

monolithic notion of homosexuality in the West. They are often expected to adopt an identity label, a psychological profile, and even a set of behaviors, any of which may seem alien to them. Pressure to conform to this preconceived "lifestyle" can come from both straight and gay "identity police." Usually safe from outright persecution, they are still encumbered in self-invention and self-definition.

Multiple minority people must be free to reject these strictures and to forge their own authentic integrated identities. Sexual expression must be affirmed along with other vital elements of the "self." If some component in the realm of "homosexualities" contributes to this self-definition, it should be able to be named as freely and respected as much as any other feature of their humanity.

(For further reading, see appendix R.)

3

Counseling GLBT Students and Their Families

Question 1: How are gay youth different in their counseling needs from their heterosexual peers?

Exploring one's sexuality, forming one's sexual identity and sexual values, and finding significant others preoccupy nearly all adolescents. This critical endeavor coincides with the challenges of honing competencies and vocational interests, moral and spiritual values, and the skills needed for friendship and family relations. Adolescence is often a period of disequilibrium, stress, and confusion.

Because their sexuality is stigmatized, lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth have even more to contend with. Usually struggling along their developmental path in secret, they have less help overcoming obstacles. The shame of internalized stigma is just one impediment to their healthy development.

Question 2: Does that mean that gay youth are more likely to suffer from mental illness than straight youth?

The complete answer to that question is still unknown. Because so many gay and questioning youth have not come out publicly, most studies of this population have been based on the experiences of teens receiving social services as gay clients. A convenient interview sample, they don't necessarily represent gay youth as a whole.

Some new studies using broader samples still point to increased health risk for gay youth compared with their straight-identified peers. Since much of this research is conducted in schools, it does not include most habitually absent students or any dropouts. As a result, the risks to gay kids may still be underreported.

BOX 3.1 RESILIENCE IN IOWA

- Scott Spilger of Iowa City: National Merit scholar, debate team star, National Forensics League's top 10 students, and hopes to study environmental law. Students threw objects and epithets at Spilger and his boyfriend at a Valentine's Day dance.
- Michael Bowser of Waterloo: editor of the school paper at East High School, on the honor roll, and recognized by the art department for outstanding achievement. Bowser was punched out at school while walking down the hall with his boyfriend.
- Jonathan Darby: editor of the "all-state honors" Washington High School yearbook for two years; National Honor Society; and Quill and Scroll. Darby transferred out of biology class rather than take more abuse.
- Terryn Johnson of Gilbert: honor roll; band; chorus; speech drama. Enrolled in classes at Iowa State University. Endured subtle and egregious acts of discrimination and violence from teachers and classmates since coming out in 1999.
- Iowa's First Friday Breakfast Club 2002: Matthew Shepard Scholarship winners for outstanding openly gay and lesbian high school seniors—four years' tuition, books and fees at a state university.

Mare Hansen, "Four Openly Gay Teens in Iowa Earn Scholarships," *Des Moines Register*, June 8, 2002.

One aspect of these discouraging statistics, however, is often overlooked. Although the numbers indicate that sexual minority youth are disproportionately endangered compared to heterosexual youth, they also show that the *majority* of gay youth are *not* at risk. In fact, they suggest that despite the obstacles they face most glbt youth are resilient. (See box 3.1.) Thus, instead of a "deficit model" of gay youth development that stresses pathology, researchers are beginning to produce an "asset-based" model, focusing on the strengths that keep most sexual minority youth healthy and stable.

Coming out of the closet and family acceptance seem to be prime generators of resilience. Coming out is often an act of desperation; not proof of established resilience, but an entry point to it. The consequences of self-disclosure, especially positive response from others, facilitate recovery from stigmatization. Pride, better relationships, and social activism frequently replace depression and low self-esteem. Being out, especially at school, does bring its own stresses and some find respite in hiding again for a time. But, notwithstanding the retreat, they eventually thrive in the open. (See box 3.2.)

