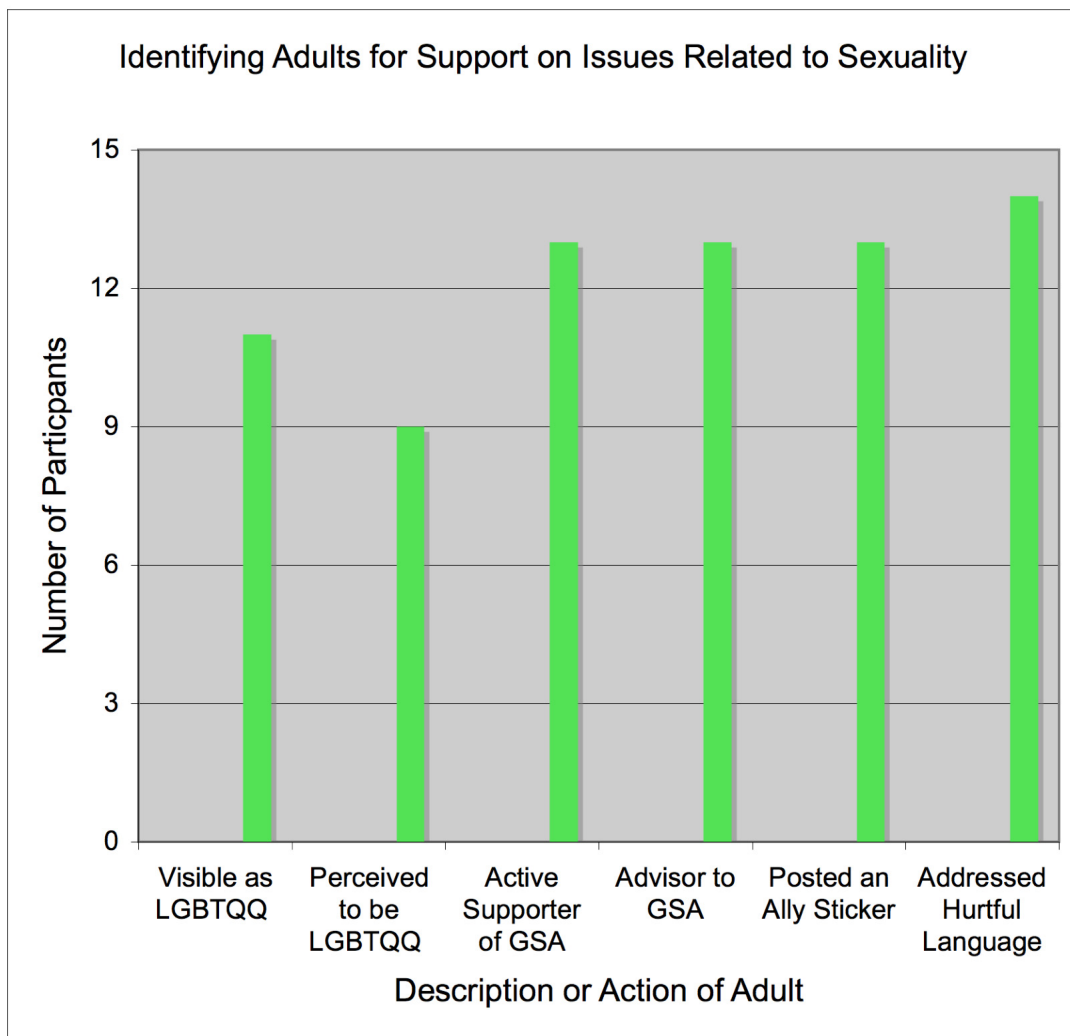


Identifying Support

Participants were asked how they were able to identify adults as approachable on issues related to sexuality. The question allowed for multiple

responses. One-quarter of identified adults were a visible member of the LGBTQQ community, another fifth were perceived to be. Almost one-third of adults had addressed hurtful language. Almost 30% of adults had either been an advisor to the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), an active supporter of the GSA, or posted a sticker indicating that they were an ally to the LGBTQQ community. Figure 3 represents the number of participants that used the above signals to identify an adult.

Figure 3



The following themes were identified when participants further described the characteristics of their adults: Good Listener, Available / Accessible, Visibility in LGBTQQ Community, Authority / Leadership / Activism, Open-minded / Non-Judgmental, Empathetic / Sympathetic, Trust / Confidentiality, Previous Relationship, and a Sense of Humor (see Table 3). Participants put a great deal of emphasis on knowing how this adult felt about or would respond to talking about issues of sexuality. One participant noted "her gender and sexuality were certainly a huge signal for me that she was supportive" while another stated "I also knew her daughter was queer and that she seemed to be pretty supportive about it".

Table 3

Characteristics of Adult Supporters

	<u>n*</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Good Listener	10	25
Available / Accessible	11	27.5
Visibility in LGBTQQ Community	5	12.5
Authority / Leadership / Activism	11	27.5
Open-minded / Non-Judgmental	7	17.5
Empathetic / Sympathetic	9	22.5
Trust / Confidentiality	9	22.5
Previous Relationship	5	12.5
Humor	5	12.5

*N = 40

Additionally, knowing the beliefs of the adult was related to having a previous relationship with the adult, the perceived or stated LGBTQ status of the adult, and witnessing their activism in the school community. For example, adults were described as 'I knew him well anyway', 'totally out,' 'active, 'committed,' as well as an 'Active supporter of the GSA'. One student went further to state, "I could not have formed such a trust tie had we met strictly within her professional capacity. ... Because we engaged through non-scholastic shared interest, I could see her as a person".

Moreover, participants looked for references, knowing that the adult spoke up against hurtful language or was involved in the GSA, knowing that they responded favorably to other LGBTQQ students, and taking the recommendations of friends. This was found in statements such as, 'great reputation,' 'leadership role,' 'a friend of mine recommended her as opposed to other counselors at school,' 'talked openly about racial issues and discrimination' as well as 'knowledge of ally status'.

The most highly noted characteristic was empathy and sympathy, which was noted by 13 participants (32.5%). While some used these words directly, in addition to 'caring' and 'understanding' there were two participants who appeared to sum up the relevance of this quality. One participant remarked, "She openly expressed an interest in my well-being as a person." Another states, "She seemed to care greatly about my well-being."

