

LGBTQ Foster Youth: a curriculum for CWS workers

by

John Jennings

A project

submitted in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Social Work

in the College of Health and Human Services

California State University, Fresno

May 2021

APPROVED

For the Department of Social Work Education

Betty Garcia Department of Social Work Education

Laurel Barnett MSW

ABSTRACT

LGBTQ Foster Youth: A Curriculum for CWS Workers

A lack of education for CWS workers in rural areas on LGBTQ foster youth is a growing concern. LGBTQ foster youth face increased risk factors when compared with their heteronormative counterparts. This project's purpose was to educate CWS workers in rural areas on the increased risk factors that LGBTQ youth face, and programs offered that could be utilized to mitigate these risk factors. By educating CWS workers in rural areas about LGBTQ youth they can better serve LGBTQ foster youth.

This project includes a Literature that discusses the risk factors that LGBTQ youth face were included in the development of the project. Factors such as religion, living in rural communities, homophobia, ethnicity, and mental health are discussed in the literature review. The social constructionist theory was utilized in this project to discuss how LGBTQ people are seen and treated in in society. The social constructionist theory can show how being LGBTQ does not increase risk factors, but the actions of those from a heteronormative society does.

This project included archival data from previous research to develop a curriculum for CWS workers and any other stakeholders in CWS to better serve LGBTQ foster youth. A curriculum was developed that highlights the increased risk factors for LGBTQ foster youth, that CWS workers may not have been aware of prior to partaking in the curriculum. The project also highlights programs being implemented in more urban communities for LGBTQ foster youth, and also programs for other minority groups that may be helpful for LGBTQ foster youth. In developing this curriculum, it was surprising to find there are a high number of LGBTQ people living in rural areas, but limited services. This project shows the importance of the coming out process, and how the reactions of others can have lasting effects on youth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	6
Introduction to the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Project.....	7
Significance of the Project	9
Definition of Terms	10
Limitations of the Project	12
Summary.....	13
<i>Chapter 2</i>	14
<i>Literature Review</i>	14
Goals and Outcomes	14
Conceptual/Theoretical Framework	15
Coming Out Process	16
Rural communities	16
Long-Term Effects	17
LGBTQ Youth and Sexual Risks	17
LGBTQ Foster Youth and Ethnicity.....	18
LGBTQ Youth and Religion.....	19
LGBTQ Youth and Mental Health.....	19
Homophobia	20
Gaps in the Literature.....	21
Summary.....	21
<i>Chapter 3</i>	22
<i>DISRIPTION/DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS</i>	22
Project Description.....	22
Discovery	23
Conclusion	23
Project Challenges.....	24
Reflections	25
Recommendations	26

REFERENCES27
APPENDIX A32

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

LGBTQ¹ youth are disproportionately overrepresented when it comes to parental abandonment, runaways, truancy, and parental conflict (McCormick et al., 2016). This overrepresentation leads to a disproportionate amount of LGBTQ youth in the foster care system. Being a member of the LGBTQ community while dealing with the trauma of becoming a youth involved in the foster care system, accompanied by factors such as race, religion, and mental health, makes these youth extremely vulnerable.

LGBTQ foster youth are also at increased risk of poor health when compared to heterosexual youth (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019). Detrimental Risk factors, such as an increased propensity for ill health, must be addressed and mitigated in order to ensure the safety and security of LGBTQ foster youth.

While LGBTQ youth are at risk everywhere, LGBTQ youth in rural areas are particularly vulnerable. A lack of education on LGBTQ youth in Child Protective Services (CPS) is due to lack of research regarding LGBTQ foster youth in rural areas (Coolhart & Brown, 2017). LGBTQ youth are at an increased risk of substance abuse, mental health disturbances, homelessness, suicidality, and school drop-outs (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2011). The increased risk factors associated with being a LGBTQ youth accompanied by the trauma associated with becoming a foster youth should make the need for specialized trainings for CPS works and service providers a priority. Due to geographical distance and the increased rate of

¹ LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning. This acronym is utilized in this work to represent the entire spectrum sexual and gender minorities.

regional, conservative views that are predominantly opposed to members of the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ youth in rural areas are less likely in these areas to receive the support needed to mitigate these risk factors (Toner, 2013).