BOX 3.2 COMING OUT IS HEALTHY

[R]esearchers found that the more "out" lesbians and bisexual women were—as measured by self-identification as a gay or lesbian, number of years out and level of involvement in the lesbian or bisexual community—the less psychological distress they reported. These findings held true for a range of racial and ethnic subsamples . . . [and] support the idea that therapy that facilitates the coming-out process is good for lesbians' mental health.

Tori DeAngelis, "New Data on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Mental Health," *Monitor on Psychology*, www.apa.org/monitor/feb02/newdata.html (February 2002).

Question 3: Is there a way to predict which gay youth are more at risk?

There is evidence that those who have been victimized are at greater risk of harm, both self-inflicted and imposed. Physical attack, harassment, and other kinds of abuse increase the likelihood of suicide, substance use, truancy, and other negative outcomes. (See box 3.3.)

BOX 3.3 VICTIMIZATION = RISK

[Researchers] explored whether ongoing discrimination fuels anxiety, depression and other stress-related mental health problems among LGB people. The authors found strong evidence of a relationship between the two.

Tori DeAngelis, "New Data on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Mental Health," *Monitor on Psychology*, www.apa.org/monitor/feb02/newdata.html (February 2002).

Half of lesbian, gay, and bisexual pupils who are bullied contemplate killing or harming themselves, and four in 10 actually harm themselves at least once. [A]lmost a third, on more than one occasion, [nearly one in five display(s)] symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder later in life. As adults, those who had been bullied . . . were found to show symptoms of depression, anxiety and internalised hostility.

"Suicide: Myth of Gay Bullying Victims," BBC ONLINE, www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/162000

Clearly, students who feel unsafe, isolated, and cut off from the support of other people and institutions are most in peril. One matter, however, is certain: there is nothing inherent in homosexuality itself that puts gay youth at risk. Except for the few with underlying mental illness, their predicament stems from homophobia, heterosexism, and persecution.

Depending on their individual coping skills, gay youth may respond to heterosexist stigma in either healthy or self-destructive ways. To be resilient, they need good interpersonal skills and self-esteem, positive family relations, and extrafamilial reinforcements. Affirmative counseling and gay-positive school environments and curricula can make an enormous difference. There is evidence that merely having gay-sensitive HIV/AIDS instruction leads sexual minority students to feeling safer and displaying fewer risk behaviors.

Preliminary analysis of Vermont and Massachusetts student data indicates greater risk (i.e., being harassed, violent, and suicidal; using alcohol, drugs, and unhealthy weight control practices) for youth who have sex with both same-gender and opposite-gender partners. It finds little difference, on the other hand, between strictly heterosexual and homosexual students. Although the region under study and the numbers of nonheterosexual students are small, these discoveries are provocative. One explanation could be that the source of the statistical difference is not to be found among genuinely bisexual youth, but rather among troubled homosexual youth struggling to be straight by having relations with opposite-gender partners. This hypothesis is strengthened by the finding that the suicide rate is higher among youth who identify as straight yet engage in same-gender sex.

Question 4: What should be the areas of concern in counseling gay students?

First, we should understand that not every counseling need of sexual minority students is about sexuality. They have other issues to attend to in academics, family life, and peer relations that are unrelated to their being gay.

Still, when we look at the environment and supports that all adolescents require for good psychosocial development (see box 3.4.), we cannot ignore that each can represent a significant challenge for glbt youth.

Question 5: How is safety a concern for gay youth?

Appalling national statistics on antigay violence, from name-calling to murder, make clear why safety is a critical concern for all gay people. Homophobic assaults are likely underreported because victims fear both exposure and a lack of sympathy from the authorities. Indeed, most police departments and schools lack protocols to protect privacy and provide follow-up support. A "blame the victim" attitude is not unusual. (See box 3.5.) Since many localities require parental notification after such incidents, it is no wonder young people hesitate to bring complaints.

BOX 3.4 REQUIREMENTS FOR HEALTHY ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

- safety and structure
- belonging and membership
- self-worth and an ability to contribute
- independence and control over one's life
- closeness and several good relationships
- competence and mastery
- self-awareness

From Karen J. Pittman and Minnie Cahill, "A New Vision: Promoting Youth Development: Testimony before the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families," Commissioned Paper #3, Washington, D.C., Academy for Educational Development, September 1997.