Characteristics of Support and Supporters

The majority of identified adults were teachers (52.3%, $n = 23$). Two principals, 12 counselors, 6 coaches and 13 club or activity advisors were also identified. Notably, many teachers played multiple roles in their schools. Eight of the 13 club advisors, 3 of the 6 coaches and 2 of the 12 counselors were also teachers.

Demographically, identified adults were perceived to be 76.2% female by biological sex ($n = 32$), 66.7% ($n = 28$) female by gender identity, 92.9% white ($n = 39$), 35% lesbian, 12.5% gay and 42.5% heterosexual. See Table 4 for expanded demographic information.

Table 4

Perceived Demographics of Adults

	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u>Percent</u>
Biological Sex		
Male	9	21.4
Female	32	76.2
Transexual	1	2.4
Gender Identity		
Male	8	19.0
Female	28	66.7
Gender Non-Conforming	6	14.3
Sexuality		
Heterosexual	17	42.5
LGBTQQ	23	57.5
Lesbian	14	35.0
Gay	5	12.5
Bisexual	1	2.5
Trans	1	2.5
Questioning	2	5.0
Race		
White / Caucasian	39	92.9
Hispanic / Latina(o)	1	2.4
African-American / Black	2	4.8

The most highly rated types of support received by participants were emotional and role modeling. Seventy percent ($n = 29$) noted receiving 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal' of emotional support. Forty-one percent ($n = 17$) noted receiving the same amount of role modeling. A full report of mean scores on types of support can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Types of Support Received

Amount of Support	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Emotional	3.78	.881
Role Modeling	3.15	1.352
Introduction to Successful Sexual Minority Adults	2.34	1.371
Education about Sexual Identity Development	2.34	1.257
References to Websites	1.80	1.100
Connections to Community Groups	2.32	1.474
Self-Help Resources	1.90	1.114
Support with Homework / Papers / Studying	2.56	1.379
Connections to grants / scholarships	1.56	1.026
Support Finding or applying for a Job	1.37	.915

Likert type scale used in which 1 = Not at All and 5 = A Great Deal. *N = 41

Experience of Support

The majority (70.7%) of participants reported an increase in self-esteem based on the support they received. Approximately half of all participants reported an improvement in school belonging (47.5%), feelings of depression (52.6%), feelings of isolation (56.1%) and feelings of hopelessness (47.1%) (See Table 6).

Table 6

Influence of Support on Common Risk Factors Associated with LGBTQQ Youth

Risk Factors	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Self-Esteem	2.24	.943
School Belonging	2.65	.893
Depression	3.39	1.028
Isolation	3.56	1.205
Hopelessness	3.47	1.237

Likert type scale used in which 1 = Increased Significantly 3 = No Change and 5 = Decreased Significantly. *N = 41

Smaller numbers of participants reported a deterioration of risk factors. Interestingly, Spearman rho correlations run between the types of support and risk factors (See Table 7) demonstrate significant relationships in which the increase of support served to diminish the experience of depression, isolation and hopelessness, while increasing participants' experience of self-esteem and school belonging.

Table 7

Spearman Rho Correlations between Types of Support Received and Risk Factors

Amount of Support	<u>Self-Esteem</u>	<u>School Belonging</u>	<u>Depression</u>	<u>Isolation</u>	<u>Hopelessness</u>
Overall Support	-.613***	--	.516***	.569***	.608***
Emotional	-.416**	--	--	--	.386*
Role Modeling	-.394*	--	.354*	.401**	.411*
Introduction to Successful Sexual Minority Adults	--	-.435**	--	.351*	--
Education about Sexual Identity Development	-.439**	-.376*	.337*	.486***	--
References to Websites	-.414**	--	--	.376*	--
Connections to Community Groups	-.389*	-.487***	--	.398**	--
Self-Help Resources	-.528***	--	--	--	--
Support with Homework / Papers / Studying	-.338*	--	--	--	--
Connections to grants / scholarships	--	--	--	--	--
Support Finding or applying for a Job	--	--	--	--	--

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

The relationships found between types of support and the identified risk factors vary in strength. As the focus remains on how support is impacting LGBTQQ youth, these relationships will be discussed according to the risk factors. Beginning with self-esteem we find moderate correlations with emotional support ($r_s = -.416$, $p = .007$, two-tailed), education about sexual identity development ($r_s = -.439$, $p = .004$, two-tailed), references to websites relevant to their sexual identity ($r_s = -.414$, $p = .007$, two-tailed) and references to self-help resources ($r_s = -.528$, $p = .000$, two-tailed). This indicates that the more of these supports participants received, the higher the increase in self-esteem.

School Belonging demonstrated a moderate relationship with introduction to successful sexual minority adults ($r_s = -.435$, $p = .005$, two-tailed) and with developing connections to community groups ($r_s = -.487$, $p = .001$, two-tailed). This signifies that school belonging increased with an increase in knowing successful minority youths and connections with community groups. A connection to community groups and role-modeling were also found to have a moderate relationship with feelings of isolation ($r_s = .398$, $p = .010$, two-tailed; $r_s = .401$, $p = .009$, two-tailed, respectfully). Moreover, there was a strong relationship found between feelings of isolation and education about sexual identity development ($r_s = .486$, $p = .001$, two-tailed). As these supports increased, feelings of isolation decreased.

Additionally, the majority of participants expressed an overall positive experience. Three participants specifically noted 'no' or 'little' support, making comments regarding how bad these experiences were and how they negatively

influenced future support seeking. Spearman rho correlations run between overall support and risk factors (See Table 7) demonstrated moderate to strong associations with self-esteem ($r_s = -.613$, $p = .000$, two-tailed), depression ($r_s = .516$, $p = .001$, two-tailed), isolation ($r_s = .569$, $p = .000$, two-tailed), and hopelessness ($r_s = .608$, $p = .000$, two-tailed). There was no significant association with school belonging. Thus, indicating that as the overall experience of support became more positive, the more likely it was for participants to experience an improvement in self-esteem and a decrease in depression, isolation and hopelessness.

Social Mirroring and Help-Seeking

Almost half (48%) of participants noted seeking an adult whose identity was similar to their own. Thirteen percent sought someone with a different identity. When asked if the perceived traits of the adult impacted their ability to ask for support, sexuality was the most noted factor in this decision with 46.4% stating it mattered 'Quite a Bit' or 'A Great Deal'. Figures 4a through 4d demonstrate the degree to which the perceived biological sex, gender identity, sexuality and race of the adult impacted help-seeking.

