Examining the Role of Peer Relationships in the Lives of Gay and Bisexual Adolescents

Stuart L. Roe

School social workers can serve as valuable supporters of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youths in the public school system by providing services aimed to improve school climates for all students. This article describes a qualitative study that examined gay and bisexual adolescent experiences with peer support using a phenomenological inquiry approach. Five themes related to peer support emerged from the data: (1) peers are an important source of support for LGBT youths in word and deed; (2) LGBT youths fear judgment from non-LGBT peers; (3) not all peers are supportive; (4) gay–straight alliances serve as a form of peer support even when students do not attend; and (5) LGBT adolescents seek support online. Several implications aimed at improving the school climate for all students as well as study strengths and limitations are discussed. Specific recommendations include offering interventions aimed at improving affective empathy among the student body, offering traditional support groups for LGBT youths, recruiting and training peer allies, and connecting LGBT youths to adult role models.

KEY WORDS: *adolescents; gay issues; gay–straight alliances; LGBT issues; peer support*

Adolescent identity development models describe the important role that peer relationships play in the lives of adolescents (Marcia, 1966), including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). In fact, peer relationships are perhaps most important during adolescence (Berscheid, 2003) as the quality, intimacy and frequency of peer interactions increase during this developmental period (Berndt, 1999). Moreover, Eccles, Sayegh, Fortenberry, and Zimet (2004) found that gay adolescents view themselves as similar to their heterosexual counterparts in most ways, including viewing peer relationships as more important during adolescence with one exception—the increased time it takes for LGBT youths to develop trusting friendships.

Furthermore, examining how peers serve as a source of social support for LGBT adolescents is important given that supportive friends can serve as protective factors in the general adolescent population (Blum, McNeely, & Nonnemaker, 2002) and LGBT adolescents experience poorer outcomes related to overall health and well-being when compared with their heterosexual peers (Coker, Austin, & Schuster, 2010; Murdock & Bolch, 2005). However, it is encouraging to note that Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, and Bukowski (1999) found that LGBT youths who had at least one friend were buffered from the full effects of harassment and peer victimization. Similarly, Baiocco, Laghi, DiPomponio, and Nigito (2012) found that gay and lesbian adolescents who had cross-orientation friendships reported less internalized stigma regarding their sexual orientation. In addition, they found that lesbian and gay adolescents are less likely to have a best friend when compared with their heterosexual counterparts. Finally, Needham and Austin (2010) found that LGBT adolescents may have more difficulty accessing support from their parents, which makes peer relationships even more important for them.

Fortunately or unfortunately, as the case may be, school is the primary venue for developing peer relationships, according to Blum et al. (2002), and a growing body of research has shown that school environments can be a contributing factor in the success of adolescents in general (Blum et al., 2002; Saewyc, Poon, Homma, & Skay, 2008) and LGBT adolescents in particular (Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). Examining ways to bolster peer support and thereby improve school environments for LGBT youths is important, given that most LGBT youths first disclose their sexual orientation and then get support from their peers (Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2005).

The current study, which examines peer support for LGBT youths, has been conceptualized using

Cohen and Wills's (1985) social support and the buffering hypothesis model, which discusses the ways in which stress is mitigated by social support. Cohen and Wills (1985) examined two models—the buffering model and the main effect model. The buffering model views social support as working for people who are currently under stress, thereby "buffering" the effects of stress. An example relevant to this study could include the buffering effect a close peer connection could have on LGBT adolescents being harassed at school. The second model, known as the main effect model, proposes that social support is beneficial for everyone. The notion is that overall well-being is related to having positive and socially rewarding relationships and that these relationships promote self-worth. Research examining the role school personnel can play in promoting positive and socially rewarding relationships among LGBT youths as well as cross–orientation friendships could lead to more support and buffering of the harmful effects of peer victimization.