BOX 3.5 INHERENTLY PROVOCATIVE

Liz Skaggs is only 17. But she has already spent four years shouldering insults from Gilbert High Schoolmates, who yelled "lesbian" and obscene slurs while hurling drinks and garbage at her from school buses and cars. As a freshman, Skaggs was banned from the school lunchroom for her protection after a brother-in-law attacked her. The other student was not repunished.

Mel Melendez, "Gays Being Harmed in Arizona Republic," February 6, 2002.

"I was pushed in the hallways. My things would get stolen and come back a week later with anti-gay graffiti written all over it. I could attend school dances because I would get beaten up afterwards. The principal told me I could either transfer to another school or hurry up and graduate early. There was one teacher who actually said to me that I was setting myself up to be made fun of and treated like that . . . by the way that I call and the way that I dress and the way that I act."

Dominic Haise in Nancy Guerin, "The Kids in the Hall," *Metroland* (Albany, N.Y.), July 3, 2001.

BOX 3.6 SCHOOL AS NIGHTMARE

Four Hillsborough High School students were charged yesterday with attacking a bisexual student in the school cafeteria. [T]hey had allegedly been harassing [the victim] for several weeks before the April 30 assault in which his nose was broken and a tooth was chipped.

By McCarron. "2 Face Blas Charges in School Attack." *The [Newark, N.J.] Star Ledger*, May 14, 2002.

An anti-gay epithet in bold red letters was written in lipstick across a sign on [the classroom] door. The same disparaging word was written much larger on [the] classroom wall. [A] girl said she found a slang term for lesbian written in black ink on the taillight of her car in the school parking lot this week.

Roxanne Srites, "Gay Slurs Spur Saratoga High to Discuss Insults, Hate Crimes." *Saratoga Mercury News*, April 5, 2001.

When he heard that a gay teenager at his summer school thought he was cute, Thomas Rivers quickly lashed out. He shouldered the boy in the . . . school's hallway and shouted slurs. He spit on him in a school bus. [Later he] saw the 15-year-old boy walking in an Aquia Harbor park, became incensed and bashed the gay youth over the head with a metal pole, almost killing him.

Josh White, "Guilty Plea in Attack on Gay Teen." *Washington Post*, December 8, 2000.

One unidentified girl threatened to jump the victim because she is gay, while another threw a lapel pin from the school's Gay/Straight Alliance at [her]. . . . [O]n the bus ride home, the juvenile defendant taunted the victim in Spanish, allegedly threatening to do her physical harm. . . . Two days later. . . . Defendant Luis Campos. . . kicked the victim about her face and body. . . . [She] was treated at the hospital for internal bleeding and injury to her left eye.

Laura Kirtsky, "Reilly Gets an Injunction against Lesbian's Alleged Attackers in Western Mass. High School." *Bay Windows [Mass.]*, August 17, 2000.

Two former prep school roommates have been sentenced to probation after admitting they cut the word "homo" into the back of another student.

The Associated Press, "Pair Sentenced for 'Humiliating' Attack on Rutlander." *Rutland [Vt.] Herald*, April 20, 2000.

BOX 3.7 ET TU!

[George] turned to teachers and administrators for help, but he said they did little to stop the abuse. . . . [Spanish teacher Juan Garcia] stood behind George's desk and said first in Spanish then in English: "There are only two kinds of men who wear earrings: Pirates and faggots, and there is no water around here." "His thing was to bother me, to torment me," George said. "I got so upset once that I walked out of his class. . . . I stopped wearing my earring, but he kept calling me pirate."

Valerie Avalos-Lavimodiere, "Gay High School Student Speaks Out for His Rights." *Fresno Bee*, May 22, 2000.

[O]n Valentine's Day [Middle School history teacher Donald E. Miller] is said to have replaced the inoffensive message on a heart-shaped sweat with the word 'Fag' [and given it to a boy] who suffers from Tourette's Syndrome. . . . Miller bullied other students, pointing a television remote control at them and calling it a 'fagometer.'