Figure 4a

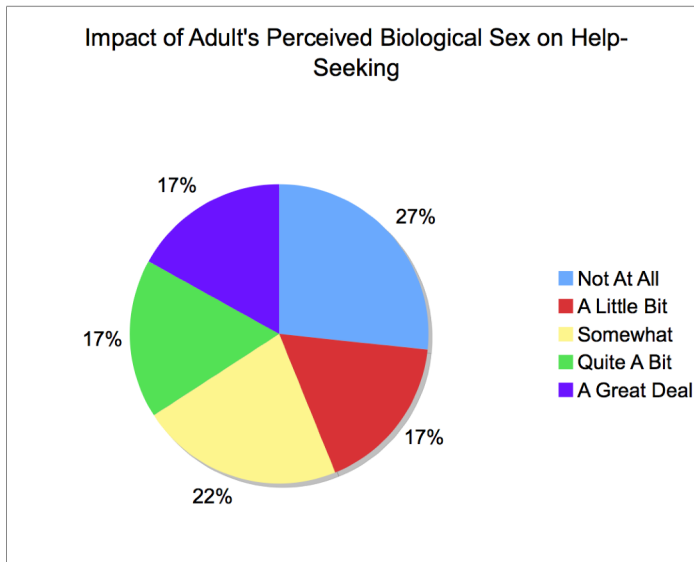


Figure 4b

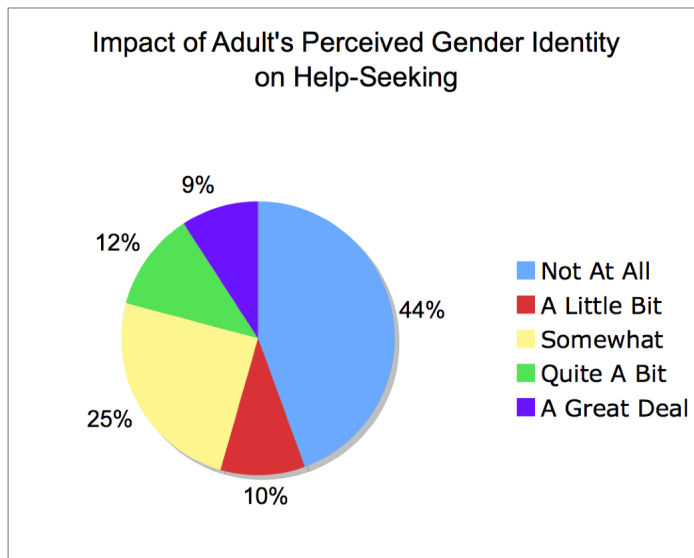


Figure 4c

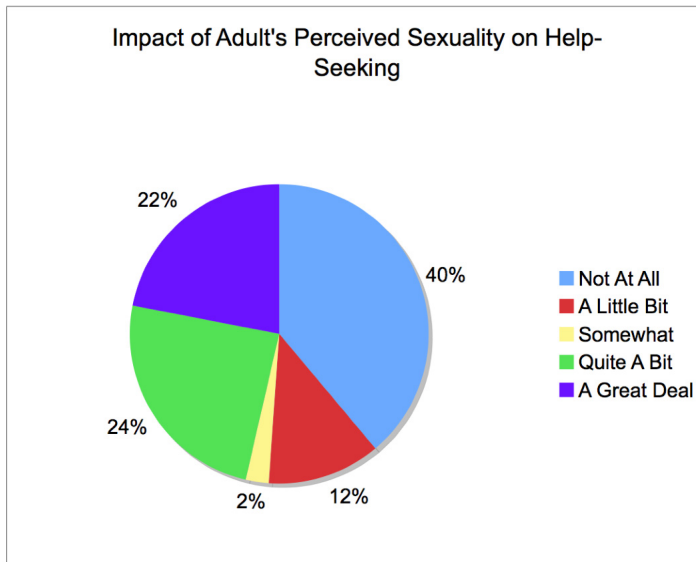
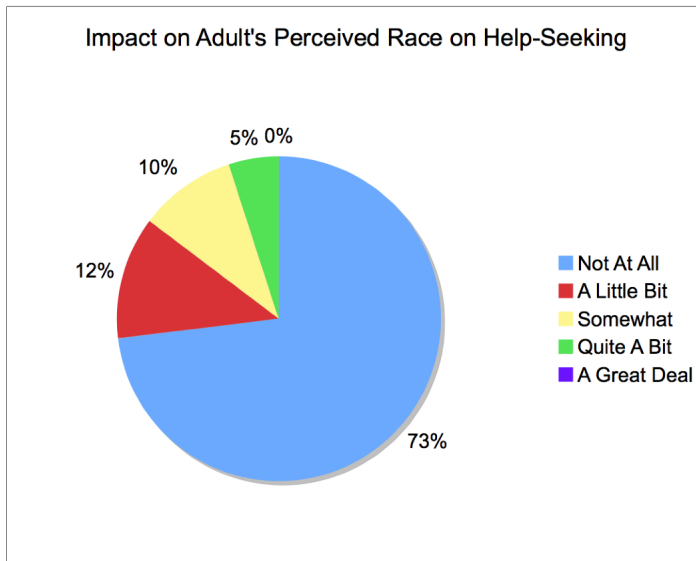


Figure 4d



Gender identity was rated to have a higher impact on seeking support if the adult was perceived to be LGBTQ ($M = 2.67$) than if they were perceived to be heterosexual ($M = 1.76$). Noting a significant difference in the impact of gender identity ($t(36) = 2.078, p = .045$, two-tailed). There was also a significant

difference in the impact of sexuality ($t(36) = 6.081, p = .000$, two-tailed), which was rated higher if the adult was perceived to be LGBTQ ($M = 3.86$) than if they were perceived to be heterosexual ($M = 1.41$). Thus, suggesting that the traits of gender and sexuality had a greater impact on help-seeking if the adult was perceived to be LGBTQ.

Based on the few participants of color, as well as the few adults of color, there was not enough data to analyze the impact of race on help-seeking or experience of support. Seventy-three percent noted 'Not at All' when asked if the race of the adult impacted their decision to ask for support. Another 22% replied that race mattered 'a little bit' or 'somewhat'. Based on the 5 point Likert-type scale, whereas 1 was 'Not At All', the mean response to this question was 1.46 (See Table 8).

