PROUD & THRIVING
LITERATURE REVIEW

EXPLORING MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS FOR LGBQ+ STUDENTS
Co-Authored by Maren Greathouse, PhD Candidate and Reese Kelly, PhD

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The **Upswing** Fund
for Adolescent
Mental Health

JED

The Jed Foundation

CONSORTIUM
OF HIGHER EDUCATION
LGBT RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

This project, generously funded by the Upswing Fund, is a collaboration between The Jed Foundation (JED), The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, and a multi-disciplinary team of subject matter experts to develop a comprehensive framework schools can utilize to strengthen systems of support for LGBTQ+ students at high schools, colleges, and universities. This is critical, given the central role that schools play in students' lives, serving as an important environment for academic, social-emotional, and identity development. Data is being collected to provide a comprehensive overview of the mental health needs of LGBTQ+ students and outline specific action steps, strategies, and resources. The framework and recommendations will be published and released in Fall 2021.

ABOUT THE JED FOUNDATION (JED)

JED is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults. We're partnering with high schools and colleges to strengthen their mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention programs and systems. We're equipping teens and young adults with the skills and knowledge to help themselves and each other. We're encouraging community awareness, understanding and action for young adult mental health.

ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM OF HIGHER EDUCATION LGBT RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals is a member-based organization working towards the liberation of LGBTQ people in higher education. We support individuals who work on campuses to educate and support people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as advocate for more inclusive policies and practices through an intersectional and racial justice framework.

ABOUT THE UPSWING FUND FOR ADOLESCENT HEALTH

The Upswing Fund for Adolescent Mental Health is a collaborative fund focusing on the mental health and well-being of adolescents who are of color and/or LGBTQ+. Created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a devastating impact on young people across the United States, The Upswing Fund provides critical resources to front-line organizations that provide the services that young people rely on. In addition, the Fund supports efforts to address key systemic challenges in the adolescent mental health system such as stigma around seeking mental health support.

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A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

We believe language matters and we are intentional about the terms we use throughout this literature review. While many studies discussed in this literature review use terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer to describe specific sexual identities, we use "queer and questioning" as shorthand to encapsulate the wide range of sexual identities captured in this review. The term queer is broadly accepted as an umbrella term that spans the innumerable ways that individuals experience and express non-normative sexual identities, behaviors, and attraction. We use the term queer to describe students whose sexuality departs from heterosexuality and heteronormative, fixed, socially constructed categories of sexuality. This use of queer includes, for example, pansexual and asexual identities that are rendered invisible by the LGBT acronym. We also intentionally include the term questioning to acknowledge that students who are exploring or unsure about their sexual identity also experience the impact of living in a heterosexist culture, even if their exploration ultimately results in a heterosexual identification. Where relevant, we also use the identity labels and acronyms used in the studies we reference. This decision allows us to represent data in the form it was gathered while being inclusive in our analysis and recommendations.

This literature review intentionally includes the terms heterosexism and monosexism, instead of homophobia and biphobia, with some exception for data congruence. Homophobia and biphobia describe a fear, dislike, or aversion to gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, respectively. They have generally been used to characterize individual- and interpersonal-level anti-gay, anti-lesbian, and anti-bisexual attitudes and behaviors. On the other hand, heterosexism and monosexism depict ideological systems that denigrate and stigmatize any behavior, attraction, identity, or relationship that falls outside heterosexuality or the exclusive desire for one gender, respectively. Paralleling and intersecting with racism, sexism, ableism, and other -isms, heterosexism and monosexism pervade belief systems, institutions, social structures, and community norms, giving us language to analyze

the individual, interpersonal, *and* structural factors that shape the lives of queer and questioning students.

Last, we use the term minoritized and the acronym BIPOC throughout this literature review. For decades, scholars and practitioners have used a myriad of terms to describe students experiencing oppression such as underrepresented, diverse, underserved, at-risk, vulnerable, marginalized, targeted, and minority. Although these terms may be helpful in some contexts, they can also elicit deficit-based stereotypes and further the assumption that particular populations are small in numbers, which is not always the case. Instead, the use of the term *minoritized* calls attention to the institutional processes by which groups of people are disempowered, marginalized, and rendered invisible. It is a reminder that institutions, communities, and individual actors create the environment in which queer and questioning students live and learn. To further align with contemporary language, we use BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) instead of POC or "people of color." BIPOC calls attention to the disparate treatment of Black and Indigenous people in the United States through the legacy of slavery and genocide while also serving as a reminder that people of color experience varying types of discrimination and prejudice. Similarly, instead of Hispanic, Latino/a, or Chicano/a, we use Latinx, a pan-ethnic and gender-inclusive term that refers to those who self-identify as having cultural ties to Latin America and/or the Caribbean as well as individuals who are of Latin American and/or Caribbean descent. Like our operationalization of queer and questioning, we acknowledge Latinx is best practice, and we also use the identity labels and acronyms from studies we cite in order to represent the data accurately.

INTRODUCTION

To be "ready to learn", students must be "in a state of physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual wellbeing".[1] Indeed, multiple studies[2] on high school and college students have found that students with mental health issues are at higher risk for lower grade point averages, absenteeism, discontinuous enrollment, and dropout—regardless of their academic record and other student characteristics. Nearly 20% of college students who took the 2018 Healthy Minds survey reported that emotional or mental difficulties disrupted their academic performance for six or more days,[3] and the National Alliance on Mental Illness[4] found that mental health was the primary reason that 64% of college students in their study dropped out. While ample attention has been paid to other academic outcome and retention predictors (e.g., financial stress, social connectedness, sense of belonging, academic preparedness), institutional leaders have paid far less attention to the role of mental health on persistence and completion.[5]

Despite mental health being an understudied factor in retention, studies[6] show that most high school principals, university and college presidents, and student affairs leaders list the mental health of their students as their top concern. Mental health issues have been found to predict difficulties with academic adjustment indicators, including intellectual flexibility, effective group work, creativity and intellectual risk-taking, and the fundamental interest in acquiring new knowledge.[7] Challenges in one or more of these areas may lead to maladaptive strategies to reduce stress and anxiety (e.g., alcohol and drug misuse, self-injury,

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[1] American Council on Education, 2014, p. 1.
[2] Eisenberg, et al., 2009; Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012; Kolbe, 2019; Rasberry, et al., 2017
[3] Eisenberg & Lipson, 2018
[4] Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012; Iachini, et al., 2016; Kern, et al., 2017
[5] American Council on Education, 2019; Iachini, 2016; Rubley, 2017
[6] American Council on Education, 2014: Iachini, et al., 2016; Rubley, 2017
[7] American Council on Education, 2014

eating disorders) that compound the impact of mental distress on academic engagement.[8]

In addition to the academic benefits, there is a compelling economic argument to be made in support of comprehensive mental health services. Public high schools may cite cost-benefit analyses of public health programs to advocate for more resources from their district, county, or state. For instance, one study[9] of public health programs across 36 countries suggests that for every dollar spent on treatment for depression and anxiety, the return on the investment could be fourfold or higher in terms of increased productivity and health. For private schools and higher education, specifically, the American Council on Education (ACE) states that increased resource provisions lead to increased retention of students, and the revenue that this generates far exceeds the investment in supportive resources that contribute to the improvement of mental health outcomes among students. As state allocations continue to shrink and tuition discounting continues to rise,[10] it would behoove secondary and higher education administrators to seriously examine the adequacy of their existing mental health resources and the role of mental health on retention, persistence, and academic success.