"Teacher Sued over Homophobic Taunts." *Rainbow Network [U.K.]* www.rainbownetwork.com (March 16, 2001).

When someone recently whistled in class, the teacher told the student to stop, and then said that only "queers and shipmates" whistle.

Paige Hewitt, "Seeking Tolerance." *Houston Chronicle*, April 4, 2002.

A principal finally took his locker away because she feared some type of explosive might be put [there]. . . . [A] male student yelled 'Faggot!' and

threw shoes at him in a classroom. I went to the school security guards and told them about the incident. . . . They then told me that they don't tolerate faggots at Santa Fe High, and if anything happened with me again, they would personally beat the (expletive) out of me." When the matter was brought to the attention of an assistant principal, he said she advised him to leave the school because she couldn't assure his safety.

Jeannie Johnson, "Sexual Tolerance Sought for Curriculum," *Albuquerque Journal*, November 18, 1999.

BOX 3.8 BULLYING

Who gets bullied 'all of the time'

Latino kids - 2%

Asian kids - 3%

White kids - 3%

Black kids - 4%

Disabled kids - 6%

Fat kids - 11%

Kids who dress differently - 12%

Kids who are gay or thought to be gay - 24%

Source: 2002 National Mental Health Association survey of 760 12- to 17-year-olds.

Human Rights Watch concluded as many as 2 million school-age youths may be affected by bullying related to sexual orientation.

Darcia Harris-Boyman, "Report Says Schools Often Ignore Harassment of Gay Students," *Education Week*, June 6, 2001.

"They call me like fag gay because I'm a figure skater, and things like that," [12-year-old Aaron Vays] said. "One bully beat and kicked Aaron while another student held him down. The boy suffered internal injuries in that incident," his parents said.

"Cold Shoulder," *ABC News.com*, abcnnews.com, May 6, 2007.

BOX 3.9 NO PLACE AT HOME

A 14-year-old . . . teen bludgeoned his only sibling to death with a claw hammer . . . because he thought his brother was a homosexual. Witnesses testified Tuesday during a preliminary hearing.

Paul Peirce, "Bishop Thought Brother Was Gay," *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, June 5, 2002.

Police say that [the parents] repeatedly smashed their [17-year-old] son with a lead pipe at a relatives' home as they yelled anti-gay slurs. God will punish you for your lifestyle! You can't be gay!

Richard Weir and Dave Saltonstall, "Parents Charged in Beating of Gay Son," *New York Daily News*, August 13, 2000.

Bullying based on sexuality begins in lower grades, then escalates in aggressiveness through high school and is particularly directed at boys. (See box 3.8.)

The Massachusetts Department of Education's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), along with YRBSs in Minnesota and Vermont, are school-based research tools that contrast the incidence and impact of violence on gay youth as compared to their heterosexual peers. According to the 2001 Massachusetts YRBS (4,204 grade 9-12 respondents in 64 high schools), glb students were: more than twice as likely to have skipped school because of feeling unsafe; over one and a half times more likely to report being in a school fight, and more than three times as likely to need medical attention afterward; more than twice as likely to have been threatened or injured with a weapon at school; and one and a half times more likely to have carried a weapon at school.

Sometimes homes are unsafe as well. Many families are demeaning and some are dangerously hostile. Family violence against gay children may be even less often reported than other types of attack. (See box 3.9.)

It has also been suggested that gay youth are more likely to perpetrate violence, perhaps as a result of witnessing it, being objects of it, and anticipating it. Being threatened or injured with a weapon at school, for example, put them at greater risk for gun possession—as well as substance abuse and suicidality. (See box 3.10.)

Question 6: How is belonging an issue for gay youth?

The question is really: where do sexual minority youth feel welcome? Family estrangement, invisibility in school activities, and lack of curricula and adult role

BOX 3.10 VIOLENCE BEGOTTEN

A gossip column in the [middle school] newspaper, implying that [Michael Carneal] was gay, fueled constant teasing and had a profound effect on the mental state of the teen charged with the Dec. 11 shooting at Heath High School, according to Carneal's psychological evaluations. [Months after the column was published—and even when he entered high school last fall—students continued to harass him and call him gay.]