Overrepresentation continues to be a significant factor for LGBTQ foster youth. Sexual minority youth are 2.5 times more likely to be involved in CPS than heterosexual youth (Fish et al., 2019). The overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth involved in foster care calls for more education and services for this vulnerable population. Although there may not be a way to confront the disproportionality of LGBTQ youth in foster care, we can create curriculum and services that will better serve them.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to develop a curriculum to educate and inform CPS workers, and all other service providers who work with foster youth, of the risk factors associated with LGBTQ foster youth. The proposed curriculum will also cover interventions and ways in which CPS workers can better serve this vulnerable population. By utilizing early intervention with LGBTQ foster youth we can help to minimize the adverse health and psychological effects that stigmatization brought about by heterosexualism has had on LGBTQ youth (Kelleher, 2009). The lack of education for CPS workers coupled with a lack of resources for LGBTQ foster youth in rural areas such California's Central Valley puts these workers at a disadvantage. Fresno County participates in the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE), which is a training used by many stake holders such as Harvard University and the Human Rights Campaign in order to collect information on LGBTQ youth and reduce their adverse risks. Los Angeles County utilizes Recognize Intervene Support Empower (RISE) as a training for youth, parents, caregivers, and professionals to prepare families, organizations,

and systems to meet the needs of LGBTQ youth (*RISE*, 2020). For areas such as the California Central Valley, which is made up of primarily rural areas there is very little education or training to help with providing services to LGBTQ youth.

This project will help provide rural areas with a training to better serve LGBTQ foster youth by providing education on the issues that LGBTQ youth in foster care face. It is an intersectionality that compounds the population's marginalization, the innate turmoil of being and adolescent in Erik Erikson's stage of identity versus role confusion, the internalized stigmatization of being queer in a heteronormative society, and the unequivocal traumatization inherent in the child welfare system. Although part of the safety and risk assessment process in child welfare involves asking whether the child identifies as LGBTQ, anecdotal evidence suggests that this recommended practice is ignored by most CPS workers. CPS workers report being unsure at what age the question it is appropriate to ask the child questions pertaining to gender and sexual orientation. CPS worker should be asking questions as to the sexual orientation and sexual identity of the minor despite the views and beliefs of the family, these questions will help determine the minor's susceptibility to the risk factors that LGBTQ youth face. CPS agencies are not encouraging staff, parents, and care providers to nurture and protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth although they are vulnerable to victimization, depression, and suicide (Pecora et al., 2019). While such encouragement is important this support for LGBTQ foster youth is see primarily in Urban areas with a higher LGBTQ population. LGBTQ individuals residing in rural areas experience complex and unique challenges compared to LGBTQ individuals who reside in large urban areas with a higher LGBTQ visibility (Sherriff et al., 2011). It is very important that the development of a training aimed at better serving LGBTQ foster youth in rural areas utilize techniques from urban areas

that are found to be successful. It is equally important to keep in mind the unique factors that these rural LGBTQ foster youth may face. These factors may include, but are not limited to, living in primarily conservative areas where their sexuality or gender preference may not be recognized or accepted, lack of education on sexuality or gender, or increased religious push back all of which impact efforts for inclusion of the LGBTQ community.

Significance of the Project

There are a variety of trainings offered to assist CPS workers and service providers working with LGBTQ youth. This project is important for rural communities and the LGBTQ foster youth who reside in these areas who are not receiving the amount of support they deserve. Rural CPS gives little attention to sexual minorities, and mainly focuses on ethnic and cultural minorities in relation to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Heiner (2017) states that ICWA is a policy of the nation to “protect the best interest of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families” (p. 2156). Fresno county also uses Cultural Brokers, which is an advocacy group that the county has mandated that CPS workers bring with them whenever they receive a referral regarding African American families. The goal of Cultural Brokers is to deliver liaison and advocacy services to families from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Curry, 2020).

Like the lasting effects of the ICWA and cultural broker initiatives, the implementation of an extensive LGBTQ training for CPS workers would serve a similar purpose for LGBTQ foster youth. Using a LGBTQ-specific lens, the child welfare system can modify assessments, treatment plans, and evaluated services to better meet the population’s needs. Identifying and providing services and support to these youth is the child welfare system’s best means to reduce

the long-term implications associated with the intersectionality of being an LGBTQ youth in foster care.

Introduction to the Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Social constructionist theory asserts that meaning arises from social systems rather than from individual members of society. In 1966 sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann published “*The Social Construction of Reality*” drawing on their knowledge of sociology to explain social interaction (Allen, 2005). Social constructionism is a theory utilized to explain how people learn, make decisions, and view reality. Social Constructionism states that views on reality are based on how we see things as a whole, we do not see something as wrong or deviant unless a community of people is taught that the thing or behavior is either wrong or deviant. In this project Berger and Luckmann’s theory will be used to explain how LGBTQ foster youth are treated by others and how changing the way society views them could widely change youths’ outcomes. Using social constructionism, I will explain how systems and organizations can advocate in rural communities, in an effort to mitigate the risk factors that LGBTQ foster youth face.

Definition of Terms

This section defines the key concepts used in the creation of a curriculum for a training program for CPS workers and care providers. Utilizing proper terminology when working with LGBTQ foster youth is extremely important in ensuring that these youth feel safe and supported. Cultural awareness such as understanding terminology associated with a group can help to promote sensitivity of the group and provide the individual with a deeper understanding of the group (Hancock & Haskin, 2015).