METHOD

This study was designed to address gaps in the literature regarding peer relationships among LGBT adolescents. Data presented here are those related to peer interactions and are part of a larger study examining protective factors across a number of domains (home, school, and so on). A phenomenological approach was chosen over other qualitative approaches as there is limited research regarding peer support of LGBT teenagers and it was my desire to understand the lived experiences of the participants. A phenomenological approach includes conducting in-depth interviews with research participants who have experience with the phenomenon of interest, in this case peer support for LGBT youths, to have a deeper understanding of their collective experiences. Two broad research questions guided the interviews: (1) What has been your experience with support from peers? and (2) How have your experiences in school shaped those experiences? (Moustakas, 1994).

Seven (six male and one female) LGBT adolescents were interviewed using the semistructured interview protocol. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that participants were selected on the basis of their experience with the phenomenon (Silverman, 2010). Participants all self-identified as LGBT and white. Fictitious names have been used in the data presentation to humanize the words of the participants.

Participants included Devin, age 18, living on his own; Marco, age 16, living with his foster parents; Jonathan, age 16, living with his grandmother; Jane, age 17, living with her single father; Jason, age 18, living with his mother and father; Sam, age 17, living with his mother and stepfather; and Brian, age 17, living with his mother and father.

Three participants were recruited at an It Gets Better event sponsored by a high school gay–straight alliance (GSA) held in central Pennsylvania; the other four participants were referred via snowball sampling from the original three participants. After initial phone contacts, students and parents were asked to complete consent forms before being provided a demographic questionnaire. Parents and students were given a description of the study that included the study purpose and necessary consent forms. In addition, participants were given $15 in cash as an incentive for participating. Interviews were audio-recorded for later analysis.

Consistent with phenomenological data analysis methods (Moustakas, 1994), I began by transcribing recorded interviews and then reading and rereading transcripts to begin to reduce the data into meaning units, a process referred to as horizontalization. These statements or meaning units were then arranged into themes, which were described using textural and structural (context) descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). To avoid bias, research team members reviewed themes and exemplar quotes and we discussed any areas in which we did not agree to arrive at a consensus regarding the themes (Patton, 2002). Research team members consisted of school counselors, a social worker, and college faculty members who are well versed in the phenomenon under investigation.

Throughout the process, a number of steps to limit bias were taken as suggested by Morrow (2005) to improve rigor and trustworthiness. Specific methods used included bracketing my assumptions, being interviewed by a colleague regarding my assumptions and biases, consulting with my research team throughout the process when questions arose, journaling, and using two member checks as part of the research design. This triangulation was completed by asking participants to review transcripts and theme lists to ensure that their thoughts about the topic were represented correctly, as recommended by Silverman (2010). Participants offered no changes or additions to the transcripts.

RESULTS

Five themes emerged from data analysis: (1) peers are an important source of support for LGBT youths in word and deed; (2) LGBT youths fear judgment from non–LGBT peers; (3) not all peers are supportive; (4) GSAs serve as a form of support; and (5) LGBT adolescents go online for support.

Theme 1: Importance of Peer Support from Gay and Heterosexual Peers

Often peers were the first people that participants entrusted with information about their sexual orientation. Devin said, "Like, I've been out since I was 15. So your friends either accept it and move on with you or they don't and they leave and that's fine. That's them; and they have their beliefs, and I have mine." Although Devin reported that it was "fine" if friends did not accept him, his demeanor during the interview led me to believe that this was not entirely true. Friends played various roles for each student, but there was a great deal of consistency in the responses of individual interviewees—support from peers was important.

Students mentioned that they felt most comfortable talking with LGBT peers or adults regarding issues related to their sexuality as they understood the issues they were experiencing. Marco said that he views support coming from "friends who are gay, who are in the situation, liberal people normally—politically it is liberal democratic type people. I don't get as much support from my conservative friends or family members." Marco, regarding gay friends said, "Gay friends understand a lot more. So they are more willing to talk about it." To Sam, support means that friends "love me and will talk to you about different things going on with my boyfriend and that sort of thing, like the gay aspect of my life they are fine with."

