Greetings, and welcome to this edition of Getting Schooled in Psymposium. The PAA was very excited to host the workshop with Dr. Kevin Alderson on The Essentials of Working with LGBT Clients and/or Students on June 1. Some wonderful comments were shared from people that attended his workshop who spoke of having a better understanding as well as appreciation and respect for this population. For this edition of Getting Schooled Ms. Shari Roberts and myself decided to write a follow-up to Dr. Alderson's workshop for school psychologists who already work in this area and for those who have little experience but would like to gain more insight. This article provides a different perspective with some focus on the lived experience of one therapist who identifies as lesbian and has worked directly with LGBT clients. We hope you will enjoy the read!

Dr. Charlene J. Barva

**Coming out and coming to terms: Not always the issue!**

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"Because I am transgender, every moment I'm not who I should be is like having 10 pounds added to my shoulders."

Participant - HRC Foundation 2012 Youth Survey

Evidence widely reported in the Canadian news media over the past decade indicates that a rapidly growing number of school children are openly embracing and establishing their sexual or gender identities to people around them (Veale, Saewyc, Frohard-Dourlent, Dobson, & Clark, 2015). The exact number of LGBTQ (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning) children and youth in Canada are difficult to come by but statistics from the 2004 Canada Youth National Survey have reported that as many as 8% of high school students identify themselves as lesbian, gay and/or bisexual and approximately 1% to 3% are transgender (Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey Research Group, 2015).

Schools are a primary social context where most LGBTQ youth spend the preponderance of their time. Yet, a climate conducive to the educational success of LGBTQ students remains elusive in many schools. In an annual survey of more than 7,000 students ages 13-21, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that sexual and gender minority youth in schools were more likely than any other students to have negative experiences and were more likely to have felt unsafe and to experience victimization based on their gender identity or expression. The survey also indicated that 42.2% of trans and gender non-conforming students had been prevented from using their preferred name, 59.2% had been required to use a bathroom or locker room of their legal sex, and 31.6% had been prevented from wearing clothes considered inappropriate based on their legal sex (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014).

Nearly 30 years ago, the focus of schools for gay and lesbian youth was strictly on safety. But today, amid growing support for LGBTQ rights and the legalization of gay marriage nationwide, the time has come for educators and policymakers to move past simply ensuring that schools are safe for LGBTQ students and work toward creating schools that affirm, respect, and include them (Veale, et.al., 2015). School psychologists can play a catalytic role in ensuring that LGBTQ issues are recognized and

appropriately addressed and that these students are supported in safe, caring, and inclusive school environments. In this article we provide a brief overview of the terminology within this area, a school psychologists' personal account, and the role that school psychologists can play to ensure that these students are fully included and successful within an educational context.

*Understanding LGBT Terms*

Presently, there are no universally agreed upon acronyms for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, queer/questioning, and intersex community, which includes the variations of LGB, LGBT, GLBT, LGBTQ, and LGBTQ1, to name a few. Collectively, these terms are self-reported and refer to gender identity and sexual orientation (Institute of Medicine, 2011).

This glossary of LGBT terms is a growing project. Furthermore, there is a lack of conformity over the meaning of terms and people may use the terms differently depending on the subculture they are referring to. In most countries today Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender people tend to be grouped as a community using the acronym LGBT because they are gender variant and do not conform to stereotype expected of men and women. Not everyone likes this and there is a strong feeling by some that because Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity issues are different, that tacking the T onto the end is wrong. Others have extended the acronym further adding I for Intersex, Q for Queer, F for Friends of LGBT people etc...turning the acronym into an alphabet soup (LGTBQIF). But it's not just transgender issues that are different. Whilst all LGBT people share common experiences of discrimination and often socialize in LGBT friendly venues, each sub group within the community has issues unique to that subculture. Rather than get into the myriad of terms that are used, the reader is referred to the Gender Spectrum's The Language of Gender and the resources attached to the 2015 APA and NASP resolution on Gender and Sexual Orientation Diversity in Schools for an excellent list of definitions related to gender and youth.

*School Psychologist Competencies: A Personal Account*

A small number of existing studies have focused on school counsellor and/or psychologist competencies for working with LGBTQ students. The National Association of Psychologists (NASP) has a position statement related to gender diverse and transgender students (NASP, 2014); however, it is acknowledged that most school psychologists will have received minimal or no training working with young LGBTQ people (Walzer, 2015). As an 18 year veteran therapist, a school psychologist, and a member of the LGBQT community, I have worked with several LGBTQ youth in various stages of 'coming out' including 'coming out' to themselves. As I identify as lesbian, some of our experiences have been shared, increasing my understanding of the depth and breadth of their distress. This has been more helpful in relationship building than in any other aspect of the therapeutic process. I believe as a school psychologist that I should disclose my identity as lesbian to them to reduce the power imbalance that could potentially exist in the counselling dyad.