Bill Bartleman, "Gay Implication Spurred Teasing: Carneal," *The Post-Creek*, [KsA Sun, June 24, 1998]

A [high school] student, lashed out at a classmate who had been teasing him, slashing his tormenter in the head with a box cutter, before school. McCortney was teasing Swanson about his sexual orientation. Swanson had complained to school officials about being teased.

John Chambliss, "G. Jenkins' Student Slashed with Box Cutter," *The Ledger* [Lakeland, Fla.], August 29, 2000

[A] senior point guard on Columbine's state championship basketball team [said] [jocks] taunted the pun by calling them gay. [A]nother student [said] the Trench Coat Mafia was widely viewed as gay. Boys would hold hands in the halls, sometimes, [a] sophomore told the paper. They were called freaks, homos and everything in-between.

Dave Giffen, "The Rumor That Went: Go Away," *Sabine.com*, www.sabine.com (April 24, 1999)

models persuade them they are alone. Diminished status in civic life and humiliation in popular culture tells them they have no valued place in society. Religious condemnation deprives them of a spiritual home. And homophobia among their peers severely limits friendship, the primary adolescent consolation.

It is not surprising that many gay youth assume the price of belonging is silence. Many families, even liberal ones, send few warm signals on the possibility of one of their own being gay. Unlike young people from other minority groups, whose families commonly share their stigmatized identity, gay youth are not statistically likely to have gay parents. There is not the same sense of a united home fortress against an old enemy. Their peers' homophobia is an omen of ostracism if they come out or are discovered. Most communities are unsafe and many churches offer

more guilt than hospitality. Because they rarely acknowledge their presence—and then mostly negatively—schools seldom feel comfortable.

As many as 28 percent of glbt youth drop out of school and about 25 percent leave home. Although boys are more likely to be evicted by their families, girls are often kept home and mistreated.

Gay homeless youth, estimated to constitute nearly half of the street kid population, may turn to prostitution and other criminal activities to survive. When they and other glbt youth in trouble enter the juvenile justice system, they face misunderstanding and mistreatment from police, judges, lawyers, agency employees, and peers. Juvenile justice workers have even resisted identifying sexual minority offenders for targeted support, fearing they would only be further endangered. Placed in foster care or group homes, they may encounter the same or worse treatment as they had before. Foster parents and community service providers may be hostile toward gay youth or lack knowledge to protect and counsel them. Few states have policies to protect glbt youth in the foster care system. In a promising but unique move, the California legislature mandated glbt sensitivity training for foster parents in 2002.

Isolated gay youth lack contact with people like themselves to provide company, share feelings, and learn about the culture. The number of school and community groups for sexual minority youth is growing, but they are still scarce, especially in rural and conservative areas. Some young people might shrink from attending a group meeting in their school or neighborhood and not be able to get to one further away. Rural youth are particularly cut off.

Some community and school groups hold events like movie nights, performances, skating parties, and dances, including proms for those who might feel unwelcome at (or are illegally barred from) their official ones. (See box 3.11.) Some of these activities are organized with the help of the adult gay and lesbian community and thus foster ties between generations.

Many youth explore the community through books and magazines, some aimed at adolescents. They also find confidential connections through telephone information lines, radio programs, and the Internet. (See box 3.12 and appendix B.) These resources are especially vital for young people who are geographically isolated or otherwise hindered from personal contact with the gay community. The Internet can be a tool for abusers, but monitoring, censorship, and filtering must be exercised appropriately. Those who would block all homosexual Internet content with a blunt instrument like the Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000 are a danger to glbt youth who need both peer support and the information provided to them by responsible adults. It is alarming that a 2002 Kaiser Family Foundation study found many schools and libraries blocking all sites using the words *gay* or *lesbian*.

For several generations glbt youth have been finding their way into adult clubs and bars as a rite of passage. But noisy, smoky, alcohol-soaked nightlife is not the best long-term venue for healthy socialization and rational sexual