Lesson 9

Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Students

Critical Lessons for School Counselors

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Real Life

Maxwell is a 2nd year, Native American, heterosexual male school counseling student in his master’s program and on his school counseling internship in a high school. One of the students on his caseload, Liam, has recently come out to him as questioning his sexual orientation. Liam has had some sexual feelings toward other men in his homeroom class, and has begun to explore his feelings by entering chatrooms online to meet other gay, bisexual, and questioning men. Maxwell is providing Liam individual counseling services and quickly realizes that Liam’s educational experiences may be compromised by experiences of bullying that are happening inside and outside of the school. In some instances, Liam noted that school personnel who have witnessed bullying events haven’t done anything. Liam also notes that his sex education class has been difficult for him, in part because the teacher has told all the male students in the class (the sex education classes at the school are separated by gender) that they have to be respectful and careful when having sex with women for the first time, assuming that all students in the class were sexually attracted to women.
Essential Question: How can I best meet the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) students?

Objectives

Students will

- demonstrate techniques that are culturally appropriate when working with LGBQ students.
- demonstrate a sensitivity to and awareness of LGBQ student's worldview.

CACREP 2016 STANDARDS

- Techniques of personal/social counseling in school settings (5.G.3.f)

MPCAC Standards

- Human development and wellness across the life span
- Counseling, consultation, and social-justice advocacy theories and skills
- Ecological, contextual, multicultural, social-justice foundation of human development

Video Spark

https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=Ted+talk+tania+israel

Bisexuality and Beyond (Tania Israel)

Helen Hamlet and Theodore Burnes (2013) have identified ways for school counseling interns to learn the numerous ways that sociocultural diversity is a part of professional school counseling and the school counseling internship experience. Like Maxwell in the case above, interns will aid in the development of a school counseling program that celebrates various social and cultural aspects of diversity. Although various cultures have traditionally been defined through identities centered on race, ethnicity, or gender, expanded definitions include a variety of different aspects including socioeconomic status and sexual orientation (Sue & Sue, 2015). Through these school counseling training experiences, interns will begin to facilitate and engage with resilience, privilege, and oppression that these students experience. One specific group of students with whom these school counselors will engage with are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) students. Sexual orientation refers to an individual's social, emotional, and/or physical attraction to someone of the same sex, another sex, or multiple sexes (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Fassinger & Arsenau, 2007). This attraction has multiple components that overlap, but should be understood as distinct facets, including sexual identity, which is a part of sexual orientation. Sexual identity is the label that individuals use to describe their identity, often (but not always) influenced by culture, environment, and community. Although there has been consistent documentation that these identities and attractions are often fixed within individuals, there is a growing documentation that
highlights a series of identities that are relatively stable, may be fluid, and can change over time (Manley, Diamond, & van Anders, 2015). Specifically, these identities demonstrate a stability in terms of labeling and attraction; however, there may some fluidity in terms of who one is attracted to and how those attractions manifest over time (e.g., physical attraction, emotional attraction, behavioral engagement). Subsequently, the term queer has some origins in academic settings and is a label often used by individuals with a fluid identity (Stombler, Baunach, Simonds, Windsor, & Burgess, 2013). The queer identity has often been used both to politicize one's identity and also as an assault on the hurtful use of the term by non-LGBT individuals in historical contexts. Individuals also often use this label to be inclusive of their attractions to transgender individuals and represent a nonbinary understanding of their attractions.

It is important to note that chapters in this text have differentiated chapters for working with LGBQ students from working with transgender and gender nonconforming (LGBQ) students. Although many group the five letters in the LGBTQ acronym together due to their transcending of gender norms and experiences of physical, verbal, societal, and vocational harassment, scholars have noted the importance in differentiating sexual orientation and gender identity (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Those individuals who identify as transgender may not have any similarities, community, or identity politics related to those individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009).

The school counseling model made by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) helps school counselors and school counseling interns to develop a program in their school that is comprehensive, has a strong foundation, and is data driven (2012). School counseling interns can work collaboratively with their supervisors using the ASCA model when working with LGBQ students to ensure that various ecological levels of the school counseling program meet the needs of LGBQ students. Further, school counseling interns' social-justice advocacy can ensure systemic change of various levels of the educational system to ensure that issues of sexual orientation are ingrained in multiple ecological levels. This chapter provides school counseling interns with suggestions and strategies for utilizing cultural competence with LGBQ students into the ASCA model.

THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF LGBQ STUDENTS IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Contemporary understandings of sexual orientation have produced a critique of educational and counseling discourses for using outdated and conflated definitions of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Burnes & Stanley, in press). When examining the intersections between sexual orientation school counseling, it is important for school counselors working with LGBQ students to understand common language related to the identity and psychological well-being of these students. As language in LGBQ communities consistently changes and evolves, to define all necessary language for competent school counseling practices with LGBQ communities would be outside the scope of this chapter; I suggest the comprehensive glossary in the Competencies for Counseling with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Ally Individuals put forth by the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2013). These various terms related to sexual identity and expression can help school counselors to understand that sexual orientation can impact the school counseling process in numerous and complex ways.

As competent school counselors, using developmental theory and practice in working with LGBQ students is reflective of school counselors' ethical standards (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2010). Many students will begin to understand notions of sexual attraction as early as late childhood (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010); however, such developmental processes may be severely impacted by environmental factors. For example, the detrimental impact of bullying and incident-based hate crimes has been documented by scholars to negatively impact LGBQ adolescents' well-being (Hillard, Love, Franks, Laris, & Coyle, 2014). Further, recent research has suggested that lack of social support from families and peers may negatively impact LGBQ students' social (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001), emotional (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009), and academic (DePaul et al., 2009) self-esteem.
and self-efficacy. Joseph P. Robinson, Dorothy L. Espelage, and Ian Rivers (2013) note that, in comparison to a sample of heterosexual youth, there are stronger relationships between emotional distress (and subsequent emotional development), sexual identity, and peer victimization for LGBQ youth, and these relationships are influenced by an LGBQ youth’s gender.

Although LGBQ students may utilize school counseling services for many different reasons, there is continual documentation (e.g., Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes, & Walther, 2008) that counselors may tend to incorrectly interpret LGBQ individuals’ reasons for counseling based on their identities (e.g., a school counselor does not ask about sexual orientation or sexual identity when it is an issue; a school counselor may assume heterosexuality unless a student corrects the counselor or students reveal their own LGBQ identity). Scholars (e.g., Cole, 2009) have noted the complexity of how identities for individuals with differing degrees of marginalization and privilege. Some LGBQ students may find themselves having to “prioritize” one identity over the other (e.g., identifying as a Black male, rather than as a Black gay male) when these students possess intersecting marginalized identities. Further, schools that have a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) may be welcoming for White students, but LGBQ may experience racism in these environments and thus feel marginalized from a space that could be a source of support for them. Thus, the numerous complexities of working with LGBQ students’ identities necessitate that school counselors assess how a client’s unique combinations of marginalized and privileged identities impact his or her respective worldviews, environments, and relationships. Further, LGBQ students have unique stressors based on their sexual identities that are often uniquely impacted by other marginalized identities such as class, gender, ethnicity, and race. These intersecting identities, then, impact their mental health and wellness inside and outside of the school setting. Scholars (e.g., Hillard et al., 2014) have documented some of these stressors, including heterosexism by teachers or school administrators, physical violence, fear of violence and discrimination in the forms of physical harassment, or verbal harassment.

● USING THE ASCA MODEL TO CELEBRATE LGBQ STUDENTS

School counselors can consider the context of their clients’ unique social and cultural frameworks in the building and maintenance of culturally informed school counseling. Specifically, school counselors and school counseling interns like Maxwell can utilize the ASCA model as a framework to consider how their school counseling program may need to be adapted, changed, or updated so as to celebrate a diverse continuum of sexual expression and to serve LGBQ students effectively. The following section identifies strategies for school counselors to adapt their programs accordingly.