THE MENTAL HEALTH OF QUEER & QUESTIONING STUDENTS

The care of, and concern for, queer and questioning individuals' mental health has long been overshadowed by the legacy of psychiatric classification in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).[11] While sexually minoritized people have a complicated history with the American Psychiatric Association, the advocacy of gay and lesbian activists during the 1960s-1970s led to the removal of homosexuality from the DSM-II in 1973 and ego-dystonic

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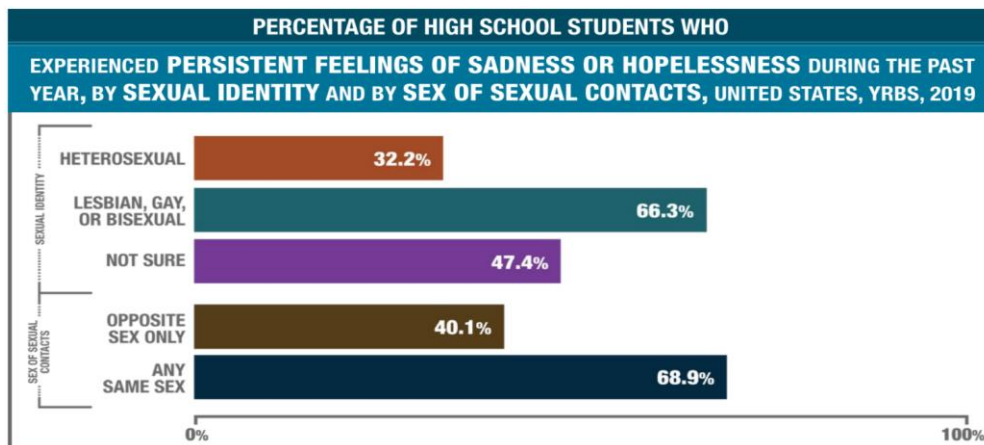[8] American Council on Education, 2014
[9] Chisholm, et al., 2016
[10] National Association of Colleges and University Business Officers, 2019
[11] Meyer, 2003

homosexuality from the DSM-III in 1987.[12] Nevertheless, heterosexism and monosexism remain pervasive threats to the well-being of queer and questioning students. Heterosexist and monosexist stigma leave queer and questioning youth to grapple with self-acceptance and positive identity development, navigate compromised social support networks, and endure significantly higher rates of mental distress and self-injury than their heterosexual peers.

● High School Students. Queer and questioning adolescents experience mental distress as a result of experiences as a minoritized group—a reality that high school administrators need to face and that higher education leaders must anticipate as they enroll new students. In one national study[13] of queer and questioning youth, of those who indicated they did not plan to graduate high school or were unsure, 92.7% listed mental health such as depression or anxiety as a reason. The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey found that 66.3% of high school students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) and 47.4% who identified as "not sure" felt sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in the past year, compared to 32.2% of heterosexual students.[14]

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO

EXPERIENCED **PERSISTENT FEELINGS OF SADNESS OR HOPELESSNESS** DURING THE PAST YEAR, BY **SEXUAL IDENTITY** AND BY **SEX OF SEXUAL CONTACTS**, UNITED STATES, YRBS, 2019

HETEROSEXUAL — 32.2%
LESBIAN, GAY, OR BISEXUAL — 66.3%
NOT SURE — 47.4%
OPPOSITE SEX ONLY — 40.1%
ANY SAME SEX — 68.9%

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report 2009-2019[15]

[12] Drescher, 2015
[13] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[14] Johns et al., 2020
[15] CDC, 2019

Across race and ethnicity, white LGB youths reported feeling persistently sad and hopeless (71.6%) at greater rates than Black (51.1%) and Hispanic (64.1%) LGB youths.[16] However, other studies suggest that the rates of mental distress for BIPOC LGB youth are underreported or inaccurately captured in mainstream studies. For instance, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation released race-specific reports on their 2017 study of LGBTQ youth aged 13-17 that show that BIPOC LGB youth experience very high levels of mental distress. For Black and African American LGBTQ youth, 80% reported "usually" feeling depressed or down, 71% reported "usually" feeling worthless or hopeless, and 80% reported "usually" feeling worried, nervous, or panicked.[17] For Asian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ youth, 77% reported "usually" feeling depressed or down, 71% reported "usually" feeling worthless or hopeless, and 79% reported "usually" feeling worried, nervous, or panicked.[18] For Latinx LGBTQ youth, 79% reported "usually" feeling depressed or down, 73% reported "usually" feeling worthless or hopeless, and 82% reported "usually" feeling worried, nervous, or panicked.[19]

- Incoming First Year College Students. Among incoming first year students who responded to the 2016 Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Freshmen Survey, 32.5% of queer and questioning students reported that they experienced depression frequently, and 36.8% entered college already diagnosed with a psychological disorder, compared to 10.1% and 8.8% of heterosexual peers, respectively.[20] Taking this into consideration, it comes as no surprise that when asked to rate their emotional health compared to their peers, 57.4% of queer students, 44% of bisexual students, 39.9% of lesbians, and 28.1% of gay students rated their emotional health as below average or in the lowest 10%, two to three times that of heterosexual peers (13.4%).[21]

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[16] Johns et al., 2020; CDC, 2019
[17] Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019a
[18] Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019b
[19] Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019c
[20] Greathouse et al., 2018
[21] Greathouse et al., 2018

- College Students. When examining the experiences of college students as a whole, 68% of queer and questioning students reported feeling so depressed it was difficult to function in the past twelve months, compared to 38% of heterosexual peers.[22] More alarming is that 21.1% of queer students reported engaging in self-injury in the previous year compared to 6.4% of heterosexual students. A larger portion of queer students had seriously contemplated suicide (28.4%), reflecting an even greater disparity when compared to heterosexual peers (10.2%).[23] Moreover, the most recent National College Health Assessment (2018) found that 53.3% of queer and questioning students utilized counseling services on campus, compared to 40.4% of heterosexual students- which is telling considering the sizes of the sample.[24]

These numbers highlight the necessity for administrators to develop a comprehensive understanding of queer and questioning students' experiences, coupled with a thoughtful and thorough approach to intervention. The following section will summarize previous research studies that have identified the factors that contribute to, or mitigate, psychological and emotional distress among queer and questioning college and high school students.