Table 8

Impact of Perceived Adult Traits on Ability to Seek Support

	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Biological Sex	2.8	1.453
Gender	2.34	1.407
Sexuality	2.78	1.681
Race	1.46	.869

Social Mirroring the Experience of Support

In order to test for the influence of social identity as a whole, t-tests were run comparing those participants who 'yes' versus 'no' on the question 'did you seek an adult that you perceived to have a similar identity to your own?'. There was no significant difference in the ratings of overall helpfulness. There was a significant difference in how much they received "role modeling" ($t(39) = 2.472, p = .018$, two-tailed). Those who stated 'yes' to seeking a similar adult displayed a mean of 3.65, whereas those who stated 'no' displayed a mean of 2.67. This demonstrates that those who sought a similar adult received more role modeling support. Role modeling was the only type of support that demonstrated significance.

In order to explore the impact of sexual identity, the data was divided by adults who were perceived to be Heterosexual versus adults who were perceived to be LGBTQ. T-tests (two-tailed) were run on both types of support, risk factors and overall support.

Two types of support were found to be experienced in a significantly different way from adults perceived to be LGBTQ versus Heterosexual. The first type of support was 'Introduction to other successful LGBTQ adults' ($t(34.26) = 5.692, p = .000$, two-tailed). Those who chose an adult they perceived to be heterosexual had a higher mean (3.051) than those who chose an adult they perceived to be LGBTQ ($M = 1.29$). The second type of support was 'reference to community groups relevant to your sexual identity' ($t(36.78) = 4.099, p = .000$, two-tailed). Those who chose an adult they perceived to be heterosexual had a

higher mean (3.00) than those who chose an adult they perceived to be LGBTQ (M = 1.41). The lower means indicating that participants noted receiving less of these types of support.

Gender Identity was explored both from the position of the participant, as well as the perceived identity of the adult. Gender Identity was grouped into conforming and non-conforming groups. In regards to the adult, conforming gender identities were considered to be 'male' and 'female' while non-conforming identities were considered to be 'gender non-conforming'. In regards to the participant, 'male,' 'man,' 'female,' and 'woman' were considered to be conforming as long as this matched their expressed biological sex. Those participants noting different biological sex and gender expression were considered to be non-conforming with those participants who considered themselves 'gender queer' or a 'masculine female'.

There was little demonstrated effect for gender identity in relation to types of support, risk factors and overall support. No significant difference was found when the participant and adult were matched for similar or different gender identities. No significant difference was found when comparing gender conforming and non-conforming participants.

Overall, no significant difference was found when comparing gender conforming and non-conforming adults. However, participants did note receiving significantly more references to websites relevant to their sexual identity ($t(39) = 2.170, p = .038$, two-tailed), as well as more references to community groups ($t(39) = -3.405, p = .002$, two-tailed) from a gender non-conforming adult. In

reference to websites, participants who received support from an adult with conforming gender identity had a lower mean ($M = 1.66$) than those who received support from an adult with non-conforming gender identity ($M = 2.67$). In reference to community groups, participants who received support from an adult with conforming gender identity had a lower mean ($M = 2.03$) than those who received support from an adult with non-conforming gender identity ($M = 4.00$). Whereas, a lower mean indicated that there was less support.

Conclusion

The results discussed within this chapter confirm and expand upon what is known about the identification of adult support in high school, as well as the efficacy of support. In addition to gaining descriptive information on adult demographics and characteristics, the analysis was able to comment on the perceived impact of support. While the analysis was limited in regards to the racial demographics of participants and adults, and inconclusive regarding the impact of gender, it does allow for a conversation about matching based on sexual identity. The following chapter will continue to discuss the impact and implications of these findings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The following chapter will review the impact and implications of the collected questionnaire data presented in the previous chapter. It will explore the knowledge gained on what types of support these youth are receiving from adults in high school; how this support is identified; and if the support received impacted the risks associated with LGBTQQ youth in high school. Moreover, to discern if sharing either similar or different social identities, as viewed specifically through the lens of gender, race and sexuality, impacts the support process.

As discussed in the findings chapter, the data on gender was inconclusive and the data on race too limited to enable an analysis. While the following will focus more exclusively on social mirroring in the context of sexual identity, gender and race will both be discussed as a result of sampling, limitations within the research and needs for future research. In addition to discussing the limitations of the research, and future recommended research, the chapter will also discuss how the current study can add to knowledge in both clinical practice and work in high schools.

Though it was expected that LGBTQQ youth who sought support from an LGBTQQ adult would receive more role-modeling support and overall support, this was not demonstrated in the findings. There was a more complex picture of support that both included social mirroring based on sexual identity, and

also more process oriented aspects of support such as listening, empathy, visibility and leadership. The following chapter will further explore how this picture of complex support is demonstrated in the findings.

Respondents

The predominantly White Female and Northeast social location of the sample is likely a direct reflection of using a convenient sampling method. As a White Female from the Northeast, the majority of initial contacts also shared a similar social location. This directly impacted how many youth across the country and how many youth of color the questionnaire was able to reach; thus resulting in another predominantly White study on LGBTQQ youth.

In regards to sexual orientation, it is notable that participants displayed a range of identification with sex, gender, and attractions within themselves. There was no way to read the scale to point out who was a 'lesbian,' 'bisexual,' or 'questioning'. At the same time, the high percentage of participants who noted 'questioning' quite a bit or a great deal (79.5%) reinforces that questioning attractions is a natural part of adolescence. Though it is unclear if those who were questioning also identified with a particular label, the results suggest that this was widely experienced.

Identifying Support

Adults were largely identified based on their association and openness with the LGBTQQ community. This either related to the adult's own sexual identity, or their willingness to advocate for LGBTQQ issues. At the same time, participants relayed a certain caution, looking to other students, relationships and

behaviors of the adult, in order to ascertain if sexuality was a safe issue to discuss.

This implies that adults did not have to be perceived as LGBTQQ in order for participants to feel that they were approachable. The theme of empathy also suggests that in environments that may not be accepting of the LGBTQQ community, it is valuable for adults to demonstrate that they 'care about [the] well-being' of their students. The other themes appear to consider the signals and behaviors that demonstrate this sentiment. Participants looked for adults who made themselves 'available,' was a 'good listener,' 'open-minded' and 'non-judgmental'. The theme of 'humor' was also notable and perhaps communicates one way that these youth knew they could relate.

Moreover, it seems many of the youth knew these adults cared because they had established relationships with them prior to approaching them for support. It was important to have established rapport before going into what could be a controversial topic, an issue that could place these youth in a vulnerable position. An established relationship was a means to already knowing that these adults 'cared,' and also in discerning that they had the qualities necessary to provide support.

