Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Gifted GLBTQ Youth

Conversations About Diversity & Equity - Winter/Spring 2014

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• When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you ...
• when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it,
• there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing.
• It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.

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10% of 2%? Don’t think so…

• According to a small body of research (Treat, 2008; Friedrichs & Etheridge, 1993), the population of GLB students may be much higher than previously imagined.
• Out of 965 participants, 499 were recruited via non-LGBT sources. 2/3 of the 499 were gifted and/or Mensa members. Out of those gifted/Mensa, over 1/3 were GLB, close to the percentages of gifted in the Friedrichs study (1997).

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Main Effects and Interactions: Treat (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Effects</th>
<th>MANOVA Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Statistically significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giftedness</td>
<td>Statistically significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>Statistically significant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Role</td>
<td>NOT Statistically significant</td>
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ONLY the Gender*Sexual orientation interaction effect was statistically significant.
Intellectual

**Bisexual females** scored higher than both **heterosexual females** (Mean Difference = .405, p < .002) and **heterosexual males** (Mean Difference = .403, p < .002).

Imaginational

**Bisexual females** scored higher than both **heterosexual females** (Mean Difference = .452, p < .002) and **heterosexual males** (Mean Difference = .406, p < .002).

Sensual

**Bisexual females** scored higher than **heterosexual females** (Mean Difference = .405, p < .002).

**Gay females** (Mean Difference = .429, p < .002) and **bisexual females** (Mean Difference = .606, p < .002) scored higher than **heterosexual males**.
Emotional

Gay females (Mean Difference = .584, p < .002), bisexual females (Mean Difference = .743, p < .002), heterosexual females (Mean Difference = .595, p < .002), and gay males (Mean Difference = .439, p < .002) scored higher than heterosexual males.

Psychomotor

No statistically significant differences.

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Evidence of Giftedness in 53 GLBT Youth in Sexual-Minority Support Groups

- 30% with 130+ IQ’s
- 30% with GPA’s over 3.5
- 40% with multiple leadership awards in school or community
- 60% with multiple creativity or arts awards in school or community
- 36% in gifted programs (24% of boys, 48% of girls)

Friedrichs & Etheridge (1993)
What We Know

- When compared to other students, LGBT kids are more likely to:
  - Have been bullied (80%)
  - Avoid school
  - Demonstrate lower academic achievement
  - Engage in unprotected sex
  - Report alcohol use (60% vs 45%)
  - Use crack or cocaine (8 times more likely)
  - Experience increased rates of depression and anxiety
  - Report a suicide attempt (32% vs 5%)

What We Know

- 31% (males) and 29% (females) report harassment or physical violence from family members
  - 92% report hearing homophobic remarks at school
- 78% of transgender youth report being verbally harassed
- 28% of LGBT youth drop out of school (nationwide)
Shared Characteristics of Gifted and Sexually Diverse Youth

- Gifted youth and LGBTQI youth share unique characteristics
- When these shared characteristics manifest in individuals who are both gifted and gay, the effects may be compounded, creating more intense, specific counseling and emotional support needs

Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

**Invisibility**
- Difficulty finding peers or others who are also gifted &/or gay
- Assumptions based on majority (heterosexual &/or average intelligence)
- Isolation
- May be extremely creative
- May need more time alone than others; may be more likely to be introverted

**Must "come out" to reveal/claim identity**
- Heightened sense of being different; may feel compelled to hide differentness to gain acceptance
- Heightened sensitivities
- Impostor syndrome – feel others do not recognize them as they really are; less worthy than others believe
- Psychological distress (trauma, depression) stems from isolation, fear, perfectionism, lack of resources/support
- May feel internal/external pressure to disclose sexual orientation prematurely if peer group is older

**Family may not understand/support if they are not also gifted or gay**
- May be/feel significantly different from other family members
- Factor may go against family’s culture/belief system
- Fear withdrawal of love/support for failure to live up to expectations or for standing out too much
- May make several moves to find good fit educationally and socially
- May be more likely to challenge status quo in family &/or community
Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

- Aware of a societal lack of acceptance
- Some form of discrimination likely (e.g., lack of educational & financial support for gifted programs or legislation denying equal rights to GLBT)
- Fear of bullying and violence when being gifted/gay is disclosed
- May not have specific protections in non-discrimination policies
- Difficulty seeing the future and themselves in it esp. if role models are invisible


Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

- Conflict between expectations of “gender appropriate” interest and one’s true interests
- Overt/covert discouragement from following passions when nontraditional &/or not high in 3 Ps (Power, Pay, Prestige)
- May push self to extreme to achieve at highest level – validates gifted label and helps “balance” the Big Secret.
- May set high/unattainable standards for self


Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

- May have difficulty finding others who share interests that are unusual for one’s gender &/or age
- Early/late sexual activity (may be greater concern when radical grade skipping has been employed or when self-identifying as GLBT before 18)

Terry Friedrichs, Ph.D.
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Gifted Gay/Bisexual Male Needs

- **Intellectual:** Broad knowledge; Cultural diversity
- **Academic:** Drive for excellence across subjects; possible underachievement
- **Metaphysical:** Spiritual questing; public self-expression
- **Physical:** Desire outlets for energy and stress; wish for athletic choices

Gifted Lesbian/Bisexual Female Needs

- **Intellectual:** Intuitiveness; Unorthodoxy; Inquisitiveness
- **Academic:** Drive for excellence; desire for high-achieving peers
- **Metaphysical:** Exploratory nature; desire for service
- **Physical:** Physical assertiveness
Recent Educational Trends Facilitative of Forward Movement for Gifted GLBTQ Youth

**Federal**
- Title IX prohibition of sexual stereotyping, sexual orientation harassment
- Equal Access Act of 1984 extended to protect Gay-Straight Alliances in schools

**States**
- DC, plus 10 states, with anti-GLB discrimination/harassment laws, statutes, regulations (CA, CT, MA, MN, NJ, PA, RI, VT, WA, WI)
- DC, plus 17 states, with Safe School Laws (AR, CA, CT, IL, IA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, NC, NJ, NY, OR, RI, WA, WI)

**Localities**
- Hundreds of districts with anti-GLB(T) discrimination/harassment regulations
- Increase in numbers of Gay-Straight Alliances and openly-GLBT students, teachers, and parents

Recent Political Trends Facilitative of Forward Educational Movement for Gifted GLBTQ Youth

**Federal**
- “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” in the Military

**State**
- Same-Sex Marriage Laws and Court Rulings
- Increase in Number of GLBT-Supportive Non-Discrimination Acts
- Domestic Partner Benefits

Tracy L. Cross, Ph.D
NAGC President
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Q&A
5 minutes

Vickie Barton; Ed.D
Executive Co-Director of The Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics and Humanities and Director of Residential and Student Affairs

Educator Tips – School wide

• Create mandatory staff trainings regarding LGBT challenges/issues, school policies and laws
• Adopt supportive and welcoming school climate and enforce policies that protect LGBT students
• Foster creation of supervised Straight-Gay alliances/clubs
• Allow LGBT students to express their identity (inclusive)
• Provide psychoeducational programming for students
Educator Tips - Individual

• Acknowledge that LGBT youth are in your midst and many may be undisclosed
• Examine personal beliefs and attitudes that may impact your own behavior
• Treat LGBT students with the same expectations and dignity as other students
• Avoid stereotyping based on mannerisms
• Be aware of your language
  – "partner" vs "boyfriend/girlfriend" etc.

Educator Tips - Individual

• Respect confidentiality!
• Be unconditionally supportive if a student discloses LGBT
• Create a welcoming environment
  – Symbols representing support
• Know what resources are available
  – Counselors, clubs, community organizations, Trevor Project, Indiana Youth Group, etc.

Terry Friedrichs, Ph.D
Friedrichs Consulting, Mendota Heights, MN
Gifted GB Male Approaches

**Intellectual**
- Broad access to independent studies
- Access to culturally diverse persons

**Academic**
- Acceleration, on- and off-site, across subjects

**Metaphysical**
- Independent learning on various spiritualities
- Classroom self-expression of beliefs

**Physical**
- Opportunities for movement
- Individual, team sport choices

Friedrichs (1997, 2012)

Gifted GL Female Approaches

**Intellectual**
- Nurturing unorthodox dreams, fantasies
- Journaling, discussions of social issues

**Academic**
- Setting high goals
- High-achieving peer groups

**Metaphysical**
- Exploration of communities
- Engaging in community service

**Physical**
- Opportunities for vigorous outings
- Individual/team sport options

Friedrichs (2012)

Want to Help Gifted GLBTQ Youth, Their Parents, and Teachers?