USING THE LENS OF MINORITY STRESS THEORY

Built upon various psychological and social theories (e.g., social stress theory, looking-glass self, social identity, and self-categorization), Meyer (2003) introduced a theoretical framework to examine the excess stress experienced by individuals occupying minoritized social identities that are marked by prejudice and stigma. The resulting framework, Minority Stress Theory, has been used to examine the impact of *distal* and *proximal* stressors on the well-being of individuals holding various minoritized identities.[25] Distal stressors are defined as *objective* stressors

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[22] American College Health Association, 2018
[23] American College Health Association, 2018
[24] American College Health Association, 2018
[25] Meyer, 2003

such as the discrimination, microaggressions, and everyday strains experienced by queer and questioning students, while proximal stressors, regarded as *subjective* stressors, include experiences such as internalized heterosexism or monosexism, expectations of rejection and discrimination, identity concealment, or felt climate.[26]

Employing Minority Stress Theory as a framework, scholars studying queer and questioning students have examined the impact of (1) distal stressors like stigma, verbal or physical harassment, macro-level environmental microaggressions (e.g., institutional policies and practices that reinforce the heterosexism or monosexism) and structural discrimination, (2) proximal stressors such as internalized heterosexism and/or monosexism, expectation of rejection, or concealment of identity, and (3) individual and group-level protective factors such as personal resilience (i.e. ability to bounce back), self-acceptance, positive regard for one's sexuality and pride in other identities they hold (e.g., race, class, disability, etc.), self-esteem, social support, community belonging, activism, family acceptance, and access to queer role models, among others.[27]

SUMMARY

The mental health of queer and questioning students is a serious concern for secondary and higher education administrators. Queer and questioning students, especially BIPOC students, report significantly higher rates of mental health issues than their heterosexual peers. It must be noted that there is nothing intrinsic to being queer or questioning that creates mental health issues. As this literature review will demonstrate, heterosexism and monosexism, in addition to racism, ableism, etc., manifest in individual, interpersonal, and structural barriers (risk factors) that create and/or exacerbate psychological distress. Following the analysis of risk factors, this literature review provides an overview of individual-,

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[26] Meyer, 2015
[27] Balsam, et al., 2011; Meyer, 2015

interpersonal-, and structural-level interventions (protective factors) that mitigate these stressors.

INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS

Queer and questioning students experience individual-level, interpersonal-level, and structural-level risk factors due to a climate of prejudice and discrimination of sexually minoritized identities and experiences. These factors often overlap and are exacerbated by one another, particularly where individuals face multiple, intersecting oppressions. This section will review individual contributors to negative mental health outcomes among queer and questioning students.

NAVIGATING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Sexual identity development is the non-linear process by which people come to understand and psychosocially integrate their sexual attraction, behaviors, and identity. Multiple theorists have posited that queer and questioning individuals experience common phases or milestones along the process of self-realization and self-acceptance, which help to solidify their sexual identity (e.g., Cass[28], D'Augelli[29], Fassinger[30], Troiden[31], Savin-Williams[32]). Mohr and Kendra (2011) drew on these models to build a therapeutic assessment[33] in which they suggest that there are eight dimensions of sexual identity development to consider: acceptance concerns, concealment motivation, identity uncertainty, internalized homonegativity, difficulty with the identity development process, identity superiority, identity affirmation, and identity centrality. Reflected in these dimensions is that, as

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[28] Cass, 1979
[29] D'Augelli, 1994
[30] Fassinger, 1991
[31] Troiden, 1988
[32] Savin-Williams, 1988; 1990
[33] Mohr & Kendra, 2011

students move towards identity integration, they are simultaneously navigating heterosexist myths and misinformation. Furthermore, studies looking at the intersections of sexual and racial identity development suggest that these identities develop simultaneously for youth.[34] It is important to note, however, that BIPOC queer and questioning youth are navigating important cultural contexts throughout the integration and navigation of their identities, such as machismo[35] and expectations of hypermasculinity for Black men.[36] Additionally, their use of community-specific (e.g., two-spirit, stud, aggressive, stemme)[37] or reclaimed Indigenous terms (e.g., *nádleehí* or *agokwe*)[38] to discuss their identities is an important factor in their resilience.[39] Developmental models in tandem with an understanding of cultural context can help secondary and higher education institutions identify students' needs and align high-impact practices.

- Stage/Milestone of Identity Development. Where students are in their identity development process has been found to influence mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety). One study found that students who identified as "questioning" report significantly higher rates of depression than heterosexual participants, and report significantly more distress than most other sexual minorities.[40] The authors posited that when students feel greater uncertainty in their identity, they experience additional stress, above and beyond associated stressors that occur at other times in their identity development process.
- Internalized Heterosexism. One of the defining features of identity development is the process students go through to reconcile the influence of heterosexism in shaping their sexual identity and how they make meaning of

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[34] Jamil & Harper, 2010
[35] Yon-Leau & Munoz-Laboy 2010
[36] Fields, et al., 2015
[37] Timm, et al., 2013
[38] Robinson 2019
[39] Singh, 2012; Singh, et al, 2014
[40] McAleavey, Castonguay, & Locke, 2011

it. One study[41] examined the predictors of queer and questioning youth suicide attempt and mental health. They found that internalized heterosexism, and the associated feelings of guilt and shame, were strong predictors for depression and anxiety, respectively.

- Internalized Monosexism. Similar to internalized heterosexism, the internal denigration of one's sexual identity due to its departure from monosexuality may lead bisexual/pansexual students to reject their identity or conceal it from both heterosexual people and gay and lesbian people -- both of which contribute to negative mental health outcomes.[42]

CONCEALMENT OF IDENTITY

Concealment has been linked to both internalized heterosexism and internalized monosexism, suggesting a positive correlation between these two individual risk factors. Concealment of one's identity may reflect low self-acceptance rates among queer and questioning students, which is associated with poorer mental health outcomes, including greater global distress, depression symptoms, and lower psychological well-being. Queer, questioning, pansexual, and bisexual students are more likely conceal their identity from their peers and high school/college/university employees than gays and lesbians.[43] One study found that this is a major concern for non-gay identified, behaviorally-bisexual men as identity concealment was positively related to depressive and anxious symptomology, as well as internalized stigma.[44] Internal factors are not the only reasons why queer and questioning students conceal their identity. A national study[45] of more than 5,000 college students found that nearly half of students identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual chose to conceal identity due to fear of mistreatment on campus. Whether motivated by internalized heterosexism,

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[41] Puckett, et al., 2017
[42] Brewster, et al., 2013
[43] Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Kosciw, et al., 2020
[44] Schrimshaw, et al., 2013
[45] Rankin, et al., 2010

internalized monosexism, or real threats to safety and security (e.g., being attacked, fired from a job), concealment "depletes cognitive resources, inhibits expression, and interferes with close interpersonal relationships".[46]

PERCEIVED BURDENSOMENESS

Perceived burdensomeness describes an interpersonal state in which an individual feels like a liability or burden to others (e.g., friends, family). Among queer and questioning students, perceived burdensomeness is reported at higher rates than heterosexual peers and it has been shown to have a statistically significant correlation to suicidal ideation, especially among women who are bi/pansexual.[47] One study[48] found that sexual identity victimization, visibility management, rejection sensitivity, and internalized heterosexism had statistically significant correlations to perceived burdensomeness and that victimization and visibility management had a direct effect on perceived burdensomeness.

THWARTED BELONGINGNESS

Thwarted belongingness is an unmet need for belonging, characterized by loneliness, a sense of alienation from friends and family, and a perceived lack of reciprocity in caring relationships.[49] Someone experiencing thwarted belongingness may feel like they're not a part of a community and/or that their friends or family don't care about them. Looking through the lens of Minority Stress Theory, one study[50] found that sexual orientation victimization, poor visibility management, and internalized heterosexism had a direct impact on thwarted belongingness. Another study[51] similarly found that perceived burdensomeness was a mediator for minority stress factors on the development of suicidality among LGB college students.