Characteristics of Support and Supporters

The findings suggest that adults played a range of roles in the school and that teachers continue to be the most prominent figures. The role of teachers seems connected to their 'availability' and 'accessibility'. These are the adults in school that students may have the most contact with and, therefore, more

opportunities to observe how 'open' they are regarding issues of sexuality. Counselors held a particular role for this sample based on the confidentiality inherent in their position, as well as assumed 'listening' and 'empathic' qualities. As one participant noted "She was the school counselor, I figured she had to listen to me".

Participants sought adults based on their roles in the school. For students specifically seeking confidentiality, counselors may be the safest to approach. Another participant remarked that she went to the school principal specifically because of "Leadership, authority and power within the school administration." Only three participants noted seeking an adult out of necessity due to an incident at school. One of these participants went to the principal and another to a counselor. While it is unclear what conclusions could be drawn from the role-specific and event-specific findings in this small sub-set of the sample, it is apparent that participants considered the role their adult played in the school.

The characteristics of support broke down the emotional, appraisal, informational and concrete support outlined by Nesmith, Burton, and Cosgrove (1999) and supported by Bringaze and White (2001). In line with their findings, the most received type of support were emotional and appraisal (role-modeling). Additionally, though the informational support such as references to websites, education about sexual identity development and connections to the LGBTQ community were noted less frequently, this appeared more to the wide distribution of possibilities. The small amounts of concrete support (connections to grants/scholarships, supporting finding and applying for a job) may reflect the

focus on a high school setting, and also the concentration on seeking support based on issues of sexuality. That is, students may have been more likely to be seeking the other types of support as they are more related to sexual identity.

Experience of Support

The majority of participants who took the survey reported a positive help-seeking experience. The high percentages of participants reporting an improvement in risk factors is both encouraging and in-line with past findings on the efficacy of support (Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999; Yakushko, 2005; Bringaze & White, 2001).

There was variance on what types of support were more highly related to improving self-esteem, school belonging, depression, isolation and hopelessness. For example, connection to community groups was weakly correlated to increased self-esteem, however moderately correlated to increased school belonging and decreased isolation. It appears natural that being more connected to other people with a similar life experience could result in feeling less isolated. How these connections are correlated to self-esteem and school belonging is less clear. Thus highlighting that the exact nature of these correlations is not well explained by the current study, only that the relationship exists.

The impact of references and resources should be considered. Emotional and role-modeling support were not the only categories carrying weak to strong relationships with the associated risk factors. The impact of resources such as an introduction to a successful LGBTQ adult, or education about sexual identity

development, suggests that adults can be supportive with knowledge of and access to the necessary information.

Moreover, the larger context of providing support appears to contribute the most moving data on the need for adult supports in school. The Spearman rho correlations between overall support and risk factors suggests that it is not simply the parts, however, the whole of the experience which provides the most beneficial and potentially healing result. That is to say, it is not just about an LGBTQQ youth coming for resources, but also about how this conversation is conducted.

Social Mirroring and Help-Seeking

Gender and sexuality were rated to have a significantly higher influence on support seeking if the adult was perceived to be LGBTQQ. This suggests that either a) the adults have these non-normative traits so they are more apparent to participants or b) participants were looking for this in the adult they went to, thus it was more important because they purposefully sought (or did not seek) and LGBTQQ adult. However, since the literature consistently indicates the importance of older LGBTQQ adults in the lives of LGBTQQ youth (Bringaze & White, 2001; Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999), this suggests the later option is much more likely.

The inflated importance of gender and sexuality in seeking an LGBTQQ adult delineates that there may be different aspects of going to a LGBTQQ versus a Heterosexual adult. The theme of 'visibility' as a characteristic of adults is further evidence of this dynamic. And yet, notably, the theme of 'leadership /

authority / activism' was more frequently noted. So while there may be different aspects of going to a LGBTQQ adult rather than a Heterosexual adult, sexuality in and of itself is not the only consideration of LGBTQQ youth who are seeking support.

Furthermore, we find the process-oriented aspects of social mirroring in the other support-seeking themes. The qualities of being a good listener, demonstrating openness, accessibility, confidentiality, and empathy, as well as having humor are all areas that fall not under what someone looks like, or what their history may be, but how they conduct themselves. These process variables expand our understanding of how adults in high school and LGBTQQ youth establish their 'social glue' (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Additionally, it translates the non-verbal mirroring (Sandhu, Reeves, & Portes, 1993) and postural mirroring theories (Sharpley et al., 2001) into more tangible categories so that the theoretical process becomes an accessible process.

No conclusions can be drawn from the data on help seeking and race. As discussed, the racial demographics of the sample, including the adults, presented as predominantly White. There were no groups large enough to compare match based on race, since they were almost all White. Additionally, it is difficult to interpret what it means for 73% of the sample to state that race has either mattered 'not at all' or 'a little bit' in their help-seeking process. This could reflect that White participants had not reflected on their racial identity development. It could also reflect that the oppressed part of their identity took

precedence in the support-seeking process. At the same time, these inferences hold no weight and only consider the White members of the sample.

Lastly, participants were asked if they sought an adult whose identity was similar to their own. This question did not specify what part of their identity needed to be similar in order to say 'yes'. The measure was used in part because though the over-arching question focuses on gender, sexuality and race, identity variables are not exclusive. The question allowed the study to get at a very simple concept regarding the impact of seeking a similar identity. When a similar identity was sought, there was also more role-modeling support received. Based on the moderate relationship that role modeling has with isolation and hopelessness, we can see how valuable similar identities can be in the way LGBTQQ youth seek support.

Social Mirroring and the Experience of Support

The following will discuss the findings on social mirroring as specifically applied to sexuality, gender and race. While gender was a significant variable in help-seeking these effects did not carry into the experience of support. The exception to this were the significant differences in how these youth received references to websites and community groups from gender non-conforming adults more than from gender conforming adults. However, it is unclear how to interpret this finding and requires further analysis.

Just as the data on gender is inconclusive, an analysis of race and the experience of support held the same limitations as the analysis of race and help seeking. Again, though race remained a variable in regards to the overwhelming

White sample, there were not enough adults of color to explore the influence of similarities and differences along this demographic. Future studies should aim towards a more diverse sample population.