Child Protective Services (CPS)

Conceptual. CPS is a major system of intervention of child abuse and neglect(*Child Protective Services, 2020*).

Operational. For the purpose of this research, when discussing CPS workers, the author will be speaking stakeholders involved with the investigation, reunification, and permanent placement of all children involved in the child welfare system. The author utilizes the above definition in this work

LGBTQ

Conceptual. According to UCSF the acronym LGBTQ stands Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and questioning. This is an umbrella term used for the entire LGBTQ community (*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resource Center, n.d.*).

Operational. For this project, the acronym LGBTQ will be utilized when discussing all sexual minorities. As time and education has progressed more letters have been added to incorporate inclusivity to all sexual minorities. For this study we will utilize the acronym LGBTQ to blanket the entire sexual minority community including those who identify as anything other than heterosexual, and all those who identify as any sex other than that assigned at birth.

Rural

Conceptual. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020), the term rural refers to the country, country people or life, or agriculture.

Operational. For this project, rural areas will be referring to conservative areas primarily focused on religious and conservative values. Rural will also be referring to areas where there is a low population.

At-Risk

Conceptual. Cambridge Dictionary, (2020) states that the definition of at-risk pertains to being in danger of being harmed or damaged, or of dying.

Operational. For this Curriculum, the term at-risk when speaking about foster youth will pertain to any youth that is in danger of negative outcomes. The goal for minors in foster care is to find permanency for them and to protect them from dangerous or self-injurious behavior. Any foster youth considered at risk for the sake of the curriculum is in danger of not meeting these goals.

Victimization

Conceptual. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, (2020) states that the term victimization is used to describe a verb meaning to make a victim, or to subject a person to deception or fraud.

Operational. For the sake of this curriculum the term victimization will refer to the abuse that is suffered by the LGBTQ community. When speaking about the risk for victimization the curriculum will refer to sexual victimization, where LGBTQ youth are forced into sexual acts either for financial or physical gratification. Victimization will refer to physical and emotional abuse that the LGBTQ population is at risk for.

Limitations of the Project

Some restrictions and limitations to the project will be the lack of research in the LGBTQ community in rural areas. Not having a full understanding of how LGBTQ youth experience, their sexuality, or sexual orientation in rural areas (e.g., culture and other socio-geographical factors) will be a barrier in grasping the true impact the conservatism that those living in rural areas have on this population.

Another limitation would be the lack of information gathered on LGBTQ youth. The current practice for CPS states that if the child does not state their sex or sexual orientation then the department does not comment on it in their documentation.

Summary

This chapter introduced the rationale behind the creation of a curriculum that will be provided to CPS workers and others who work with LGBTQ foster youth including care providers. It also introduced structure of the curriculum being created, terms to be referenced in chapter 2 and 3, and limitations that may create barrier to the creation of the curriculum. Chapter 2 Literature Review will review issues and difficulties that LGBTQ foster youth face as well as programs and resources that may be helpful in the creation of the CPS curriculum. Chapter 3 Description/Discussion/Conclusion will discuss the creation of the curriculum and what it entails, projected outcomes of implementing the curriculum, limitations to implementing the curriculum, and a conclusion on the project. The curriculum will be found in Appendix A.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review chapter explores literature regarding the LGBTQ community both adults and youth, as well as literature about other minority groups (e.g., African Americans, and Native Americans) that will help build a curriculum that will be helpful in working with LGBTQ foster youth. This literature describes factors that contribute to a lack of education and LGBT resources such as mental and physical health available in rural areas. Long-term effects of ignoring the issues that LGBTQ foster youth are facing will be identified, along with a description of the issues at hand. The intersectionality of race, ethnicity, mental illness, and religion and how these factors have an effect on LGBTQ foster youth will be discussed. This literature review will also touch on education and resources that have been put in place to benefit racial and ethnic minorities that may be utilize for LGBTQ youth in foster care.

Goals and Outcomes

The goal of this literature review is to present archival data and demonstrate the need for research, service, and training curricula. Such curricula should be provided to CPS workers and service providers such as mental health workers working with LGBTQ foster youth, and foster family agencies on how to better serve LGBTQ foster youth. Due to an enhanced societal focus on gender roles and views on masculinity homophobia is sometimes seen as the last accepted form of discrimination (Cadwell, 2011). By educating CPS workers on the heteronormative mainstream that push these gender roles onto LGBTQ foster youth we can help to lessen the damage that is done by not respecting a youth's gender identity or sexual orientation. This Literature Review will begin with a discussion of the theoretical framework and follow with a review of relevant literature.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Kenneth Gergen, a social psychologist who has attributed most of his career to the research and teaching of constructionism states that Constructionism represents the plurality and diversity in our social world. Constructionism entertains multiple realities which help us to come up with innovative ways of shaping and appreciating reality” (Girishwar & Prakash, 2012, P. 221). Understanding of how the LGBTQ community is understood should be in historical, sociological, and social psychological context rather than in exclusively individualistic terms (Herek, 1986)

By utilizing Social Constructionist theory, we can take a look at how social norms regarding gender and sexual orientation are constructed by society. While gender and sexual orientation can be seen objectively as men and women who should only have relations with partners opposite sex in order to procreate, and that biology states whether a person is a man or a woman. The Social Constructionist view helps us to understand that the way in which we categorize each other is historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2015). By looking at these categories using the Social constructionist theory we can then begin to educate those working in child welfare on the origin of discrimination against the LGBTQ community.