Participants reported feeling supported when peers took action on their behalf. For example, when asked about bullying or harassment at school, students reported that they were not the victims of such behaviors. However, when asked later if peers ever came to their aid, Jason replied, "Yes, when another student called me a faggot, they stuck up for me." Marco reported that it is helpful if friends stand up for you when you get teased:

> It is more effective if someone else does it because it seems like a straight person has more respect for a straight person than a gay person,

if that makes sense. I don't know. It just seems like it works that way.

Furthermore, participants reported feeling valued when they were given explicit verbal support from friends; one participant reported that LGBT students are not expecting peers and others to address each of their issues perfectly, but to make an attempt.

Theme 2: Fear of Judgment

LGBT participants were fearful that they would be judged by their peers on the basis of their sexual orientation, not personal attributes. Students were fearful of judgment from others before coming out and after disclosing their sexual orientation and were often fearful of the reactions of their peer groups. Students were fearful that they would no longer be liked by their friends. Because of this fear, students were careful to whom they disclosed their sexual orientation. Most youths interviewed saw their sexual orientation as central to who they are—making fear of judgment even more pronounced.

The following participant statements illustrate these points. Jane said, "Pretty much I couldn't tell anyone, without feeling judged, so I told someone [a close friend] that I knew would be there no matter what." Some students reported support from some friends, but not from others. Marco said,

> They will talk about it and they will give me advice sometimes—depending on the friend, and the main part is they don't judge me, like compared to others would do—like some of my other friends. I'm not friends with [them] because of it anymore.

Theme 3: Unsupportive Behaviors

Although the intent of this study was to examine ways in which peers have been supportive, manners in which peers have also been unsupportive or hurtful also emerged. Harassment or physical assault at school was mentioned by each participant interviewed. Even though those interviewed indicated that school is the most supportive place in their lives, each mentioned that they had been harassed. Three students mentioned some form of physical violence, and all of those interviewed reported some form of verbal abuse. One student, Marco, described getting randomly attacked while out for a walk: "Yeah, I was walking through the city and

yeah, it was random from behind, and I just got attacked and they started saying stuff and names, you know, the usual, and they eventually walked away." When discussing harassment in the school hallway, Jonathan reported, "When I'm walking in the hall, I will blast music to drown stuff out, then in class, it kind of comes in handy." The interviewer asked, "You literally have an iPod or whatever that you listen to?" Jonathan replied,

> Yeah, I use my phone though. I literally blast music because if I hear it [derogatory remarks], it will stick and I'm pretty good at picking up whose voice it is and I would probably turn around and say something that I would rather not.

Marco further stated that in his school, "Someone can walk down the hall and call someone a faggot in a heartbeat and they get away with that."

Theme 4: GSAs

All of the students interviewed attended a school that had an organized GSA. Opinions varied regarding their experiences with GSAs. Some students believed that the club could do more, some were frustrated that other students viewed the club as a gay club, and others were proud to be a part of an organized group in their school. Three students, although attending a school with a GSA, were not members but spoke about what the presence of the club means to them. The following comments from each of the participants illustrate the various opinions. Brian was very concerned that by joining this club, peers would view him and others as stereotypes. He was worried that if the club did not serve a purpose and plan events it would "do more harm than good." Devin viewed his school as more supportive because it has a GSA. He said,

> They have gay pride, like on bulletin stuff [bulletin boards], and I think it helps the school understand more about gays and GBT or whatever it's called or whatever. I don't really know what it is—it helps them [the student body] understand that we're just people, we're all people.

Many of the students interviewed were involved in a number of school activities, and although they reported that they did not have time to attend GSA meetings, they believed it helped make their school a more affirming place for all students who may feel different. Jason relayed his thoughts on his school's GSA hosting a successful advocacy event: "It made me proud to know that we accomplished it and we hopefully opened some people's eyes. It made me proud."