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[46] Hall, 2018, p. 297
[47] Silva, et al., 2015
[48] Hicks, 2017
[49] Joiner, 2005
[50] Joiner, 2005
[51] Roberts, 2018

HOLDING MULTIPLE MINORITIZED IDENTITIES

Among students holding multiple minoritized identities, risk factors become complicated by other systems of oppression. These factors create an additional layer of minority stress and may also limit students' opportunities to develop an affirming support system. Research indicates that people with multiple minoritized identities manage moving in and out of various affinity communities by compartmentalizing and code-switching, which can have a deleterious effect on mental health.[52] At the same time, researchers[53] have found evidence of "positive intersectionality" among BIPOC LGBT people—that a person's acceptance and empowerment of one of their minoritized identities can lead to acceptance and empowerment of another, ultimately increasing resilience and wellbeing. As the concept of positive intersectionality continues to be researched, it could shed light on studies that aren't fully explained by Minority Stress Theory.

- Race/Ethnicity. Queer and questioning BIPOC students report experiences with racism within the queer community, while simultaneously experiencing heterosexism and monosexism within communities of color.[54] One national study[55] found that 21.4% of BIPOC LGBTQ students were bullied or harassed based on their actual or perceived race or ethnicity. Moreover, due to the prevalence of white peers in queer-affirming spaces, especially at predominantly white institutions, queer and questioning BIPOC students may face a lack of support for all of the identities they hold, leaving them with the added responsibility of creating support networks for their queer and questioning BIPOC peers.[56]

- Disability. Due to various factors, including the invisibility of many disabilities, identity development is more nuanced for queer and questioning students

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[52] Ghabrial, 2016
[53] Bowleg, 2013; Ghabrial, 2016
[54] Duran, 2019; Ramirez & Galupo, 2019; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011
[55] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[56] Vaccaro & Mena, 2011

with disabilities. One study[57] found that some queer and questioning students with disabilities viewed their sexuality as an identity, while seeing their disabilities as a "medical phenomenon to be managed".[58] These students viewed their own personal disabilities as a trait/attribute—something that required navigation of medical institutions and social stigma—while simultaneously expressing a desire for others to have a greater socio-political understanding of ableism and desire to advocate for people with disabilities. This suggests that queer and questioning students with disabilities face unique circumstances in their identity formation process, both in reconciling their identities and in developing a sense of belonging (or not) to a minoritized community. This was particularly salient among students with "hidden" or invisible disabilities (i.e. those not visible, such as a learning disability).

- Religion. Studies that have examined the relationship between religion and sexual identity development for queer and questioning youth find that religion can be a protective factor or a risk factor for mental health, depending on whether the religious or spiritual tradition is gay-affirming or espouses homonegativity, respectively. Queer and questioning students whose religious or spiritual tradition is gay-affirming are able to integrate both identities and religiosity can buffer those students against internalized heterosexism and depression.[59] Conversely, in religious or spiritual traditions in which homonegativity and heterosexism are dominant, religiosity is a risk factor for queer and questioning students who have to navigate incompatible parts of themselves. For students faced with a real or perceived irreconcilable conflict between religion and sexuality, this tension is strongly associated with internalized heterosexism and poor mental health.[60]

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[57] Miller, 2015
[58] Miller, 2015, p. 300-302
[59] Page, et al., 2013
[60] Lauricella, et al., 2017; Page, et al., 2013

MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIORS AND COPING MECHANISMS

Numerous scholars have linked social stigma, isolation, alienation and harassment to maladaptive behaviors and coping mechanisms that exacerbate negative mental health outcomes. These behaviors include substance misuse, eating disorders, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal ideation/attempt. The correlation between these behaviors and psychological distress are well documented in the literature.

- Substance Misuse. A myriad of studies have found links between substance misuse and negative mental health outcomes. Experiences with physical and emotional stress, internalized heterosexism and monosexism, and encounters with discrimination place queer and questioning individuals at high risk for misuse of alcohol and drugs across the life span.[61] The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Study found that high school students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual had a higher prevalence of all current and lifetime substance misuse behaviors, except binge drinking, compared to their heterosexual peers.[62] Experiences with personal or ambient (e.g., witnessed) hostility significantly increase the odds of problematic drinking and problematic drug use among sexual minority students.[63] One study[64] found that perceptions of not feeling safe on campus increased stress levels, and experiences of threats or victimization contributed to increased alcohol and drug use, and resultant suicidal thoughts or attempts. Another study[65] found that bisexual college students are at a heighted risk for substance misuse compared to other queer and questioning peers. Similarly, substance misuse is prevalent across queer and questioning college students.

- Eating Disorders. Disordered eating is more prevalent in queer and questioning high school and college/university students compared to their

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[61] Bryan, et al., 2017; Cabaj, 1996, 2000; Schauer, et al., 2013; Weber, 2008
[62] Johns, et al., 2020
[63] Woodford, Krentzman, & Gattis, 2012, p. 17-18.
[64] Reed, Prado, Matsumoto, & Amaro, 2010
[65] Schauer, et al., 2013

heterosexual peers.[66] One in four[67] queer and questioning youth report purging, fasting, or taking diet pills, all of which have been linked to psychological distress.[68] One study[69] found that over half of sexual and gender minoritized youth experienced weight-based victimization from family members and peers, which in turn was associated with increased rates of binge eating, dieting, and other unhealthy weight-control behaviors. In particular, queer and questioning women are a heightened risk for binge-eating and restrictive eating disorders.[70] Queer and questioning men, however, are at significantly increased odds to engage in restrictive disordered eating behaviors compared to heterosexual men.[71] This can be attributed to minority stress and internalized heterosexism, which can manifest as body dissatisfaction and desire for greater muscularity.[72]

- Non-Suicidal Self-Injury. Queer and questioning students are at a significantly increased risk for self-injury, including intentional cutting, burning, bruising, or otherwise injuring themselves. One study[73] found that 18.3% of queer and questioning college students reported engagement in self-injury sometime in the previous 12 months, compared to 5.4% of heterosexual peers. Furthermore, the Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health[74] found that 48% reported engaging in self-harm in the previous 12 months. Another study[75] found statistically signification correlations between self-reported self-injurious behavior and physical assault, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. Students who

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[66] Matthews-Ewalld, et al. 2014; Parker & Harrigar, 2020; Watson, et al., 2016
[67] Institute of Medicine, 2010
[68] Bayer, et al., 2017
[69] Himmelstein, et al., 2019
[70] Bankoff & Pantalone, 2014; Mason & Lewis 2015
[71] Matthews-Ewald et al., 2014
[72] Brennan, et al., 2012; Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005
[73] Greathouse, et al., 2018
[74] The Trevor Project, 2020
[75] Blosnich & Bossarte, 2012

engage in self-injury are seven times more likely to misuse substances such as drugs or alcohol, consider suicide, experience other forms of psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety).[76]

- Suicidal Ideation and Attempt. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for high school and college aged youths, after unintentional injuries.[77] In addition to non-suicidal self-injury, queer and questioning students report significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempt than their heterosexual peers. The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that over three times as many LGB high school students (46.8%) and over twice as many questioning students (30.4%) reported seriously considering suicide as their heterosexual peers (14.5%). LGB high school students were nearly four times more likely (23.4%) and questioning students over twice as likely (16.1%) to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers (6.4%).[78] When disaggregated by gender, LGB females report more suicide risk behaviors than LGB males. Across race and ethnicity, white LGB youths reported seriously considering suicide (52.4%) at greater rates than Black (35.1%) and Hispanic (39.2%) LGB youths. However, Black and Hispanic LGB youths attempted suicide at higher rates than their white LGB peers (27.2%, 23.2%, and 22.3%, respectively).[79] This suggests that current measurements of mental distress and suicidality are inaccurate predictors of suicide risk for BIPOC queer and questioning students. At the college level, one study[80] found that 23.5% of queer and questioning students reported seriously considering suicide in the previous 12 months, compared to 8.2% of heterosexual peers, and 3.5% had made a suicide attempt. Various risk-factors are associated with suicidal ideation,

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[76] Cramer, et al., 2017
[77] Hedegaard, Curtin & Warner, 2019; Ivey-Stephenson, et al. 2020
[78] Ivey-Stephenson, et al., 2020; Johns, et al., 2020
[79] Johns, et al., 2020
[80] Greathouse, et al., 2018

including sexual violence,[81] substance use,[82] perceptions of safety on campus,[83] self-injurious behaviors,[84] environmental and interpersonal microaggressions,[85] LGBQ-motivated victimization,[86] increased stress levels,[87] internalized homophobia,[88] conflicts with faith/religion,[89] perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belonging,[90] family rejection/lack of support,[91] and--indirectly-- sexual orientation concerns and school/campus climate for queer and questioning students,[92] among others.