CPS workers come into child welfare from all walks of life with certain values and outlooks. These diverse views on how we ought or ought not to live our lives can be either beneficial or harmful to LGBTQ youth depending on the views that they have. Although CPS workers are taught to utilize a non-biased approach when working with foster youth, it is the responsibility of the department for which they are working to utilize trainings and provide education to give these workers the skills to avoid succumbing to their own biases. By utilizing

constructionist theory we can help to challenge categories of social identity such as gender and race (Allen, 2005).

Postculturalists and critical theorists focus on the macro level of constructionism how meanings are made in social structures, while relational social constructionists focus on micro level constructionism which focuses on how meanings are created through embodied dialogical activities (Cunliffe, 2008). Social construction explains how a person uses what they see or hear in order to fill in gaps and make meaning of things, whether that be on a macro level where systems give people the information or a micro level where people are exchanging dialogue

Coming Out Process

The coming out process for LGBTQ youth can be either a traumatic or positive experience which has a large impact on their sense of self. Adults who were interviewed stated that coming out as lesbian or gay was an important step in establishing their homosexual identity (Perrill-Wallqvist & Lindblom, 2015). The response of a caretaker or parent to a child coming out as a member can have a substantial influence on the youth's health. Parental rejection of LGBTQ youth can negatively impact the youth's health, therefore it is beneficial for the youth to receive some form of support during their coming out process (Polllock & Eyre, 2012).

Rural communities

While LGBTQ youth are present everywhere, it may be more difficult for LGBTQ youth to feel comfortable coming out or feeling accepted in rural areas with a smaller population. There is no evidence that people in small towns are any less accepting, but without a large LGBTQ presence and with a lack of resources LGBTQ people can begin to feel isolated and alone (Kielburger, 2019). The experiences of LGBTQ foster youth can vary depending on their location, individual situation, and other intersectional factors. Any curriculum being created to help LGBTQ

foster youth would need to be altered based on the region that they live, as it may alter their experience.

Long-Term Effects

Given the increased risks related to sexual trauma, domestic violence, and substance abuse, LGBTQ youth are statistically more likely to have PTSD, also the traumas that LGBTQ youth endure due to the feeling of rejection, marginalization, and bullying will lead them to engage in maladaptive coping if not given the tools need to cope (McCormick et al., 2018). The experiences that LGBTQ youth face can follow them into adulthood having negative effects if individuals who are working with this vulnerable population do not receive proper training and education on LGBTQ issues. Feedback from LGBTQ foster youth indicates all CWS workers and potential foster parents should have extensive LGBTQ training. This training will reduce the risk of harm to these vulnerable youth. Potential foster parents should be screened on their willingness to commit to LGBTQ-affirming parenting before being placed with an LGBTQ foster youth (Mountz et al., 2019). By putting these practices into action, we can reduce the long-term risk that early childhood trauma can have on LGBTQ foster youth.

LGBTQ Youth and Sexual Risks

LGBTQ youth are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior and endure sexual violence. A study by Haelle (2020) showed three times more sexual minorities than their heterosexual counterparts reported they had been forced to have intercourse. Similarly a high number of LGBTQ youth have stated that they had been sexual assaulted opposed to heterosexual youth (Haelle, 2020). These risks are very serious and can lead to physical and psychological trauma that can be a lifelong issue for the youth.

LGBTQ youth are not at risk of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation just because of their orientation. “Factors that are associated with the increased risk of sexual abuse and exploitation include: racism, family poverty, homelessness and it’s associated stigma; lack of adequate or safe housing options; lack of access to gender-affirming medical care; and rejection and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity by families, communities, and employers” (Dank et al., 2015, p. 5). The intersection of risk factors, meaning risk factors such as homelessness and poverty combined with the youth being a member of the LGBTQ community can lead sexual vulnerability of LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ youth are not placed at risk because of their orientation but because of the stigma around the reactions of others who should be protecting them when they become at risk.