Theme 5: Online Support

Advances in technology have provided support to many of the participants interviewed. Nearly every student interviewed mentioned some form of online social media such as Facebook during their account for various reasons—most often related to coming out. Marco reported, "I put it [his sexual orientation] on Facebook and everyone found out that way and he [foster dad] didn't really use Facebook, but he did eventually spy on my Facebook page and figured it out." One student noted how the adviser of the school GSA has a Facebook page that she uses to share information with interested students regarding LGBT issues. Brian said,

> I thank God for the Internet. . . . I heard LGBT keep going around and I had no idea what it stood for again—PFLAG, rainbow flag—I didn't even . . . Freshman year of high school I did not understand rainbows were gay [a symbol of gay pride].

Students want a safe and reliable source of information. Another student mentioned that when he was searching for information on the Internet, "I noticed when I tried to do that [look for support online] I found a lot of sites that were actually in opposition and I would read them, get upset, and then I wouldn't want to look."

DISCUSSION

Understanding that school can be both a place of support and torment for LGBT youths, the purpose of this study was to begin to understand how peers can serve as a source of support to LGBT youths and then to consider ways in which school social workers can foster the development of peer support. Participants were asked questions related to how peers have been supportive to them. From the data, five themes emerged. The first of these themes, that peers are an important source of support in word and deed for LGBT teenagers, is important to recognize as this is the case with nearly all adolescents, and the LGBT youths in this study were no exception.

Furthermore, youths reported wanting and receiving support from their LGBT peers as well as heterosexual allies. The next theme, the fear of being judged by peers because of their sexual orientation, was shared by all participants. In some cases, judgment meant that peers no longer associated with participants and in others this meant that peers told them that being gay was not right. The third theme, that not all peers are supportive, became clear as participants described incidents of both verbal and physical harassment. The intent of this study was not to solicit information about harassment, but this content inevitably surfaced as participants were asked about support they have received from peers. The fourth and fifth themes, GSAs and online venues as sources of support, were not surprises, but some of the nuanced findings related to these forms of peer support were unexpected. For example, even those students who were not members of a school GSA felt supported by the presence of a GSA in their school. Regarding online support, most students used Facebook or other social media sites to connect with other LGBT youths; some participants reported discovering Web sites that were "in opposition" to their sexual orientation and they found this discovery upsetting.

In addition to the academic mission of schools, school is undeniably the primary place where adolescents meet and form friendships, and as a result it is the venue that may be most appropriate for meeting the needs of LGBT youths related to peer support. Therefore, interventions aimed at peer groups cannot be ignored as these peers are often the first to learn that a friend identifies as LGBT. This is both encouraging and upsetting—as Hillier et al. (2005) pointed out, nearly three-quarters of all LGBT students who experienced harassment by peers did so in a school setting, making schools an ideal setting for interventions with LGBT youths and their peers.

Participants were remarkably consistent in their remarks regarding wanting and appreciating social support from their peers, which is consistent with adolescent development theories such as Marcia's (1966) theory of identity achievement as well as the work of Savin-Williams (1998), who found that LGBT youths turn to friendships for support. Participants did not report specifically seeking out friends in whom they knew they could trust. They based decisions regarding disclosure of their sexual orientation on the trust level of currently established friendships. This finding is consistent with the work

of Eccles et al. (2004), who found that adolescence is a time when LGBT youths seek deeper friendships that are more emotional in nature.

Although participants in this study consistently mentioned peers as a form of social support, peers were also cited as those who were the most unsupportive or hurtful. This is important, given the work of Murdock and Bolch (2005), who hypothesized that social support from parents and friends might buffer against the effects of bullying and harassment that LGBT youths experience in school, but their hypothesis was not supported by their findings; the results of a cluster analysis suggested that it is the combined effect of a negative school environment and poor support that matters. Conducting qualitative interviews from a phenomenological perspective, I was able to shed some light on how this "combined" effect might work. Those students who reported that they were harassed at school also reported having support from peers, GSAs, and through online avenues.

LGBT youths are fearful of judgment from their peers. Although participants interviewed for this study initially overcame such fears—enough to disclose their sexual orientation—there are others who undoubtedly are not comfortable with such a disclosure based on these fears, and that decision could have potentially harmful effects on their long-term development. As Cooley (1998) noted, physical and verbal harassment does not have to be experienced firsthand to terrify LGBT students. However, consistent with the findings of Grafsky, Letcher, Slesnick, and Serovich (2011), students in the current study reported that disclosing their sexual orientation was overall a positive experience.