Foundation. When developing school counseling programs, school counselors should develop a mission statement that explicitly states that their school is a welcoming place for individuals with diverse gender identities. ASCA’s (2014) position statement on working with LGBTQ youth in schools can be a framework for developing a school counseling program that combines LGBTQ affirmative practice with the understanding of the effects of discrimination, privilege, and marginalization of all a student’s unique combination of identities. School counselors can also help to make LGBQ students feel supported by infusing issues of sexual orientation into the school community. Celebrating the history and culture of LGBQ communities is one way to help students learn about resources available to LGBQ people in the students’ geographic area (e.g., LGBT community centers, coffee shops, bars) and, as well, websites and Internet-based sources that may provide assistance in students learning about LGBQ identities in a context that is more anonymous. It is imperative that school counselors and school counseling interns make sure to thoroughly review websites that are listed as resources for any member of the school’s community so as not to provide inaccurate information.

As school counselors assess their own competencies in working with LGBQ students, the need for appropriate continuing education and training becomes paramount (Goodrich, Harper, Luke, & Singh, 2014). In the absence of supervisors with competency in working with LGBQ students, school counseling interns should identify opportunities to seek additional training and experiences to work
in the P–12 educational setting (e.g., additional coursework, professional conference presentations, workshops and training given at local, state, national, or international levels).

**Service Delivery.** As bullying attitudes and behaviors are disproportionately reflected toward LGBQ students in comparison with their non-LGBQ peers, the need for school counseling interns to deliver comprehensive services that affirm LGBQ individuals and communities in their school becomes paramount so as to provide concrete actions that an attitude of celebration of LGBQ identities in school is the norm and not the exception. Making sure that counseling services use affirmative language and counseling processes is necessary in order to achieve this goal, including questions related to (a) how the multiple facets of students’ sexual identities (e.g., behaviors, emotions, attractions, fantasies, physical experiences, and sexual expressions) come together and intersect, (b) how the student came to connect with a LGBQ identity in their developmental experiences (if applicable), (c) the process (if applicable) of the student’s sharing of an LGBQ identity with other people (the school counselor can ask about sharing this identity in multiple ecological domains, including family, extracurricular sports teams, school personnel, home life, etc.), (d) how the process of coming out has impacted the student’s mental health and well-being. School counselors should also inquire as to how a student’s cultural, familial, and societal identities may cause stress as they interact with a student’s LGBQ identity. For example, a Mexican American male student may have disclosed his bisexual identity to his family and thus may lack a vital support system to buffer against ethnic discrimination.

For school counselors conducting individual and group counseling sessions working with LGBQ clients, it is important that they routinely self-assess their competence level. Many school counseling trainees may lack specific training in working with LGBQ students; such lack of training is not specific to the discipline of school counseling and is true of many different mental health disciplines (Luke, Goodrich, & Scarborough, 2011). Thus, school counselors’ learning about LGBQ individuals and communities to increase their knowledge, attitudes, and skills will be able to positively impact their skills with respect to the counseling process. Recent guidelines for psychological practice with LGBQ clients note that psychologists should recognize that the families of LGBQ people might include people who are not legally or biologically related (American Psychological Association [APA], 2012, p. 18). Utilizing these guidelines, school counselors should apply theories of ecology (e.g., “family of choice,” understanding self-acceptance; Fassinger & Arsenau, 2007) and the use of ecological frameworks to aid in the conceptualization of LGBQ students.

For example, Liam may exhibit anxiety-related symptoms, such as “my stomach feels numb like parts of my body are disconnected from other parts” and poor concentration as he decides to come out as bisexual to his family. Thus, Maxwell can ask Liam questions related to who is in Liam’s community (Who do you consider family? Can you tell me why this person is family to you?), questions related to how and to what extent family have helped Liam (Can you tell me about a specific instance when a family member has helped you through a difficult time?), and questions related to clients’ relationship to their unique relationship to culture (I know that we all have different ways that we engage with culture and the world around us. What are ways that you engage with your culture?). Further, Maxwell can ask Liam questions in a counseling interview from a strength-based approach. Specifically, Maxwell can assess what Liam’s strengths are as he develops his bisexual identity, what Liam values in himself, and what are strengths and social support that Liam would like to cultivate as he deepens his resilience and his connection to his bisexual identity.