The analysis of sexual identity and help seeking is interesting. Heterosexual adults were more likely to provide references to community groups, as well as provide introductions to older successful LGBTQ adults. This suggests that heterosexual adults could recognize their deficits and look to build other supports for these youth. It also suggests that perhaps adults who already identify as LGBTQQ (or were at least perceived as such) were less likely to provide resources to community groups. This finding is in contrast to the results of Nesmith, Burton and Cosgrove (1999), whereas LGB adults provided more support overall, especially in regards to informational support.

Interestingly, there was no difference in the experience of role modeling between the perceived LGBTQ adult group and the perceived Heterosexual adult group. That this differs from the measure on overall similarity speaks to the complex nature of identity matching and the ways we should not outwardly assume that we could not be helpful to an LGBTQQ youth if we are not also LGBTQQ.

Limitations

There is valuable information to be gained and built upon from the current study. At the same time, there are quite a few limitations in design, sample and ability to generalize. As a retrospective study participants have been asked to look back at their thoughts and impressions from up to 1 to 14 years earlier. This

raises questions about how accurately participants will remember their experiences. Arguably, participants reported on relationships that made a specific impression, and yet it would be highly beneficial to study these relationships for youth who are currently in high school.

Accordingly, the self-report nature of this questionnaire may have impacted the validity of reports. Since participants only noted what was important to them, there was no opportunity to follow-up, for example, to gain a more detailed and comprehensive account of why they were looking for support.

The convenient sampling method directly impacted the diversity of the sample, most notably based on region and race. However, also due to the degree that participants may have known the researcher. Though data was sought for a range of support seeking experiences, the bias towards a positive experience could reflect participants desire to please the researcher. It could also reflect that there are more positive rather than negative experiences for this demographic, however, the possibility of this bias cannot be ruled out.

Participant demographics were gathered through open-ended questions, as well as the Likert-type scale used for sexual identity. While well intentioned to encapsulate the fluidity of these identities, this made the analysis of social mirroring and social matching challenging. This was particularly the case since the perceived adult demographics were taken in a more traditional and categorical manner.

As a questionnaire based on previous research there is a great deal of face validity for measures taken in a primarily descriptive fashion. At the same

time, no test-retest reliability has been demonstrated and no measurement for internal consistency reliability was built into the questionnaire itself.

Clinical Implications

The present study adds knowledge towards both work in schools, as well as direct clinical practice. The first is that social identity matters, however, is not limiting. That is, it is important for LGBTQQ youth to be exposed to adults who may mirror their sexual identity. At the same time, an accessible, trusting and open ally with the knowledge to connect youth to these resources is equally as important. The adults these youth seek do not necessarily need to be a member of the LGBTQQ community.

Resources are essential to LGBTQQ youth. Schools and clinics should know their basics on identity development, and in the least know how to direct youth to the appropriate sources of information. It is also important to know what supports are available both within the school and in the larger community.

Another salient point is the development of rapport. The majority of participants looked into the behaviors and beliefs of adults before trusting them with vulnerable information. In addition to ally status, these adults held some of the key components in competent clinical social work practice: listening, empathy, openness, confidentiality, being non-judgmental and a willingness to advocate when needed. It is important to remember that it can take time to establish these building blocks.

Additionally, to recognize that sexuality, gender identity and racial identity are not just pertinent concerns for students who find themselves deviating from

the White Male Heterosexual model. Adults should keep in mind that identity development is a process. It is essential to be available for support because when provided well it can improve our quality of life.

Conclusion

The present study reinforces what is already known about the efficacy of support in the lives of LGBTQQ youth. The more positive the experience of support from adults in high school the more likely an improvement in self-esteem, school belonging, depression, isolation and hopelessness.

Moreover, it demonstrates that gender and sexual orientation had a greater influence in regards to help seeking, however, did not reflect the quality of support received. While there were differences in the types of support provided, both LGBTQQ and Heterosexual adults did provide support that the youth could find helpful.

Though not striking, it is essential to acknowledge that social mirroring occurred through the categories of gender and sexuality in the context of a social process. Part of this process is the willingness of adults to make themselves accessible and known advocates to the LGBTQQ community. In schools and communities that may challenge this visibility, the caring relationship between adults and students may become ever more essential.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Committee Approval Letter

February 27, 2008

Amanda Starfield

Dear Amanda,

Your second set of revisions has been reviewed and all is now in order. We are therefore glad to give final approval to your study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Alexandra Graham, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Dear Friends,

I am writing to recruit participants for my thesis research on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQQ) high school students. More specifically to examine their experience of adult support in high school. It is a retrospective on what high school was like for current graduates. This is part of the completion of my Master's degree at the Smith College School for Social Work.

The purpose of the research is to look specifically at how youth who self-identify as a member of the LGBTQQ community in high school seek support from adult staff in that environment. That is, how are adults identified, what types of support do they receive, and do they find it helpful? Additionally, to explore whether youth are more likely to seek support or find it helpful from adults who mirror their own identities. The hope is for this research to add to a growing understanding of how to create supportive high schools and improve the quality of life for LGBTQQ youth.

You'll find the inclusion criteria for participation, my contact information, and a link to the survey below. If you know of anyone who may fit the criteria or know others that might, kindly pass this along. I greatly appreciate your help in supporting this research, for both the completion of my thesis and also for the benefit of the LGBTQQ community.

Best,

Amanda Starfield

Participants must ...

- A) Have questioned their sexuality or considered themselves a member of the LGBTQQ community for a minimum of a year in high school.
- B) Sought support from an adult(s) in high school, such as a teacher, counselor, coach, or other school staff.
- C) Be between the ages of 18 to 27.

If you are able to participate in my study, you are eligible to win one of three \$25 gift cards from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Link to the survey:

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments

Appendix C

Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY SMITH COLLEGE □ NORTHAMPTON, MA.

Adult Support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQQ) Youth in High School.

Hello,

My name is Amanda Starfield, I am a Master's student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting research for my thesis that explores the influence of social variables (e.g. sexuality, gender and race) on the support sought or obtained by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQQ) high school students from adult caregivers, teachers or other school staff.

The study aims to learn more about how these relationships are established in high school and what influences if (if not) those relationships are viewed as helpful. The information you provide could help improve intervention and programming efforts aimed at addressing a supportive school environment for all youth, regardless of gender or orientation. Also adding to a growing understanding of how to improve the quality of life for LGBTQQ youth.

In order to participate you must have sought support from an adult in high school on an issue related to your sexual orientation. You must have questioned your sexuality or considered yourself a member of the LGBTQQ community for at least a year in high school. You are eligible to participate if you are 18 - 27 years of age. This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. After completing the survey you will have an opportunity to enter a raffle for an Amazon.com gift card. There will be three gift cards awarded with a value of \$25. Entry into the raffle will not be connected to your survey so that you will remain anonymous.