LGBTQ Foster Youth and Ethnicity

As though being an LGBTQ foster youth was not stressful enough, when the consequences of intersectionality of being a member of the LGBTQ community and an ethnic minority while attempting to fit in culturally with your ethnic group your risk factors seem to increase. A survey on LGBTQ+ Latino/a youth on risky behavior found that compared to heterosexual White youth they are more likely to attempt suicide due to family rejection. Stigmas of hypermasculinity in men and submissiveness in women can increase mental health stressors for LGBTQ+ youth in this culture (Schmitz et al., 2020). It is important to understand that duality and intersectionality of being an ethnic minority that LGBTQ foster youth face when attempting to cope with their own gender and sexuality and also feeling obligated to conform to their own cultural norms.

A child welfare study on the effects of ethnicity on key predictors of trauma found that sexual orientation was predictive of trauma for black youth. This finding was consistent with

existing research which states that black LGB youth consistently experience stigma related to ethnicity and sexual orientation (Washburn et al., 2018). Much of the focus when we speak on culture and inclusivity in child welfare is around race and ethnicity. CPS workers are trained to utilize cultural competence or cultural humility when working with individuals who share different cultural values. It is important that LGBTQ culture, language, and barrier to high-quality healthcare is understood in order to provide this community the best treatment (Margolies & Carlton, 2019). When CPS workers are receiving cultural humility training the needs of LGBTQ foster youth and their unique challenges related to rejection and shame are not being discussed.

LGBTQ Youth and Religion

LGBTQ youth perceive religion as a barrier to support from their parents, most find it is used against them to condemn their sexual orientation (Roe, 2016). Religious affiliation in the family unit has been seen as a primary factor in the lack of support for LGBTQ foster youth. Using religion to condemn foster youth makes them fear any type of religious affiliation, therefore being placed in a foster home that promoted this type of behavior can be detrimental to the foster youth's sense of safety and security.

There are many faith-based Foster Family Agencies with positive intentions, however most LGBTQ foster youth may be retraumatized by these agencies after the experiences they have had with religious organizations. LGBTQ have primarily described hearing negative messages from faith communities related to their sexual orientations (Higa et al., 2012). The traumatization of foster youth using faith can have lasting effects on foster youth into adulthood and increase their risk factors for mental health and risky behaviors.

LGBTQ Youth and Mental Health

The LGBTQ community as a whole is at risk of bullying and discrimination that may lead to psychological and mental health concerns. One of the biggest issues for LGBTQ youth and their susceptibility to bullying and discrimination is their increased use of social media platforms, with sites such as Facebook and Instagram, making it easier to bully without any in-person confrontation. A study has shown that when compared to face-to-face bullying and teachers' bullying cyber bullying had the biggest impact on mental health with youth (Baier et al., 2019). Cyberbullying can contribute to psychological distress for LGBTQ due to the increased risk for victimization (McConnell et al., 2017). While the internet can be a great place for LGBTQ foster youth to reaching out for the support and resources, it also makes them very vulnerable to bullies and predators. "LGBTQ youth are often isolated from others and susceptible to the interests and exploitation of sexual predators" (Little, 2014, p. 20).

Identity and sexual identity have a major impact on youth development. Brandon-Friedman, 2019, States that the earlier we recognize a youth's sexual identity, expression of sexual desires, and enactment of aspects of sexual identities the more beneficial it is to their mental, physical, developmental, and social health. It is important that we integrate identity development into mental health for youth (Tiberi, 2019). CPS workers need to be aware that the way in which LGBTQ foster youth are approached and their sexual and gender identity will have an effect on the way in which they learn and conduct themselves.

Homophobia

Weinberg (1972, p.1) coined the term homophobia and proposed that "the person who belittles homosexuals with evident enjoyment is at the very least telling me that he wants to establish his own sense of importance through contrast with other people--a tenuous business." The term heterosexualism constructs gay oppression and heterosexist privilege as a social

phenomena that describes the main stream society, while the term homophobia places the idea of gay oppression within the psychology of certain individuals (Aguinaldo, 2008). Homophobia is defined as an irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2020).

During secondary school, boyhood homophobia reaches different levels usually peaking during beginning to mid primary school (Plummer, 2001). Homophobia experienced at this young age can be detrimental to mental health and self-esteem. Masculine roles are a large contributor to homophobia and the reason why homophobia starts at such a young age. Young boys use homophobic slurs not only as a way to position their own masculinity, but also as a cuss word that is widely accepted and allowed in our current society (Phoenix et al., 2003)

Gaps in the Literature

Literature directly regarding the CPS system providing services for LGBTQ foster youth was difficult to find. Most literature regarding LGBTQ foster youth was focused on intersectional factors that are incorporated into the outcome of LGBTQ youth aging out of the system. More literature that directly focuses on the experience of LGBTQ youth based on the efforts of the CPS system to provide support is needed.

More literature about the lack of services in rural areas is also needed. Most literature focuses on LGBTQ youth in larger cities such as Los Angeles and New York, there has been minimal research on the types of services, education and advocacy for LGBTQ foster youth in rural and conservative areas such as Fresno, and Madera (Barnett, 2018). Creating literature that focuses on the lack of services and the associated outcomes would be beneficial in showing the need for more rural services for LGBTQ foster youth.