SUMMARY

Queer and questioning youth experience their identity development while immersed in heterosexist and monosexist environments. To varying degrees, they receive denigrating and dehumanizing messages about their sexual identities, attractions, and behaviors. When internalized, queer and questioning students struggle to attain self-acceptance and identity integration, and this struggle may manifest as identity concealment, perceived burdensomeness, and/or thwarted belongingness. Among students holding multiple minoritized identities, risk factors become complicated by other systems of oppression that contribute additional minority stress and limit students' opportunities to develop an affirming support system. The social stigma, isolation, and alienation that queer and questioning students face are correlated with maladaptive behaviors and coping mechanisms that exacerbate negative mental health outcomes. Queer and questioning students

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[81] Blosnich & Bossarte, 2012
[82] Reed, et al., 2010
[83] Reed, et al., 2010
[84] Cramer, et al., 2017
[85] Woodford, et al., 2018
[86] Woodford, et al., 2018
[87] Reed, et al., 2010
[88] Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015
[89] Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015
[90] Roberts, 2018
[91] Ryan, et al., 2009
[92] Roberts, 2018

are at greater risk for substance misuse, eating disorders, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal ideation/attempts than their heterosexual and/or monosexual peers.

INTERPERSONAL RISK FACTORS

Queer and questioning students experience individual-level, interpersonal-level, and structural-level risk factors due to a climate of prejudice and discrimination of sexually minoritized identities and experiences. These factors often overlap and are exacerbated by one another, particularly where individuals face multiple, intersecting oppressions. This section will review interpersonal contributors to negative mental health outcomes among queer and questioning students.

UNSUPPORTIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social support networks have a significant influence on the mental health of queer and questioning students. These networks include peers, family, faith communities, and their relationships with teachers/faculty and staff. While social support is a key protective factor for queer and questioning youth, not all relationships are positive. The Trevor Project[93] found that two out of three LGBTQ youth in their national study had been pressured to change their sexual identity by someone in their lives, and those who were subject to conversion therapy were more than twice as likely to attempt suicide than those who were not.

PEERS

Peer groups assist students with building social support networks, feeling accepted, and feeling a sense of belonging among their peers.[94] They influence psychological development and constitute a critical source of social support for

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[93] The Trevor Project, 2020; The Trevor Project, 2021
[94] Astin, 1993

queer and questioning students. At the college level, peer groups are "the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years."[95] That is why it is so troublesome to cite that queer and questioning (25%) first year college students report greater isolation from campus life than heterosexual peers (15.3%).[96] Similarly, most LGBTQ youth report avoiding school functions (77.6%) and extracurricular activities (71.8%) "to some extent" and over a quarter report avoiding them "often" or "frequently" (31.3% and 25.9%, respectively).[97]

- **Proximity to Peers Engaging in Self-Harm or Suicidal Ideation.** One study[98] found that queer and questioning youth were more likely to engage in self-harming behaviors if they had a friend who had previously attempted suicide, and these rates increased dramatically with the number of friends who made a suicide attempt. Another study[99] found that queer and questioning youth who had lost friends to suicide were 29 times as likely to attempt suicide– the strongest predictor of suicide attempts found in their study.

- **Peer Tokenization and Objectification.** Studies on BIPOC queer and questioning youth find that they experience racism in the forms of tokenization, fetishization, and sexual objectification unlike their white queer and questioning peers, in addition to a general lack of acceptance and inclusion.[100] One study[101] found that perceived sexual racism is associated with higher rates of psychological symptoms and suicidal ideation in young Latino men who have sex with men.

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[95] Astin, 1993, p. 398
[96] Greathouse, et al., 2018
[97] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[98] Longo, et al., 2013
[99] Puckett et al., 2017
[100] Jamil, et al., 2009; Newcomb, et al., 2015
[101] Hidalgo, et al., 2020

FAMILY AND CAREGIVERS

Familial support of a child's sexual identity has a direct impact on the psychological and emotional well-being of students. The Perceived Parental Reaction Scale[102] details various modes of familial rejection, including:

- Holding negative attitudes about same-sex attraction
- Making derogatory remarks about queer and questioning individuals or their own child's sexual identity
- Making declarations that they will not accept a child's sexual identity
- Demonstrating symptoms of psychological distress, such as crying or anger
- Pretending their child is not queer-identified or avoiding the topic
- Seeking to control or change their sexual identity
- Concealing a child's sexual identity due to fear or shame of how it will reflect upon them and/or their children
- Revoking general support (e.g., emotional, financial, housing) that was provided prior to disclosure of sexual identity
- Severing the relationship they have with the child (e.g., disowning)

Students whose families are unsupportive of their sexual identity experience higher rates of depression, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, drug use and issues of addiction, and unprotected sex with casual partners.[103] These youth are more likely to struggle with internalized heterosexism, may conceal sexual identity more frequently, may exhibit worry over being accepted by others, and may experience a high level of psychological distress during the coming out process.[104] Further, one study[105] found that a significant number of youth in their sample had experienced maltreatment by caregivers, including insults, criticism, being made to feel guilty, being ridiculed, humiliated, or embarrassed by a caregiver. This maltreatment correlated with an increased risk of attempted suicide by 9.5 times those of peers who had not suffered maltreatment and with increased risk of depression and

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[102] Willoughby, et al., 2006
[103] Ryan, et al., 2009
[104] Bregman, et al., 2013; D'amico, et al., 2015
[105] Puckett, et al., 2017

anxiety (which they suggest is related to an insecure home life). Maltreatment by families and caregivers also contributes to housing instability for LGBTQ youth, 29% of whom have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or run away.[106] Surprisingly, one study[107] of bisexual students found that this population was more likely to view their families as a source of support than monosexual students (e.g., gay, lesbian).