School counseling interns may want to implement the school counseling core curriculum lessons as part of their training and as part of their school counseling program’s service delivery model. Such experiential activities can be helpful in working with students who may not have the cognitive capacity or emotional maturity to engage in conversation about abstract topics such as sexual orientation (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010). In one such activity, students sit by themselves with a piece of paper and a writing instrument. School counseling interns ask students to write the names of four people in their life—any four people—on the piece of paper. Next, students are instructed to pick two of the names and circle them. They can pick any two of the four names that they want to circle. Once everyone has circled, the school counseling interns announces that the student has come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer,
to the four people on their respective list. Further, on the list, the students are told that the two people whose names they circled have had a positive reaction, and the two names that were not circled have had a negative reaction. Students then cluster into small groups of two to four students; they are asked to process what it would be like if these were the reactions that these people had in real life. In a subsequent large-group process, it is helpful for the school counseling intern to discuss how it is often difficult to predict the ways that people might react to such identity disclosure.

As part of the service delivery domain of a school counselor’s program, Kristopher Goodrich, Amney Harper, Melissa Luke, and Anneliese Singh (2013) urged professional school counselors and school counseling interns to work within multiple levels of the school system to facilitate in-service trainings and workshops on working with LGBQ students, staff, and administration. They suggested including domains on language and on policies for including diversity about sexual practices and identities in gendered spaces (e.g., school dances, sex education classes). Further, making sure that LGBQ students have specific resources available for their career development and college readiness is also important.

Management. Hamlet and Burnes (2013) note that the school counseling internship is a developmental process in which interns should be able to incorporate their own increasing bodies of knowledge and feel supported by their supervisor as they develop skills of managing programs that serve the needs of a diverse student body. When school counselors engage in the management of their school counseling programs, they should consider the needs of LGBQ students in a variety of ways. First, it is helpful to initially examine the nondiscrimination policies within the school to ensure that sexual orientation is included in the policy (Almeida et al., 2009). Further, school counselors can also work with administrators to establish an advisory council of counselors, faculty, staff, and administration that can be responsive to issues of sexual identity diversity and issues of intentional inclusion of sexual orientation issues into schools. Additionally, school counselors can begin collecting data related to incidence of anti-LGBQ attitudes, behaviors, or practices. Further, making sure that various members of a school's health care team—intervention advisors, school counselors, psychologists, nutritionists, and social workers—can create collaborations that will translate into long-term partnerships to develop a LGBQ-affirmative environment for the school.

In managing their school counseling program, school counseling interns can design, implement, and evaluate in projects that highlight understanding, celebration, and sensitivity of LGBQ students. In conjunction with their supervisors, such projects could include designing and implementing an assembly presentation or a school counseling core curriculum lesson in sexual fluidity or how to be an ally to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer students. Further, school counseling interns can also create advocacy groups or task forces within the school focused on drafting and editing discrimination policies that could be added to the school’s philosophy and mission statement.

Accountability. ASCA (2012) documented the importance of school counselors not only designing innovative strategies to collect data within their school counseling programs, but also using data to show how school counseling programs have impacted student well-being and facilitated student success. When analyzing and interpreting data about their programs, school counselors’ interpretation should be carefully checked and audited for homophobic, biphobic, or anti-queer biases and assumptions, including those that are heterosexist (e.g., assuming pronoun usage when speaking about someone’s attractions or partners), and may include biases about sexual roles, norms, and behaviors. The ways that some LGBQ students’ transcending of certain gender norms should also be explored and taken into careful consideration when interpreting peers, as many LGBQ students transcend societal gender roles and norms similar to their transgender, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming peers.

Finally, school counselors and school counseling interns must recognize that interpreting results and providing feedback to school and district administrators about the mental health and well-being of LGBQ students must be accompanied by feedback about the harsh realities of LGBQ students’ experiences in school environments. Specifically, noting how data can be used to identify strategies for systemic change at the school or district levels can be helpful in school counseling interns’ education about how to create affirmative environments for LGBQ students at multiple levels.
CONCLUSION

This article has identified the ways that school counselors can utilize the ASCA model to serve LGBQ students. Further, the article identified the multiple ways that school counseling interns are able to implement specific interventions at individual, group, classroom, school, and district levels that utilize frameworks of social justice and cultural competence. As issues of sexual orientation and sexual expression continue to be a topic of continued importance worldwide given the expansion of LGBQ issues in the media, it is important for school counselors and school counseling interns to bring issues of sexual diversity to the forefront of their school community's minds so as to increase understanding.

REFERENCES


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