The information you provide will be kept strictly anonymous. Settings on Survey Monkey have been prepared so that your email address will not be collected in connection to your survey. To protect your privacy, the survey will only be identified with a code number and printed surveys will be kept in a locked file cabinet behind a locked door in my office. The information gathered in this study may be published in scientific journals and presented at professional meetings, but only group patterns will be described and your identity will not be revealed.

You will be asked to answer questions about your high school experience of adult support as related to gender identity, sexual identity, and other background

information about you. Some of the questions may remind you of unhappy past experiences. Should you need support, the following list of resources will also be provided at the end of the questionnaire. Participants in the Boston area, if you become upset as a result of participating, counseling is available through a Peer Listening Line (800.340.4528), the Sidney Borum Jr. Health Center (617.457.8140), as well as the Fenway Community Health Center (Peer Listening Line 800.399.7337; toll free Helpline 888.340.GLBT; Violence Recovery Program 800.834.3242). The Fenway can be accessed Nationally. Other supports include GLBT National Youth Talkline (800-246-7743 (pride)), Colorado Anti-Violence Program (888-557-4441), L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center/Anti-Violence Project: (800) 373-2227, and SafeSpace in Vermont (866) 869-7341. For a comprehensive list of national resources, please visit www.safeschoolscoalition.org or www.bostonglass.org/resources.

The decision to participate is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study or withdraw at anytime. In order to withdraw you must exit the questionnaire without submitting. Since the survey is anonymous, there would be no way to identify your particular questionnaire. Additionally, you may decline to answer any questions throughout the survey. The data will at no time be used without your consent. Group patterns may be used for possible presentations or publications.

You have the right to ask questions and have them answered at anytime. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered, please contact me, Amanda Starfield. You can also reach the Smith College Institutional Review Board at (413) 585-7974. The results of this study can be made available to interested research participants. Respondents are welcome to contact me for more information.

Consent

BY RETURNING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE, YOU ARE INDICATING THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION ABOVE AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Choosing 'YES' indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research subject. Choosing the 'YES' option will direct you to the beginning of the survey.

Choosing the 'NO' option below indicates that you do not want to volunteer as a research subject. Choosing the 'NO' option will exit the survey.

YES

NO

Appendix D

Questionnaire

In order to participate in this survey you must be between the ages of 18 and 22 and have been 'out' to (at least) yourself for one year in high school. Additionally, you must have sought support from an adult (e.g. teachers, counselors, coaches, staff and administration) in your high school based on issues related to your sexual orientation.

'Out' is considered to include anything from knowing you questioned your sexuality to declaring yourself a member of the LGBTQQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning) community. Your thoughts are welcome regarding the language used within the study.

The following survey explores how the similarity or difference of your identity and the identity of an adult impacted your ability to seek support from them, the type of support you received and whether or not you found this support helpful. For the purpose of this study only certain variables of social location are specifically explored. There are many more areas to be explored (e.g. age, ethnicity, religion, and immigration status) and you are invited to note how they impacted your relationship with these adults.

1. Did you identify as a member of the LGBTQQ community in high school?

yes

no

2. Have you sought support on issues related to being a member of the LGBTQQ community from an adult (teacher, counselor, coach, advisor, etc.) in your high school?

yes

no

Information About You

3. Age _____

4. Biological Sex _____

5. Gender Identity _____

6. Racial Identity _____

On a Scale of 1 to 5 how much did you find yourself in high school ...

(1 = Not At All, 2 = A Little Bit, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Quite a Bit, 5 = A Great Deal)

7. Identified with your Biological Sex
8. Identified with your Gender Identity
9. Questioning your attractions
10. Attracted to people of the same-sex
11. Attracted to people of the opposite-sex
12. Attracted to people of a similar gender
13. Attracted to people of a different gender

Information about your High School

14. Please note the regional location of your high school.

- Northeast
- West
- South
- Midwest

15. My high school was located in

- A urban area
- A rural area
- A suburban area

16. Was your racial identity in the majority or minority at your high school?

- Majority
- Minority

You will have the opportunity to describe up to two adult relationships from high school. This should be an adult you sought for support on issues related to being a member of the LGBTQQ community. You do not have to choose an adult that was ultimately helpful, as experiences in seeking and using support may vary.

Please answer the following questions for ONE of these adults (Adult #1). These questions will be repeated for the second adult.

17. What grade were you in at the time you sought this person's support?

- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th

18. How did you identify this adult as a person that was approachable on issues of sexuality? Choose all that apply.

- They were a visible sexual minority at school
- They were perceived to be a sexual minority, though were not 'out'.
- They were an active supporter of the Gay-Straight Alliance
- They were the advisor to the Gay-Straight Alliance
- They posted a sticker which signifies that they are an ally to the LGBTQQ community
- They addressed hurtful language about sexual minorities
- Other _____

19. What role did this adult play at the school? Choose all that apply.

- Teacher
- Counselor
- Administrator
- Coach
- Club or Activity Advisor (for example, music or drama)
- Other _____

20. What was your perception of this adult's biological sex

- Female
- Male
- Transsexual
- Intersex

21. What was your perception of this adult's gender identity

- Male
- Female
- Gender Non-Conforming

22. What was your perception of this adult's sexual identity

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Trans
- Queer
- Questioning
- Heterosexual
- Other _____

23. What was your perception of this adult's racial identity

- African-American; Black
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Hispanic; Latina/o
- White; Caucasian
- Other _____

24. Please describe 3 relevant characteristics (other than sexual orientation, gender, race, or role at the school) which led you to perceive this adult to be a source of support. These could be personality traits (good listener/understanding), availability, or other aspects of their identity such as age, ethnicity, immigration status, or many others.

25. Did you seek an adult that you perceived to have a similar identity to your own?

yes

no

26. Did you seek an adult that you perceived to have a different identity to your own?

yes

no

Please rate the degree to which the following perceived traits of the adult impacted your ability to ask them for support ...