Summary

Being LGBTQ does not make you at risk, the actions of others towards the LGBTQ community is what makes the population vulnerable and at risk. Social oppression and stigmatization have been a huge factor in the experience of gay men (Cadwell, 2011). The LGBTQ community has been stigmatized and rejected based solely on their sexual orientation and gender identity for years, and for foster youth it is the responsibility of the CPS to mitigate this oppression. The next chapter will discuss this project's focus on the development of a curriculum and course work that can be offered to CPS workers that can help them to provide effective support and services to LGBTQ foster youth.

Chapter 3

DISCRIPTION/DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will describe the project, findings and documents that helped inform the design of the curriculum. Also included in Chapter 3 will be a reflection of the process in creating the curriculum, and suggestions aimed towards application of materials made available in the PowerPoint curriculum.

Project Description

The curriculum is made up of a Power Point presentation that discusses the risk factors and inequalities that LGBTQ foster youth face. The curriculum identifies and discusses current trainings that are offered in Urban areas for LGBTQ foster youth. The curriculum also discusses trainings and programs that are being implemented for CPS workers that benefit other minority groups. Using statistics that show the increase in various risk factors for LGBTQ foster youth, the curriculum shows the importance of providing additional comprehensive services for LGBTQ foster youth.

The curriculum will be implemented within a one hour, one time training. The presenter of the curriculum will begin the training by describing the importance of the information that is being provided, followed by the need for additional resources for LGBTQ foster youth in rural areas. The presenter will then share their own personal experience growing up in a rural community as an LGBTQ adolescent being raised by grandparents. The presenter will then discuss key terms, statistics, and risk factors that address LGBTQ youth and conclude by discussing current programs both for LGBTQ youth and for other minority groups that could be useful resources for CPS workers and other professionals working with LGBTQ foster youth in rural areas that are lacking resources in their regions.

Discovery

While it is believed that very few LGBTQ people live in rural communities, data was discovered that showed there is a growing number of LGBTQ people living in rural areas. Data shows that 15% to 20% of the nations LGBTQ population live in rural areas (*Where we Call Home LGBTQ People in Rural America*, 2019). These numbers are larger than what was expected when beginning this project, especially since these numbers do not reflect the number of LGBTQ people who have not yet come out.

Conclusion

LGBTQ foster youth training is important for rural communities, to train child welfare workers the risks that these vulnerable youth face. Child welfare workers have the opportunity to be the first sign of acceptance and support that these youth have ever had in their young lives. Having the education that is provided in this curriculum will help all working with young foster children understand the risks that LGBTQ foster youth face. The training on

supports that are given in urban areas will help workers in rural areas find resources for the needs of LGBTQ foster youth.

The curriculum is designed for CPS workers, Mental Health workers, and any other service providers that work directly with LGBTQ foster youth. The curriculum is directed towards individuals who are working with LGBTQ foster children in rural areas where there is a lack of education and resources for these youth.

The curriculum is intended to educate and motivate participants to understand the significance of each foster youths' intersectionality and demonstrate curiosity about each minor's complex identity by exploring the intersectionality of the minor's identity, particularly in relation to look for intersectionality to possible risk factors pertaining to LGBTQ foster youth.

Project Challenges

The lack of resources and data regarding LGBTQ foster youth makes it difficult to find ways to better serve this vulnerable population. It is easy to see the lack of services and resources. It becomes difficult to find ways to develop and incorporate more comprehensive services and resources without research into beneficial ways to actually help. Federal protections would blanket all LGBTQ individuals in terms of protections against discrimination such as the Federal Equality Act, which would make it illegal nationwide to discriminate against someone based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Scher, 2019). While these are beneficial for the protections of LGBTQ people there is still little talk of local protections in rural communities. As discussed in the literature without local protections LGBTQ people begin to feel isolated.

The importance of the coming out process and the need for acceptance and support was discussed in the literature review. Acceptance and support for the youth while coming out will help the youth establish their identity. Due to the fear of discrimination and loss of friends and family, a number of LGBTQ people do not feel safe coming out. Stigma associated with identity can be a huge barrier to finding true and honest statistics for the LGBTQ community. Men may be having sex with men, and woman may be having sex with women, but they may not associate themselves with the LGBTQ community. Experiences that youth have living in a heteronormative environment can lead to internalized shame that disrupts the coming out process (Barnett, 2018). These individuals may not identify themselves with the LGBTQ community and try to justify their behaviors. Sociologists say “if people believe something is real, it is real in its consequences” (Ghaziani, 2017). The stigma placed on labels makes it difficult to find true statistics, as many sexual minorities are afraid to identify themselves with the community.

