Activism in Practice: Teaching Basic Helping Skills to Increase LGBTQ+-Affirmative Practices in Schools and the Community
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Learning Objectives
• To highlight the need for increased affirmative practices in schools toward individuals who identify as LGBTQ+.
• To explain a training program that was found to increase the affirmative practices of student teachers and school administration students.
• To explore ways in which counselor educators and supervisors can teach basic helping skills to student in order to increase LGBTQ+-affirmative practices.

GENERAL CONCERNS REGARDING LGBTQ+ POPULATIONS
LGBTQ+ persons may experience:
• Fear/Rejection in various contexts (social life, work, school, home, spiritual/religious spaces)
• Minority Stress – Chronic Stress
• Psychological/Physical distress
• Internalized homophobia/heterosexism
• Depression/Helplessness
• Anxiety
• Anger
• Elevated risk of suicide as compared to cis/het peers
• Low self-esteem
• High risk sexual behaviors
• Substance use
(Brown & Gortmaker, 2011)

LGBTQ+ Students’ Experiences in school
• 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ+ (Durso & Gates, 2012)
• 85% of LGBTQ+ students verbally harassed in past year (GLSEN, 2015)
• 56% heard homophobic remarks and 64% heard negative remarks about gender expression from school staff (GLSEN, 2015)
• 66% experienced discriminatory school policies/practices (GLSEN, 2015)
• Lower self-esteem and GPAs than cis-het students (GLSEN, 2015)
• 2X more likely not to pursue plans to attend college after high school (GLSEN, 2015)

Training School Teachers & Administrators
• Importance of Training due to Regional Differences
  • Fewer training workshops with content on LGBTQ+ issues
  • Less contact with LGBTQ+ individuals
• Many LGBTQ+ individuals may attempt to avoid discrimination or marginalization by not disclosing sexuality or gender identity (Mullins, 2012)
Training School Teachers & Administrators

• Social Cognitive Theory
  • Knowledge acquisition and behavioral change are the result of
    • Interactions
    • Experiences
    • Outside Media
  (Alessi, Dillon, & Kim, 2015)

• Social Role Theory
  • Psychological differences are attributed to societal standards rather than biology
  • For example, gender dysphoria → gender identity disorder
  (ANA, 2013)

Training Agenda

• Pretest
• Need
• Discussion of beliefs and bias
• Basic helping skills
• Breakout groups
• Processing
• Implications for Educators
• Referral sources
• Posttest

Gay Affirmative Practice Scale

• Measure beliefs and behaviors regarding LGBTQ+ populations (Crisp, 2006)
  • Two 15-item statements from two domains (Belief and Behavior)
  • Overall Cronbach’s alpha of .95
  • Correlation between belief domain and Heterosexual Attitudes Toward Homosexuals Scale = .624 (p = .000)
  • Correlation between behavior domain and Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale = .466 (p = .000)

Sample Belief Question

1. In their practice with gay/lesbian clients, practitioners should support the diverse make-up of their families.

   Strongly Agree
   Agree
   Neither Agree nor Disagree
   Disagree
   Strongly Disagree

Bias

• Positive—treat LGBTQ+ individuals with more kindness
• Negative—treat LGBTQ+ individuals with less dignity
• Significant relationship between beliefs and practice behaviors
• More frequent contact and workshops related to more affirmative beliefs (Scales, 2012)

Need Explanation and Personal Beliefs and Bias

The theory behind it:

• Social Role Theory—psychological differences can be attributed to expectations of gender and cultural standards rather than biological factors
• Cognitive Dissonance Theory—when a person either consciously or unconsciously realizes conflicting attitudes, thoughts, or beliefs, they experience mental discomfort.
  • An individual will avoid such conflicting information or try to reduce the dissonance
Basic Helping Skills

The theory behind it:
- Social Cognitive Theory
- Therapeutic relationship accounts for 30% of client change
- Connect on a genuine level
- Offer support, validation, and hope

(Young, 2013)

Basic Helping Skills

- Nonverbals
- Eye contact
- Body position
- Nonjudgmental wording
- Minimal encouragers
- Open-ended questions
- Paraphrasing

(Young, 2013)

Breakout groups

The theory behind it:
- Social Cognitive Theory
- Knowledge acquisition and behavioral change are the result of:
  - Interactions
  - Experiences
  - Outside Media

Breakout groups

- Role Play: Teacher, Student, Observer
- Scenario Two
- One of your students, Jake, asks to speak with you after class. Jake seems visibly distressed and tells you that he is gay. He admits that you are the only one he has told and that he is afraid to tell his parents.
- What should you do?

Process Questions

Theory behind it:
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Social Cognitive Theory

Implications for Educators

- Examine ingrained bias and prejudice – Be willing to confront yourself
- Avoid making assumptions about students
- Ask questions – appropriate and relevant
- Know (create) the resources – Make students aware of the help/support out there
- Advocate – Work to change policies that limit the rights of LGBTQ+ students/people
- Do no harm – Do NOT try to change, dismiss, or demean sexual or gender identities of your students
- Validate – Encourage/support students exploration of their sexual and gender identities

(Sue & Sue, 2008)
Participants

- IRB Approved
- N=144
  - Undergraduate student teachers
  - Master’s school administrators
  - 78% female, 21% male, 1% blank
  - 15% African American, 9% American Indian, 67% Caucasian, 3.5% Hispanic, 3.5% two or more, 2% blank
  - Ages 20-50; average 26 years old

Analysis

- Mean Pretest score=106.5
- Mean posttest score=118.4
- Paired-samples t-test
  - t=-9.658 (pretest minus posttest)
  - Sig=.000
  - Mean difference 11.93

Results

- There was a significant difference in the pretest (M=106.51, SD=25.01) and the posttest (M=118.41, SD=26.28)
- t(143)=-9.56, p = 0.000
- The LGBTQ+ training significantly increased students’ LGBTQ+-affirmative beliefs and behaviors.

- Limitations of the Instrument:
  - Use of term “Gay” might be limiting
  - Designed for practitioners

Implications for Professional Counselors and Counselor Educators/Supervisors

- Counselors have a responsibility to advocate on behalf of clients
- Trainings like this should be offered whenever possible
- Trainings can be extended to different populations (e.g., individuals who work at a prison, pediatricians)
- You may have a copy of the training if you are Safe Zone-trained!

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Selected References