Given that Hillier et al. (2005) found that LGBT youths have various ways of protecting themselves both physically and emotionally, LGBT youths may be reasonably expected to be judicious about those from whom they seek support. In the general adolescent population, Blum et al. (2002) found that good family relationships and supportive friends served as protective factors. The peer relationships described by students in this study imply that these supportive relationships work similarly for LGBT youths.

Online social media is an ever-growing source of support for LGBT youths and, to some, a growing source of pain and harassment. As Sumter, Baumgartner, Valkenburg, and Peter (2012) found, those who are harassed offline are often harassed

online as well. Facebook was mentioned as a way for students to come out to others in a passive way. Adolescents in this study also described the Internet as a means to connect with other LGBT individuals, find out about LGBT-related community events, and learn about gay culture, a finding that corresponds to the findings of Harper, Bruce, Serrano, and Jamil (2009).

Implications for School Social Workers

There are a number of practical implications for school social workers based on the results of this study, and these implications fit well with one of the tenets of the school social work practice model to "promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence" (School Social Work Association of America, 2014). Students who are fearful of being judged, harassed, or otherwise marginalized are not part of an environment that is conducive to learning and by virtue of their training and expertise, school social workers are well positioned to facilitate improved learning environments by increasing peer support for LGBT adolescents.

The recommendations described herein are part of an overarching goal, to effect change in the school environment for LGBT youths. Alone, each of these recommendations may provide only marginal gains, but taken together they can be effective in changing the culture of a school. It is also important to note that these recommendations are neither complicated nor costly to implement, but rather draw on the expertise of school social workers who are already present within the school system.

Unfortunately, changing a school culture takes time, and the individual needs of LGBT youths cannot be ignored as schoolwide systemic policies and interventions are put into place. Strategies that foster resiliency in LGBT youths, such as offering mentoring programs, could prove useful to LGBT youths and should be coupled with interventions aimed at improving affective empathy among the study body—that is, providing interventions that go beyond helping students to have a cognitive understanding of empathy, as suggested by a recent review of bullying and empathy literature (Noorden, Haselager, Cillessen, & Bukowski, 2014).

One way to support LGBT youths is to provide support during the "coming out" process through traditional support groups and one-on-one counseling. In the context of this study, coming out was an important first step for gay and bisexual adolescents seeking social support. It is known that LGBT youths are self-aware long before they publicly self-identify (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000); fear of judgment associated with disclosure may prevent them from coming out and consequently prevent them from seeking social support from peers. Social workers can help students make decisions about who to come out to and when to come out, assist them in weighing the pros and cons of the decision, and help to emotionally prepare them for the reactions they may receive.

Results of the current study suggest that GSAs serve several purposes, including providing a safe environment for LGBT students and supportive peer allies to meet. For those who do not attend GSA meetings, the presence of these groups provided them with a sense that their school was a supportive place just for having a GSA in place, a finding that is consistent with previous studies (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006). School social workers can serve as GSA advisers, and although GSAs are not counseling groups per se, they do serve as informal support groups and can benefit from the group facilitation expertise of school social workers. Ensuring that GSAs continue to run, even when participation is low, could also be an important function of school social workers, as the presence of GSAs creates a sense that support is available even if students do not attend. Furthermore, those students who are not "out" may benefit psychologically by the presence of a GSA. Similarly, just as the presence of a GSA can be supportive, the inclusion of sexual orientation in school district antidiscrimination policies can send a powerful message to LGBT youths that they are supported by their school. Advocating for inclusion of sexual orientation in such policies is congruent with the mission of school social workers. Although many states have included sexual orientation in antidiscrimination policies, this is not universally the case.