Reflections

As described in previous studies and discussed in the literature review, LGBTQ youth have many increased risks, that can increase risk factors even more. The intersectionality that LGBTQ youth face, rather it be religion, race, or community can increase their susceptibility to negative risk factors. Allowing time for participants of the training to ask questions in an essential component in the implementation of the curriculum, there are a number of biases and stigmas that are placed on the LGBTQ community and LGBTQ youth. Research shows that experiences that are shared by LGBTQ youth create anticipation of enacted stigma such as rejection, harassment, and victimization based on theirs or others experience, led to changes in their decisions or limited their participation in activities (Gower et al., 2019). Having the ability to answer questions, participants of the training may help to combat stigmas of

LGBTQ youth and impact the way in which CPS and other professionals work with these youth.

This project is relevant in child welfare and social work since it provides education and intervention for a minority group of foster youth that has been overrepresented. This project is just the tip of the iceberg, we must work together to break stigmas in our community and educate non-child welfare workers on the importance of providing support to LGBTQ youth. The hopes for this project are that it will be utilized for all child welfare workers, mental health workers, and resource parents who are responsible for the care and wellbeing of foster youth.

Recommendations

Knowing the elevated risk factors that LGBTQ foster youth face, it is important that child welfare workers inquire into and explore all foster youths' sexual orientation and gender identity. As a child welfare intern, I have heard many workers state that they do not bring up sexual orientation or gender identity unless the youth discussed it first. Creating a dynamic curriculum to help child welfare workers better serve LGBTQ foster youth will be better implemented in these workers are educated on the importance exploring the minor's sexual orientation and gender identity. The youths' age should be a factor when asking questions about sexual orientation and identity. Based on the youths' understanding of the terms the question should be asked differently.

REFERENCES

- Acevedo-Polakovich, D. I., Bell, B., Gamache, P., & Christian, S. A. (2011). Service Accessibility for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth. *Sage Journals*, 75–97.
- Aguinaldo, J. (2008). The Social Construction of Gay Oppression as a Determinant of Gay Men's Health: "Homophobia is killing us." *Critical Public Health*, 18(1), 87–96.
- Allen, B. J. (2005). Social Constructionism. In *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives* (pp. 35–38).
- Baier, D., Hong, J. S., Kliem, S., & Bergmann, M. C. (2019). Consequences of Bullying on Adolescents' Mental Health in Germany: Comparing Face-to-Face Bullying and Cyberbullying. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(9), 2347–2357.
- Barnett, L. E. (2018). *A Phenomenological Look at the Lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Foster Youth in the Fresno, CA Area*.
- Brandon-Friedman, R. A. (2019). Youth Sexual Development: A Primer for Social Workers. *Allied Health*, 64(4), 356–364.
- Burr, V. (2015). *Social Construction*.
- Cadwell, S. (2011). Clinical Practice with Gay Men. In *Theory & Practice in Clinical Social Work* (pp. 587–616).
- Cambridge Dictionary*. (2020). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/at-risk>
- CDC. (2019). *Protective Factors for LGBTQ Youth: Information for Health and Education Professionals*. Adolescent and School Health.
- Child Protective Services*. (2020). California Department of Social Services.
- Coolhart, D., & Brown, M. (2017). The Need for Safe Spaces: Exploring the Experiences of

- Homeless LGBTQ youth in Shelters. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 82, 230–238.
- Cunliffe, A. (2008). Orientations to Social Constructionism: Relationally Responsive Social Constructionism and its Implications for Knowledge. *Hull University Business School, UK and Anderson School of Management, NM, USA*, 39(2), 123–139.
- Curry, C. (2020). *Cultural Brokers*.
- Dank, M., Yahner, J., Madden, K., Banuelos, I., & Yu, L. (2015). Surviving the Streets of New York: Experiences of LGBTQ Youth, and YWSW Engaged in Survival Sex. *Williams & Mary Law School Scholarship Respository*, 1–88.
- Fish, N. J., Baams, L., Wojciak, S. A., & Russell, T. S. (2019). Are Sexual Minority Youth Overrepresented in the Foster Care, Child Welfare, and Out-Of-Home Placement? Findings From Nationally Representative Data. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 89, 203–211.
- Ghaziani, A. (2017). The Closet. *Contexts*.
- Girishwar, M., & Prakash, A. (2012). Kenneth J. Gergen and Social Constructionism. *Psychol Stud*, 121–125.
- Gower, A. L., Valdez, C. A. B., Watson, R. J., Eisenberg, M. E., Mehus, C. J., Saewyc, E. M., Corliss, H. L., Sullivan, R., & Porta, C. M. (2019). First- and Second-Hand Experiences of Enacted Stigma Among LGBTQ Youth. *The Journal of School Nursing*.
- Halle, T. (2020). LGBTQ Youth are at Greater Risk for Physical, Sexual Assault. *Pediatric News*, 54(6), 3.
- Hancock, A., & Haskin, G. (2015). Speech-Language Pathologists' Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Populations. In *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*.
- Heiner, K. (2017). Are You My Father? Adopting a Federal Standard for Acknowledging or