Among queer and questioning students who seek counseling services, BIPOC students report greater distress around family issues than their white peers.[108] Studies of queer BIPOC students consistently cite the pressure to maintain the reputation of the family at the expense of disclosure of sexual identity.[109] Whether these students fear rejection and judgement or feel a sense of responsibility to conceal their identity for the sake of family harmony and reputation, this theme undergirds the experiences of queer and questioning BIPOC students, regardless of their communities of origin.[110]

FAITH COMMUNITIES

Religion is widely accepted as a protective factor for the mental health of heterosexual students. However, the reverse was found to be true for queer and questioning students.[111] One study[112] of lesbian and gay youth who said that religion was important to them were 38% more likely to have had recent suicidal ideation, compared to lesbian and gay youth who did not regard religion as important to them. These findings revealed that queer and questioning youth who reported greater religiosity (e.g., use of religious beliefs in guiding one's life) were 9.3 times more likely to engage in self-harming behaviors than Christian-identified youth who

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[106] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[107] Whiting, et al. 2012
[108] Hayes, et al., 2011
[109] Hipolito-Delgado, et al., 2017; Duran, 2019
[110] Duran, 2019
[111] Lytle, et al., 2018
[112] Lytle et al., 2018

found "little to no guidance" from their religious beliefs and secular queer and questioning youth (e.g., agnostics, atheists).

Compared to just 7% of heterosexual peers, one study found that 62% of lesbian students, 58% of gay students, 34% of bisexual students, and 34% of students of another sexual identity reported that someone has mistreated them on campus because of that person's religious worldview.[113] A study[114] of Christian college students found that 78.8% of students who experienced same-sex attraction chose to conceal their sexual identity, identifying publicly as heterosexual. However, 22.4% of these individuals privately identified as queer and questioning.[115] Queer and questioning students at these Christian colleges were also less likely to engage in same-sex intimacy or relationships.

Religious institutions, specifically Abrahamic religions, are frequently cited as a source of negativity for queer and questioning students.[116] One study[117] found that religiously based colleges/universities enforced heterosexuality and gender conformity through discipline policies, fostering a culture of fear (e.g., fear of exposure), creating an environment of marginalization and isolation, and facilitating psychological distress (e.g., when students attempted to deal with victimization, reconciling one's sexual identity and religious identity).

TEACHERS/FACULTY, STAFF & ADMINISTRATION

Teachers/faculty and staff have an enormous influence on a student's learning and engagement inside and outside the classroom.[118] One national study[119] found that nearly half of LGBTQ youth surveyed reported that school personnel never intervened when hearing students make homophobic remarks. Moreover,

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[113] Interfaith Youth Core, 2014
[114] Stratton, et al.2013
[115] Stratton et al., 2013
[116] Higa et al., 2014
[117] Craig, et al., 2017
[118] Astin, 1993; Kosciw, et al., 2020
[119] Kosciw, et al., 2020

52.4% reported hearing their teachers or other school staff making homophobic remarks. It is no surprise that less than half (42.4%) of respondents in this study reported that their school administration was very or somewhat supportive of LGBTQ students.

Studies focused on the correlations between positive teacher/faculty engagement and students' emotional and academic outcomes may provide perspective on possible outcomes associated with negative teacher/faculty-student engagement. At the college level, one study[120] found that positive relationships with faculty correlated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and substance use among queer and questioning college students. Similarly, another study[121] found that positive relationships with faculty positively impacted grade point average, engagement in the classroom, perceptions of social acceptance on campus, and institutional satisfaction, even when they experienced heterosexist harassment or had negative perceptions of campus climate. Additionally, a large study[122] found queer and questioning college students to be more satisfied with faculty interactions than their heterosexual peers. These findings suggest the inverse is true when students have negative relationships with faculty. While there is not a tremendous amount of research on college administrators, several studies did address student attitudes towards administrators that suggest negative perceptions. For instance, queer and questioning students are less likely (32.8%) than heterosexual peers (46.3%) to be satisfied with administrative responses to discrimination.[123] This suggests that the relationship that queer and questioning students have to administrators may be strained by policies and procedures around bias intervention and response practices.

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[120] Silverchanz, et al., 2008
[121] Silverchanz, et al., 2008
[122] Garvey & Inkelas, 2012
[123] Greathouse et al., 2018; Kosciw, et al., 2020

EXPERIENCES WITH HARASSMENT, BULLYING & ASSAULT

Queer and questioning students experience greater interpersonal victimization and microaggressions than their heterosexual peers.[124] Findings from one national study[125] reveal that queer and questioning students were the target of derogatory remarks (61%) or felt that they were stared at (37%). These rates are significantly higher than their heterosexual peers (17% and 29%, respectively). The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that absenteeism due to safety concerns for LGB high school students and students who identified as "unsure" was almost twice the rate as their heterosexual peers (13.5%, 15.5%, and 7.5%, respectively).[126]

Additional studies[127] reveal that among queer and questioning youth, many BIPOC students experienced victimization based on both their race/ethnicity and their sexual identity, and/or due to the intersecting nature of their multiple minoritized identities. For instance, one study[128] found that Native and Indigenous LGBTQ high school students experienced the highest rates of in-school victimization and discrimination based on their sexual identity (82%), in addition to reporting the second highest rates of race/ethnicity-based victimization (68.2%). This same study also found that, while Asian American and Pacific Islander, Black, and Arab American, Middle Eastern, and North African LGBTQ students reported lower rates of victimization based on sexual identity than their white peers (55.7%, 58.6%, 67.5%, and 70.4%, respectively), these students report significantly higher rates of race/ethnicity-based victimization compared to their white peers (51.2%, 43.2%, 46.89%, and 11.0%, respectively). It is important to not overlook race/ethnicity-based victimization of queer and questioning BIPOC students as they may be targeted for racialized harassment, bullying, and assault because of

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[124] Woodford, et al., 2014
[125] Rankin, et al., 2010
[126] CDC, 2019
[127] Greytak, et al., 2016; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2020
[128] Kosciw, et al., 2020

their minoritized sexual identity. Research consistently shows that victimization is positively correlated with depression.[129]

VERBAL HARASSMENT, BULLYING & ASSAULT

Nearly one-quarter of queer and questioning college students report being verbally threatened, and more than two-thirds of high school students reported being verbally harassed at school within the past 12 months.[130] One study[131] found that 70% of LGBTQ youth aged 13-17 had been bullied at school because of their sexual identity. Additionally, the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that more than one in four lesbian, gay, or bisexual high school students (26.6%) were electronically bullied and nearly one in three (32.0%) were bullied on school property in the previous year, rates much higher than that of their heterosexual or "unsure" peers (19.4% and 26.9%, 14.1% and 17.1%, respectively).[132] One study[133] found that queer and questioning college students were more likely than their heterosexual peers to be the targets of heterosexist name-calling, criticized for not being gender conforming, treated rudely, given the silent treatment, and verbally threatened in-person, on the phone, or online—all of which led to heightened anxiety. Another study[134] examined group level differences among white and racially minoritized queer and questioning college students related to the impact of heterosexism (e.g., environmental microaggressions, interpersonal microaggressions, sexual identity victimization) on depression. The researchers found that higher rates of blatant heterosexist victimization were correlated with higher rates of depression among all students, the greatest of which was found among Black and Latinx students.

[129] Kosciw, et al., 2020; Woodford et al., 2018
[130] Greathouse, et al., 2018
[131] Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2018
[132] CDC, 2019
[133] Woodford et al., 2014
[134] Kulick, et al., 2017

PHYSICAL HARASSMENT & ASSAULT

Queer and questioning students are physically harassed and physically assaulted at higher rates than their peers.[135] GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey of over 16,000 LGBTQ students between ages 13-21 found that, based on sexual orientation, 25.7% of LGBTQ students were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) and 11.0% of LGBTQ students were physically assaulted at school in the past year.[136] The 2019 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that twice as many LGB or "unsure" identified high school students were threatened or injured by a weapon in school compared to their heterosexual peers (11.9%, 12.9%, and 6.3%, respectively).[137] One national study[138] found that 3.2% of queer and questioning college students were the target of physical violence, and 12.7% feared for their safety. The Trevor Project[139] found that 30% of LGBTQ youth in their study had experienced physical harm at some point in their lives due to their sexual orientation, and those that experienced physical harm were 20% more likely to consider suicide than their peers who did not experience physical harm.

