

Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Gifted LGBTQ Youth

Conversations About Diversity & Equity - Winter/Spring 2014

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& Alena R. Treat, Ph.D.,
Moderator: Tracy L. Cross, Ph.D.

NAGC WOW May 14, 2014



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Why It is Time...



- 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.

1984, Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry*

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).

Treat, A.R. (2008)

Main Effects and Interactions: Treat (2008)

Main Effects

- Gender
- Giftedness
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Role

MANOVA Results

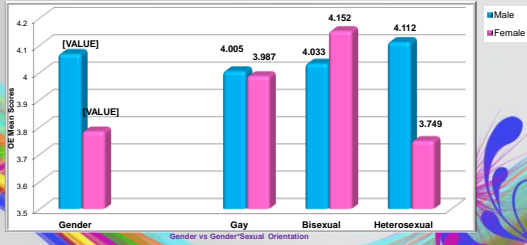
- Statistically significant
- Statistically significant
- Statistically significant
- **NOT Statistically significant**

ONLY the Gender*Sexual orientation interaction effect was statistically significant

Treat, A.R. (2008)

Intellectual

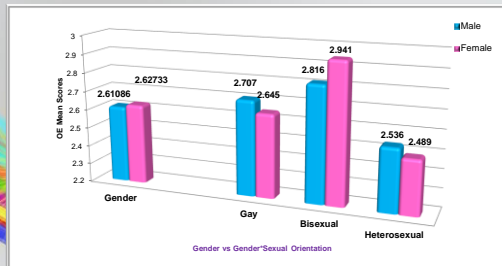
Bisexual females (Mean Difference = .403, $p < .002$) and **heterosexual males** (Mean Difference = .403, $p < .002$) **scored higher than heterosexual females** (Mean Difference = .363, $p < .002$).



Treat, A.R. (2008)

Imaginational

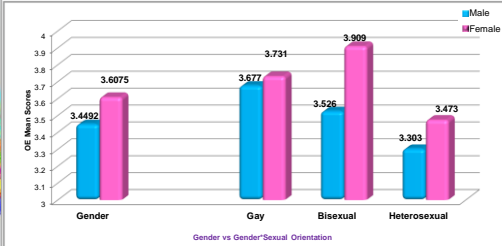
Bisexual females scored higher than both **heterosexual females** (Mean Difference = .452, $p < .002$) and **heterosexual males** (Mean Difference = .406, $p < .002$).



Treat, A.R. (2008)

Sensual

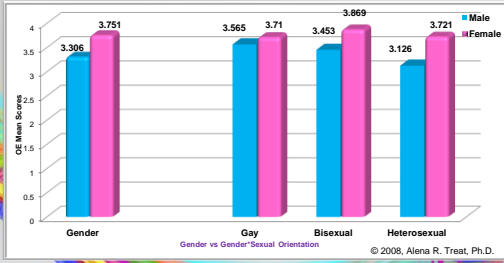
Bisexual females scored higher than **heterosexual females** (Mean Difference = .436, $p < .002$).
Gay females (Mean Difference = .429, $p < .002$) and **bisexual females** (Mean Difference = .606, $p < .002$) scored higher than **heterosexual males**.



Treat, A.R. (2008)

Emotional

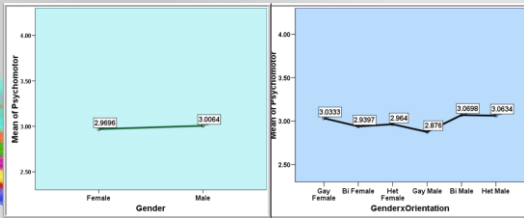
Gay females (Mean Difference = .584, $p < .002$), **bisexual females** (Mean Difference = .743, $p < .002$), **heterosexual females** (Mean Difference = .595, $p < .002$), and **gay males** (Mean Difference = .439, $p < .002$) scored higher than **heterosexual males**



Treat, A.R. (2008)

Psychomotor

No statistically significant differences



Treat, A.R. (2008)



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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)



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Q&A 2 minutes



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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%)

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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)

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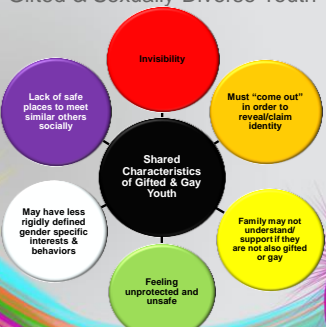
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Shared Characteristics of Gifted and Sexually Diverse Youth

- 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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth



Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

© 2008, Whittenburg & Treat

Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

Feeling unprotected and unsafe

- 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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

May have less rigidly defined gender-specific interests & behaviors

- 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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

Shared Characteristics of Gifted & Sexually Diverse Youth

Lack of safe places to meet others like themselves

- 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)

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)



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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

Friedrichs (2012)

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

Friedrichs (2012)

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

Friedrichs (2014), GLSEN (2014)

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


(Friedrichs, 2014)




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Q&A
5 minutes



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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

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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.

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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

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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,
ckaye@nagc.org

Say that you want to be a member!

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Q&A 3 minutes



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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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

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)

Whittenburg, B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

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

Whittenburg, B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

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

Whittenburg, B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

Feeling unprotected and unsafe

- 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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

May have less rigidly defined gender-specific interests & behaviors

- 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

Whittenburg,B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)

Recommendations for Gifted Programs & Schools

Lack of safe places to meet others like themselves

- 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

Whittenburg, B. & Treat, A.R. (2008)



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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](#)

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Publications/Resources

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Alena & Terry's References

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Final Questions/Thoughts?



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