(1 = Not At All, 2 = A Little Bit, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Quite a Bit, 5 = A Great Deal)

27. Biological Sex

28. Gender Identity

29. Sexuality

30. Race

Please rate the degree to which you received the following types of support. 1 = None at all 2 = A little bit 3 = Somewhat 4 = A lot 5 = A great deal

31. Emotional (listening and/or advice)

32. Role Modeling

33. Introduction to successful sexual minority adult(s)

34. Education about sexual identity development

35. References to websites relevant to your sexual identity

36. References to community groups relevant to your sexual identity

37. Self-help resources

38. Support with homework, papers or studying

39. Connections to grants / scholarships

40. Support finding or applying for a job

41. Other _____

The following risk factors are often associated with sexual minority youth. On a 1 through 5 scale please note if the support you received influenced any of these factors for you.

1 = Increased significantly 2 = Increased somewhat 3 = No Change 4 = Decreased somewhat 5 = Decreased significantly N/A = Not Applicable

42. self-esteem

43. school belonging

44. feelings of depression

45. feelings of isolation

46. feelings of hopelessness

47. Did you perceive this adult to be supportive? Please rate supportiveness on a scale of 1 to 5, whereas 1 = Not At All and 5 = Extremely Supportive

48. Additional Comments

Please answer the following questions for A SECOND adult (Adult #2).

49. Did you seek support from a second adult?

- yes
- no

50. What grade were you in at the time you sought this person's support?

- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th

51. How did you identify this adult as a person that was approachable on issues of sexuality? Choose all that apply.

- They were a visible sexual minority at school
- They were perceived to be a sexual minority, though were not 'out'.
- They were an active supporter of the Gay-Straight Alliance
- They were the advisor to the Gay-Straight Alliance
- They posted a sticker which signifies that they are an ally to the LGBTQQ community
- They addressed hurtful language about sexual minorities
- Other _____

52. What role did this adult play at the school? Choose all that apply.

- Teacher
- Counselor
- Administrator
- Coach
- Club or Activity Advisor (for example, music or drama)
- Other _____

53. What was your perception of this adult's biological sex

- Female
- Male
- Transexual
- Intersex

54. What was your perception of this adult's gender identity

- Male
- Female
- Gender Non-Conforming

55. What was your perception of this adult's sexual identity

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Trans
- Queer
- Questioning
- Heterosexual
- Other _____

56. What was your perception of this adult's racial identity

- African-American; Black
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Hispanic; Latina/o
- White; Caucasian
- Other _____

57. Please describe 3 relevant characteristics (other than sexual orientation, gender, race, or role at the school) which led you to perceive this adult to be a source of support. These could be personality traits (good listener/understanding), availability, or other aspects of their identity such as age, ethnicity, immigration status, or many others.

58. Did you seek an adult that you perceived to have a similar identity to your own?

yes

no

59. Did you seek an adult that you perceived to have a different identity to your own?

yes

no

Please rate the degree to which the following perceived traits of the adult impacted your ability to ask them for support ...
(1 = Not At All, 2 = A Little Bit, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Quite a Bit, 5 = A Great Deal)

60. Biological Sex

61. Gender Identity

62. Sexuality

63. Race

Please rate the degree to which you received the following types of support.

1 = None at all 2 = A little bit 3 = Somewhat 4= A lot 5 = A great deal

64. Emotional (listening and/or advice)

65. Role Modeling

66. Introduction to successful sexual minority adult(s)

67. Education about sexual identity development

68. References to websites relevant to your sexual identity

69. References to community groups relevant to your sexual identity

70. Self-help resources

71. Support with homework, papers or studying

72. Connections to grants / scholarships

73. Support finding or applying for a job

74. Other _____

The following risk factors are often associated with sexual minority youth. On a 1 through 5 scale please note if the support you received influenced any of these factors for you.

1 = Increased significantly 2 = Increased somewhat 3 = No Change 4 = Decreased somewhat 5 = Decreased significantly N/A = Not Applicable

75. self-esteem

76. school belonging

77. feelings of depression

78. feelings of isolation

79. feelings of hopelessness

80. Did you perceive this adult to be supportive? Please rate supportiveness on a scale of 1 to 5, whereas 1 = Not At All and 5 = Extremely Supportive

81. Additional Comments

82. Resources for Support

Participants in the Boston area, if you become upset as a result of participating, counseling is available through

- Peer Listening Line (800.340.4528),
- The Sidney Borum Jr. Health Center (617.457.8140)
- The Fenway Community Health Center. Peer Listening Line 800.399.7337; toll free Helpline 888.340.GLBT;
- Violence Recovery Program 800.834.3242.

Other Resources

-- GLBT National Youth Talkline toll-free phone (run by GLNH ([Gay & Lesbian National Hotline](#)): telephone and email -counseling for young adults up to age 25 by peer volunteers - about coming-out issues, relationship concerns, parent issues, school problems, HIV/AIDS anxiety and safer-sex information, and lots more. Mailing address: GLBT National Help Center 2261 Market Street, PMB #296 San Francisco, CA 94114; Administrative phone: 415-355-0003; Fax: 415-552-5498; Phone toll-free 1-800-246-PRIDE (1-800-246-7743); Monday thru Saturday from 9:30pm to Midnight, Eastern time); Email: youth@GLBTTNationalHelpCenter.org Website: <http://www.glbttnationalhelpcenter.org/talkline/index.html>

-- Colorado Anti-Violence Program: provides direct client services including crisis intervention, information, and referrals for LGBT victims of violence 24 hours a day: 1-888-557-4441 (good in Colorado and parts of surrounding states). <http://www.coavp.org/>

-- L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center/Anti-Violence Project: (800) 373-2227 (victims' line-southern California only)

-- SafeSpace: (866) 869-7341 (Vermont)

For a comprehensive list of National Resources, please visit www.safeschoolscoalition.org or www.bostonglass.org/resources.

83. Thank you!

A new window will open when you 'click here' to enter the raffle. YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE WILL NOT BE SUBMITTED IF YOU DO NOT CLICK 'DONE' ON THIS PAGE.

If you would like to enter the raffle [click here](#).

You will be redirected to a Second Survey in order to enter the raffle for one of three \$25 gift certificates to Amazon.com.

This survey is not connected to the first, so as to maintain your anonymity. If you do not want to enter the raffle once redirected simply click on 'Exit this Survey' on the top right hand corner.

IN ORDER TO SUBMIT THE CURRENT SURVEY PLEASE CLICK 'DONE'.

Appendix E

Raffle Entry

Enter your email address below to participate in a raffle for one of three \$25 gift certificates to Amazon.com. Gift certificates will be emailed within 6-8 weeks of completing the survey.

If you do not wish to participate please click on 'Exit This Survey'

1. Please enter your email address.