SEXUAL & INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, HARASSMENT & ASSAULT

Queer and questioning students experience intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault at higher rates than their heterosexual peers. One national study[140] found that 15.7% of queer and questioning college students had been sexually touched without their consent, experienced an attempt of sexual penetration without consent, or were sexually penetrated without their consent compared to 7.7% of heterosexual peers. When looking at intimate partner violence, 14.2% had experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse in a relationship, compared to 8.6% of heterosexual peers. The 2019 National Youth Risk Behavior

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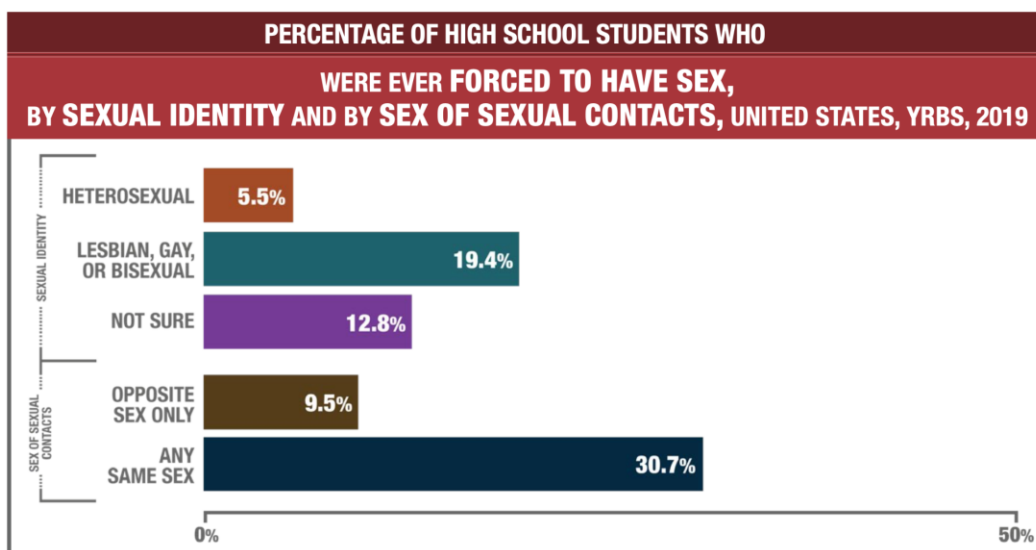[135] CDC, 2019; Kosciw, et al., 2020
[136] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[137] CDC, 2019
[138] Kulick et al., 2017
[139] The Trevor Project, 2020
[140] Greathouse, et al., 2018

Survey found that "unsure" students were more likely than their LGB and heterosexual peers to experience physical dating violence (16.9%, 13.1%, and 17.2%, respectively). Conversely, LGB students were significantly more likely to have been forced to have sex than their "unsure" and heterosexual peers (19.4%, 12.8%, and 5.5%, respectively).[141]

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WERE EVER FORCED TO HAVE SEX, BY SEXUAL IDENTITY AND BY SEX OF SEXUAL CONTACTS, UNITED STATES, YRBS, 2019

SEXUAL IDENTITY
- HETEROSEXUAL: 5.5%
- LESBIAN, GAY, OR BISEXUAL: 19.4%
- NOT SURE: 12.8%

SEX OF SEXUAL CONTACTS
- OPPOSITE SEX ONLY: 9.5%
- ANY SAME SEX: 30.7%

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report 2009-2019[142]

These percentages are starker when we look at high school students who have experienced sexual contact. The study also found that high school students who had sexual contact with people of the same sex were more than twice as likely to experience physical dating violence and three times more likely to have been forced to have sex than students who had sexual contact with only the opposite sex (19.7% and 30.7% and versus 8.8% and 9.5%). Another national study found that six in ten LGBTQ youth experienced sexual harassment in school in the previous year.[143]

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[141] CDC, 2019
[142] CDC, 2019
[143] Kosciw, et al., 2020

SUMMARY

Queer and questioning high school and college/university students are more likely than their heterosexual and monosexual peers to have unsupportive social networks. They face rejection, exclusion, tokenization, attempts at conversion, bullying, harassment, and both verbal and physical assault from their peers, family and caregivers, and faith communities. Queer and questioning students report that teachers/faculty, staff, and administrators are failing to intervene and, in some cases, perpetrating the harassment. Queer and questioning students experience verbal harassment, bullying, and assault, physical harassment and assault, and sexual and intimate partner violence, harassment, and assault at significantly higher rates than their heterosexual peers, and they are targeted because of their sexual identity. Furthermore, heterosexist and monosexist victimization is correlated with suicidal ideation and depression, especially for Black and Latinx queer and questioning youth. For queer and questioning students, unsupportive social networks and interpersonal victimization contribute to poorer mental health outcomes and suicidality as well as issues with academic performance and retention.

STRUCTURAL RISK FACTORS

Queer and questioning students experience individual-level, interpersonal-level, and structural-level risk factors due to a climate of prejudice and discrimination of sexually minoritized identities and experiences. These factors often overlap and are exacerbated by one another, particularly where individuals face multiple, intersecting oppressions. This section will review structural contributors to negative mental health outcomes among queer and questioning students.

USING THE LENS OF INSTITUTIONAL BETRAYAL

Institutional betrayal occurs when "an institution causes harm to an individual who trusts or depends upon that institution," including failure to prevent or respond

supportively when harm is committed in the context of that institution (e.g., physical assault at school/on campus).[144] Institutional betrayal can take on many forms such as victim-blaming, making it difficult for people to report incidents of victimization, minimizing or dismissing reports of victimization, covering up an institution's wrongdoing, failure to notify or enforce protective policies, punishing people for reporting, setting expectations of safety and inclusion that aren't upheld, and more. Psychologists Carly Smith and Jennifer Freyd began using the term to describe how an institution's failure to prevent or respond supportively to survivors of sexual assault exacerbates post-traumatic symptomatology.[145] Since then, researchers have utilized the concept to illustrate how institutions exacerbate the mental health effects of heterosexist and racist microaggressions.[146] What this research shows is that educational institutions can cause and/or exacerbate harm to students, especially in situations in which students seek assistance and support for being victimized. When a school or institution's policies, practices, and provisions exclude, punish, and/or neglect queer and questioning students, they engage in institutional betrayal by doing harm to students who depend on them to provide a safe and equitable learning environment.

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES & PRACTICES

Queer and questioning students do not experience the same range of structural barriers that impact trans and nonbinary students. Nevertheless, there are many institutional policies that continue to impact the experiences of and, subsequently, the mental health of queer and questioning students. Taken individually or collectively, these environmental stressors communicate to students that they are neither valued nor considered worthy of attention by their institutions. These environmental stressors have a deleterious impact on psychological health.