Likewise, the Internet has become a tool that has helped LGBT youths to overcome obstacles that are related to geography and isolation. This study points out some ways that LGBT youths, particularly those in rural areas, can explore their sexual identity online and reap some of the possible benefits of connecting with an LGBT community, as suggested by Rosario, Schrimshaw and Hunter (2004). School social workers are adept at providing access to resources and should develop resource

brochures that are specific to the needs of LGBT youths and include Web addresses of reputable and monitored online resources such as TrevorSpace .org. In addition, access to some resources for LGBT students may be limited by school Internet filters. School social workers, in conjunction with school librarians or technology managers, need to be sure that Web resources are accessible by creating filter exceptions for reputable Web sites.

In addition, adolescents often discuss romantic interests with peers before doing so with parents, and the fear of rejection experienced by LGBT students in this study may further complicate the decision to discuss romantic interests with peers and parents. School social workers can serve an important role in recruiting and training allies as part of peer helper groups that already exist within school systems to foster support among peers for LGBT youths, thus giving them a safe place to discuss issues related to their sexual orientation. Because peers are often the first people to whom LGBT youths disclose their sexual orientation, it is important that school social workers let the student body know how to make a referral to the school social worker for assistance in much the same way students would make a referral for other difficult issues that students may be facing.

In addition, school social workers should consider finding ways to connect LGBT youths to positive adult role models, as LGBT youths may find that hearing individual stories of others who have shared similar experiences and faced their fears regarding coming out to be empowering. If possible, school social workers can identify LGBT school personnel who are willing to share their experiences, acknowledging that this may not be possible in every school district for various reasons. School social workers can also identify LGBT individuals within the community who may be willing to share their stories, thereby helping LGBT youths to face their fears. Working with other school personnel, school social workers could also consider hosting an It Gets Better Project–style event to introduce students to positive role models. Finally, as school social workers are experts in parental engagement, they can offer support to parents who are struggling to support their LGBT child by running groups or making connections to local resources such as PFLAG.

Strengths and Limitations

The design of the study was a strength, because LGBT adolescents have been interviewed "in the

moment" and have not been asked to look back in time, which is rare when studying LGBT adolescent issues. In addition, the students identified for the study were not "atypical" in that they were not part of a group for homeless LGBT teenagers or those with addictions. Rather, they were considered representative of typical "out" LGBT students. Furthermore, the phenomenological approach used here, which included flexibility in the interview format, allowed nuanced information to be captured.

It should be noted that as this study was qualitative in nature and was completed with a small sample size, the results should not be generalized to all LGBT youths. The need to receive parental permission was also a limitation of the study. Even students who were out to their parents were often uncomfortable asking for permission to be part of a "gay" study. For this study, it was certainly a limitation that I was only able to interview adolescents who were out in each of their life domains, and the experiences of those adolescents who are not "out" may not be represented in this study. In addition, Rosario et al. (2004) found that African American and Latino youths differ significantly from their white counterparts in that this population often publicly discloses their sexual orientation later in life. This finding, coupled with my participant recruiting efforts, illustrates the difficulty in recruiting non–majority population LGBT youths, who may have very different experiences. Finally, the experiences of male and female youths may be very different and in the current study, only one young woman was interviewed.

CONCLUSION

School social workers, with their focus on advocacy and removing barriers to academic achievement, are well positioned by virtue of their academic and clinical preparation to support LGBT youths in the school system. Helping LGBT youths make connections with peers while at the same time helping non–LGBT peers become allies will hopefully improve school environments for all students. CS

REFERENCES

Baiocco, R., Laghi, F., DiPomponio, L., & Nigito, C. S. (2012). Self-disclosure to the best friend: Friendship quality and internalized sexual stigma in Italian lesbian and gay adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 35*(2), 381–387. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.08.002

Berndt, T. J. (1999). Friends' influence on students' adjustment to school. *Educational Psychologist, 34,* 15–28.

Berscheid, E. (2003). The human's greatest strength: Other humans. In L. G. Aspinwall & U. M. Staudinger (Eds.), *A psychology of human strengths: Fundamental questions and future direction for a positive psychology* (pp. 37–47). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Blum, R. W., McNeely, C., & Nonnemaker, J. (2002). Vulnerability, risk, and protection. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 31S*, 28–39.