- Establishing Paternity in State Court ICWA Proceedings. *Columbia Law Review*, 117:2151, 2151–2184.
- Herek, G. (1986). On Heterosexual Masculinity. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 29(5), 563.
- Higa, D., Hoppe, H. J., Lindhorst, T., Mincer, S., Beadnell, B., Morrison, D. M., Wells, E. A., Todd, A., & Mountz, S. (2012). Negative and Positive Factors Associated with the Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth. *Youth and Society*, 46(5), 663–687.
- Kelleher, C. (2009). Minority Stress and Health: Implications for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) young people. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 22(4), 373–379.
- Kielburger, C. (2019). Bringing Pride Canada-Wide; in 2019, LGBTQ+ Celebrations Still Haven't Taken Root in Some Rural Areas. *Edmonton Journal*.
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resource Center*. (n.d.). UCSF.
- Little, B. (2014). *Supporting LGBTQ Youth in the foster Care System: A Grant Proposal to Develop a Curriculum for Foster Care Parents and Foster Care Workers*.
- Margolies, L., & Carlton, B. (2019). Increasing Cultural Competence with LGBTQ Patients. *Nursing*, 49(6), 34–40.
- McConnell, E. A., Clifford, A., Korpak, A. K., Phillips, G., & Birkett, M. (2017). Identity, Victimization, and Support: Facebook Experiences and Mental Health Among LGBTQ Youth. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 76, 237–244.
- McCormick, A., Scheyd, K., & Terrazas, S. (2018). Trauma-Informed Care and LGBTQ Youth: Considerations for Advancing Practice with Youth with Trauma Experiences. *The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 99(2), 160–169.

- McCormick, A., Schmidt, K., & Terrazas, S. R. (2016). Foster Family Acceptance: Understanding the Role of Foster Family Acceptance in the Lives of LGBTQ Youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 61*, 69–74.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2020).
- Mountz, S., Capous-Desyllas, M., & Perez, N. (2019). Speaking Back to the System: Recommendations for Practice and Policy from the Perspectives of Youth Formerly in Foster Care who are LGBTQ. *Child Welfare, 117*–140.
- Pecora, P. J., Whittaker, J. K., Barth, R. P., Borja, S., & Vesneski, W. (2019). *The Child Welfare Challenge Policy, Practice, and Research*.
- Perril-Wallqvist, R., & Lindblom, J. (2015). Coming out as gay: a phenomenological study about adolescents disclosing their homosexuality to their parents. *Social Behavior and Personality, 43*(3), 467.
- Phoenix, A., Frosh, S., & Pattam, R. (2003). Producing Contradictory Masculine Subject Positions: Narratives of Threat, Homophobia and Bullying in 11-14 Year Old Boys. *Journal of Social Issues, 59*(1), 179–195.
- Plummer, D. (2001). The Quest for Modern Manhood: Masculine Stereotypes, Peer Cultures and the Social Significance of Homophobia. *Journal of Adolescence, 24*, 15–23.
- Pollock, L., & Eyre, S. (2012). *Culture, Health & Sexuality*.
- RISE. (2020).
- Roe, S. (2016). “Family Support Would Have Been Like Amazing”: LGBTQ Youth Experiences With Parental and Family Support. *The Family Journal, 25*(1), 55–62.
- Scher, A. (2019). Gau in Rural America: Up to 5 Percent of Rural Residents are LGBTQ, Reports Find. *NCB News*.

- Schmitz, R., Robinson, A. J., & Sanchez, J. (2020). Intersectional Family Systems Approach: LGBTQ+ Latino/a Youth, Family Dynamics, and Stressors. *Clinical Solutions For Distinct Family Matters*, 832–848.
- Sherriff, N. S., Hamilton, W. E., Wigmore, S., & Giambrone, B. L. B. (2011). “What Do You Say To Them?” Investigating and Supporting the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Young People. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 939–955.
- Tiberi, A. E. (2019). *School Based Policies Protecting LGBTQ+ Youth*.
- Toner, J. (2013). Rural Social Workers’ Perception of Training Needs for Working with LGBTQ-Identified Youth in the Foster Care System. *Contemporary Rural Social Work Journal*, 5(5), 65–66.
- Washburn, M., Carr, L. C., & Dettlaff, J. A. (2018). The Moderating Effects of Ethnicity on Key Predictors of Trauma in Child Welfare Involved Adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 179–187.
- Weinberg, G. (1972). *SOCIETY AND THE HEALTHY HOMOSEXUAL*.
- Where we Call Home LGBTQ People in Rural America*. (2019). Movement Advancement Project.

APPENDIX A

[Project presentation.pptx](#)