A challenge, in the beginning, is to consciously avoid the pitfall of allowing their sexual orientation or gender to achieve master status in the counselling office. Not every student is there for help with coming out. It is important to be mindful that I have before me a human being whose entire life experience provided the context for counselling. Sexuality and or gender dysphoria may not be the focus of therapy, for this particular human may have fled a war torn country, may be suffering from a specific trauma, or indeed, have experienced the traumatic effects of years of xenophobic socialization (Brown,

2003; 2008). Research on risks that members of the LGBTQ community may present with include depression, anxiety, specific phobias and all other "normal" presenting issues (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996; Fisher, Komosa-Hawkins, Saldaña,Thomas, Hsiao, Rauld, & Miller, 2008). There can be increased suicide risk, self-loathing, family alienation, and living in fear of being discovered. Having to constantly hide who one really is because there is risk to family and friendly relationships, a danger of losing one's home, or being the victim of random violence can also be the context for mental issues and may be considered as chronically traumatic, a departure from a more historical definition of trauma as a single incident (Brown, 2003) It is advisable for therapists to become knowledgeable about the LGBTQ culture, easily done in larger cities and schools which have GSA's, in order to understand the cultural context surrounding their current distress (Callahan, 2001; Schmidt, Glass, & Wooten, 2011). It should never be the client's role to educate the therapist about LGBTQ culture as having to do so may distract from the therapeutic relationship and process (Brown, 2004). In the case of transgender youth, counselling may take a different bent again depending on the presenting issue. Having worked with transgender boys and girls, aside from helping the student cope with depression and or other common presenting issues, my main role was to help connect the young person with appropriate resources such as psychiatry, peer support, and finding medical resources. Wait lists for surgery and group therapy can be very long and I remained involved with my clients for whatever therapeutic support was, and when it was, required. I firmly believe that, in the words of Rogers (1951), "unconditional positive regard" is extremely important in the counselling context. As a counsellor/school psychologist, and critical change agent in schools, I believe that I can play a very special role in the lives of LGBTQ students to help them to achieve to their fullest potential.

*School Psychologists Role*

As educational leaders within an academic community, school psychologists are in a good position to become LGBTQ allies given their expertise in human development, knowledge of sociocultural and ecological influences on behaviour, counseling, and consultation skills, ability to reach a wide audience (including administrators, teachers, school staff, and students), and adherence to ethical principles, which are reinforced by enumerated nondiscrimination policies from the National Association of School Psychologists (2012) and the Canadian Psychological Association (2010). Heck and colleagues (2011) recommend that school psychologists can advocate for change by (a) working directly with teachers and administrators to foster positive attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals; (b) infusing information about sexual orientation and gender expressions into the curriculum; (c) developing strategies to confront bias and harassment in and out of classes; (d) reinforcing disciplinary actions for harassing offenders; and (e) supporting or forming gay straight alliances (GSAs). Murphy (2012) adds that since many students attend GSAs to receive social support or need a safe space to discuss difficulties they may be facing, the school psychologist is often ideal to serve as GSA advisor.

Kiperman, Varjas, Meyers, and Howard (2014) present a model for school psychologists to assist LGBTQ youth, by outlining what these students perceive as supportive and non-supportive behaviours of those around them. School psychologists can be supportive through affirmation of the youth's strengths and resilience, providing a safe space and identifying safe harbours outside of the school, offering counselling and emotional support, and providing instrumental assistance. They can also provide professional development by promoting awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ youth, and fostering an inclusive and welcoming school climate. The authors caution school psychologists to avoid unsupportive behaviours, and they also recommend that school psychologists help these youth navigate away from

negative experiences, characterized as unmet expectations, negative perceptions (e.g., homophobic beliefs, close mindedness, lack of rapport), and negative interactions (e.g., insults or verbal slurs, targets of rumor or exclusion).

*Conclusion*

The climate of acceptance of LGBTQ individuals is slowly improving in Canada, but many schools remain blind, biased, and unreservedly discriminatory toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning individuals. School psychologists are in a unique position to work with educators, parents, and students to ensure equal access to education, safe and bias-free school experiences, and promotion of strength, resilience, and health among LGBTQ students. This needs to be the focus of school psychologists, a profession that often goes above and beyond the call of duty to advocate for the disadvantaged, disenfranchised, and oppressed to have an equal opportunity to a fair and healthy educational experience (Fagan & Wise, 2007).

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*References available on request*