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 98*(2), 310–357.

Coker, T. R., Austin, S. B., & Schuster, M. A. (2010). The health and health care of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents. *Annual Review of Public Health, 31*, 457–477.

Cooley, J. J. (1998). Gay and lesbian adolescents: Presenting problems and the counselor's role. *Professional School Counseling, 1*, 30–34.

Eccles, T. A., Sayegh, M. A., Fortenberry, J. D., & Zimet, G. D. (2004). More normal than not: A qualitative assessment of the developmental experiences of gay male youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 35*, 425e11–425e18.

Goodenow, C., Szalacha, L., & Westheimer, K. (2006). School support groups, other school factors, and the safety of sexual minority adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*, 573–589. doi:10.1002/pits.20173

Grafsky, E. L., Letcher, A., Slesnick, N., & Serovich, J. M. (2011). Comparison of treatment response among GLB and non-GLB street-living youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 569–574. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.10.007

Harper, G. W., Bruce, D., Serrano, P., & Jamil, O. B. (2009). The role of the Internet in the sexual identity development of gay and bisexual male adolescents. In P. L. Hammack & B. J. Cohler (Eds.), *The story of sexual identity: Narrative perspectives on the gay and lesbian life course* (pp. 297–326). New York: Oxford University Press.

Hillier, L., Turner, A., & Mitchell, A. (2005). *Writing themselves again: 6 years on, the 2nd national report on the sexuality, health & well-being of same sex attracted young people in Australia.* Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society (ARCSHS). Retrieved from http://www.glhv.org.au/files/writing_themselves_in_again.pdf

Hodges, E. E., Boivin, M., Vitaro, F., & Bukowski, W. M. (1999). The power of friendship: Protection against an escalating cycle of peer victimization. *Developmental Psychology, 35*(1), 94–101.

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*, 551–558.

Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling and psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 250–260. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Murdock, T. B., & Bolch, M. B. (2005). Risk and protective factors for poor school adjustment in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) high school youth: Variable and person-centered analyses. *Psychology in the Schools, 42*, 159–172. doi:10.1002/pitts.20054

Needham, B. L., & Austin, E. L. (2010). Sexual orientation, parental support, and health during the transition to young adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 39*, 1189–1198.

Noorden, T. J., Haselager, G. T., Cillessen, A. N., & Bukowski, W. M. (2014). Empathy and involvement in bullying in children and adolescents: A systematic review. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence.* Advance online publication. doi:10.1007/s10964-014-0135-6

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2004). Predictors of substance use over time among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths: An examination of three hypotheses. *Addictive Behaviors, 29*, 1623–1631. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2004.02.032

Russell, S. T., Seif, H., & Truong, N. L. (2001). School outcomes of sexual minority youth in the United States: Evidence from a national study. *Journal of Adolescence, 24*, 111–127.

Saewyc, E. M., Poon, C. S., Homma, Y., & Skay, C. L. (2008). Stigma management? The links between enacted stigma and teen pregnancy trends among gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 17*(3), 123–139.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (1998). The disclosure to families of same-sex attractions by lesbian, gay and bisexual youths. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 8*, 49–68.

Savin-Williams, R. C., & Diamond, L. M. (2000). Sexual identity trajectories among sexual-minority youths: Gender comparisons. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 29*, 607–627.

School Social Work Association of America. (2014). *SSWAA national school social work practice model: Improving academic and behavioral outcomes.* Retrieved from http://sswaa.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=459

Silverman, D. (2010). *Doing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sumter, S. R., Baumgartner, S. E., Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2012). Developmental trajectories of peer victimization: Off-line and online experiences during adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 50*, 607–613. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2011.10.251

Stuart L. Roe, PhD, *is assistant professor, Counselor Education, College of New Jersey, P.O. Box 7718, Ewing, NJ 08628; e-mail: roes@tcnj.edu.*