Join the Free NAGC GLBTQ Special Interest Group (SIG)!
- Meet other gifted GLBTQ supporters
- Obtain gifted-GLBTQ supportive information
- Advocate for these youth, their parents, and their teachers

Contact Terry Friedrichs, NAGC GLBTQ SIG Coordinator, tpfriedrichs@stthomas.edu
OR
Carolyn Kaye, NAGC Staff Person, ckyae@nagc.org

Say that you want to be a member!

Friedrichs (1997, 2012)
Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

- Provide ways to be with peers who are also gifted and/or gay
- Don't assume heterosexuality or average intelligence
- Encourage and provide opportunities for creativity
- Allow options for working alone if they want/need it
- Don't force students to be outgoing; allow other ways to express themselves
- Don't assume shy/introverted are not intelligent or are agreeing with you

Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

**Must “come out” to reveal/claim identity**
- Show that you and others value differences, all intellectual levels, and all orientations
- Provide staff development for teachers, counselors, and psychologists on characteristics and needs of gifted, GLBT, and gifted/GLBT individuals
- Ensure that school counselors and psychologists are professionally, if not personally, “gay friendly,” understand, and are empathetic to transgender issues
- Establish a school GSA (Gay/Straight Alliance)


Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

**Must “come out” to reveal/claim identity**
- Reveal sexual orientation of famous individuals as you include other personal characteristics in the curriculum while clearly valuing their contributions
- Bring in mentors/guest speakers who are gifted, gay, and gifted/gay and show you value them
- Provide ways for students to express sensitivities and show that you value those sensitivities
- Emphasize that gifted individuals were not always good at everything while encouraging valuing of their contributions


Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

**Family may not understand/support if they are not also gifted or gay**
- Encourage and demonstrate the valuing of differences, uniqueness, and diversity
- Try not to force choices between one’s culture and giftedness or sexual orientation
- Provide resources and support for families of gifted and GLBT youth
- Establish a PFLAG, SENG or other support group
- Make permission slips and notes home gender nonspecific regarding parents/guardians

Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

Feeling unprotected and unsafe

- Establish close monitoring and clear, severe penalties for bullying and violence specifically addressing gifted and GLBT
- Ensure that students are aware of progress made toward acceptance of gifted/GLBT
- Provide visible role models for gifted/GLBT students

- Ensure that school non-discrimination policies include sexual orientation and gender identity
- Establish support/discussion groups for gifted and sexually diverse youth
- Seek financial support for gifted and GLBT youth organizations and resources in school
- Provide visible support for educational, financial, and legislative equal rights for gifted and GLBT individuals and programs

- Encourage and demonstrate valuing those who break gender stereotypes in curriculum and in the classroom
- Encourage pursuit of passion areas even when unusual or not high in 3 Ps (Power, Pay, Prestige)
- Demonstrate acceptance of non-perfect products and performances without lowering acceptable standards
- Encourage setting of attainable standards while still pushing for excellence
- Allow time for questioning and formation of identity during children’s development

Feeling unprotected and unsafe

Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

• Provide safe places (clubs, activities) to meet others like them
• Be open to arranging educational opportunities, class schedules, and placements that accommodate cognitive and sexual diversity
• Provide mentors, internships, independent study mentors, and role models based on students’ interests that counter gender stereotypes and provide positive relationships
• Allow for interest-based opportunities that are gender and age nonspecific

Vickie Barton, Ed.D
Executive Co-Director of The Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics and Humanities and Director of Residential and Student Affairs

Resources

• Gay SIG (Mensa Society)
• GLSEN
• GSA Network
• HRC Youth
• It Gets Better Project
• Lambda Legal
• One Iowa
• PFLAG
• Southern Poverty Law Center
• Stop Bullying.Gov
• Teaching Tolerance
### Publications/Resources


### Alena & Terry’s References


### Vickie’s References

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Final Questions/Thoughts?