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[144] Smith & Freyd, 2013, p. 10
[145] Smith & Freyd, 2013
[146] Crumley, 2019; Gomez, 2015

NON-DISCRIMINATION, ANTI-HARASSMENT & ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES

Non-discrimination laws at the Federal and State levels are not widespread and inconsistently applied. As of 2020, only 18 states protect students from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the educational setting (e.g., public K-12 schools and colleges/universities), and while Title IX covers anti-discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation, some secondary schools and higher education institutions view this interpretation as controversial and refuse to apply it.[147] Non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and anti-bullying (e.g., Code of Conduct) policies provide students a level of institutional protection and a process of recourse when they are victimized by peers, teachers/faculty, staff, and volunteers. However, many schools and institutions lack clear processes for addressing policy violations or addressing bias-related behaviors that fall outside policy definitions, but are just as damaging. Additionally, queer and questioning students may be hesitant to report these experiences. It is telling that with over three-quarters of queer and questioning college students aware that their institution has a sexual orientation antidiscrimination policy,[148] only 32.8% of them express satisfaction with administrative response to instances of bias.[149]

One national study[150] found that the majority of LGBTQ youth who were harassed or assaulted at school/on campus did not report these incidents to staff, citing doubts that effective intervention would occur and fears that reporting would make the situation worse as the most common reasons for not reporting. Among the students who did report such incidents to personnel, one in five were told to change their behavior/dress and 60.5% said staff did nothing and/or told the student to ignore the victimization. Moreover, some high schools (and fewer colleges/universities) actively target queer and questioning students, prohibiting them from dating and public displays of affection, being open about their sexual

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[147] Human Rights Campaign, 2020
[148] Nguyen, et al., 2020
[149] Greathouse, et al., 2018
[150] Kosciw, et al., 2020

identity, writing about queer and questioning topics in assignments, forming student organizations, participating on athletic teams, attending events with a date of the same gender, and even policing gender non-conforming clothing/hair/accessories at school, at school-sponsored functions, and for school photographs.[151]

ADMISSIONS & ADMITTED/ENROLLED STUDENT SURVEYS

Only 23 colleges/universities provide queer and questioning students with an option to indicate their sexual identity on admissions applications (e.g., including specific questions, explicit encouragement in written statements, special interest indicators) or when completing their admitted student or enrolled student paperwork upon declaring their intent to enroll.[152] This leaves queer and questioning students with the burden of navigating disclosure across multiple domains of student life. Additionally, it renders queer and questioning student life invisible, signifying a campus climate that is neither welcoming nor inclusive, whether that is the case or not. This disclosure and invisibility burden may exacerbate some of the risk factors discussed in this literature review (e.g., campus housing, health services, counseling services, etc).

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

One study[153] found that almost two-thirds (62.8%) of LGBTQ high school students experienced school discipline (e.g., detention, suspension) compared to less than half (45.8%) of non-LGBTQ students. In the same study, LGBTQ students reported being suspended from school at much higher rates than their non-LGBTQ peers (24.9% and 14.5%, respectively). Research indicates that queer and questioning students are being disciplined for breaking rules that aren't enforced for their heterosexual peers and, as noted earlier, queer and questioning students are also

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[151] Campus Pride, 2020; Kosciw, et al., 2020
[152] Campus Pride, 2019
[153] Greytak, et al., 2016

being disciplined for being open about their identity.[154] Additionally, as is the case in studies on BIPOC students and students with disabilities, queer and questioning students who are victimized at school are more likely to receive disciplinary infractions related to the incident of victimization.[155] LGBTQ youth who are victimized by their peers at school experience greater school discipline, including disciplinary referrals to school administration, school detention, suspension, and expulsion; and greater involvement in the justice system as a result of school discipline, including arrest, adjudication, and detention in a juvenile or adult facility-- all of which are associated with negative mental health outcomes.[156] Overall, studies[157] examining disparate discipline policies and practices and law enforcement presence in schools (e.g., school resource officers) indicate the presence of a school-to-prison pipeline for queer and questioning youth, especially for those who experience family rejection and homelessness. Although this research focuses primarily on secondary schools, there are similar opportunities for college/university policies, practices, and personnel to target and disproportionately penalize queer and questioning students.

STUDENT SERVICES

The late 20th century ushered in a steady stream of support services on college campuses as institutions realized that supporting the health and wellbeing of students would enhance academic performance, retention, and graduation. While some of these blossomed at high schools as well, many did not appear in parallel or were not seen as relevant to the high school experience. Overall, queer and questioning students experience unique challenges when navigating these resources, which this literature review examines in this section.

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[154] Greytak, et al., 2016; Kosciw, et al., 2020
[155] Greytak, et al., 2016
[156] Greytak & Palmer, 2017; Snapp, et al., 2014
[157] GLSEN, 2016; Palmer & Greytak, 2017; Snapp, et al., 2015; Snapp & Russell, 2016

SCHOOL/CAMPUS PHYSICAL HEALTH SERVICES

Students experiencing bias from health care providers have increased psychological distress. When health care providers indicate discomfort (e.g., attitude, non-verbal communication, tone) when a student discloses their sexual identity, queer and questioning students feel uncomfortable continuing with their visit and may avoid seeking out needed services in the future.[158] Students in one study[159] complained that clinicians assumed they were heterosexual when taking their sexual health history (e.g., not asking what the genders of their sexual partners are).[160] Further, students reported anxiety when there was no physical indicator that they were in an affirming space (e.g., presence of a rainbow decal or safe zone sign), when there were no LGB clinicians, when their sexual identity became an unnecessary focus of the visit, and from perceived social stigma (among male participants in this study, specifically).[161]

SCHOOL/CAMPUS COUNSELING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Students experience a myriad of challenges to accessing affirming in-school and on-campus mental health care. In an analysis of 203 four-year institutions, one study found that fewer than "one-third of counseling center websites described individual counseling opportunities for LGBT students, fewer than 11% mentioned group counseling opportunities, and fewer than 6% offered a university-crafted pamphlet with information about LGBT issues and resources."[162] While many college and university counseling departments have a team of clinicians that offer affirmative therapy for queer and questioning students, prejudice and discrimination may still exist. One team conducted a study to identify

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[158] Hood, et al., 2018; Stover, et al., 2014
[159] Stover, et al., 2014
[160] Stover, et al., 2014
[161] Stover, et al., 2014
[162] Wright & McKinley, 2011, p. 138

microaggressions experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer clients.[163] Reworded to be consistent with contemporary language, these included:

- Assumption that sexual identity is the cause of all presenting issues
- Avoidance or minimization of sexual identity
- Attempts to overidentify with queer and questioning clients (e.g., heterosexual experiences are not the same)
- Making stereotypical assumptions about queer and questioning individuals (e.g., "Wow, I would never have known you are gay!")
- Expressions of heterosexist bias (e.g., being asked, "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? Are you married?)
- Assumption that queer and questioning individuals need psychotherapeutic treatment
- Being warned about the dangers of identifying as queer or questioning by a clinician

QUEER AND QUESTIONING FOCUSED SUPPORT SERVICES

At the high school-level, Gay Straight Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) can provide a safe space for queer and questioning youth to build community, share resources, and advocate for change at their school. One study[164] found that LGBTQ students in schools with GSAs reported greater feelings of school belonging, lower levels of depression, and higher levels of self-esteem than students in schools without GSAs. Although the number has been increasing steadily, over one-third of high schools still do not have a club or organization for queer and questioning students.[165] Currently, less than 10% of colleges and universities have dedicated staff (half-time or graduate assistant-led) that serve the needs of queer and questioning students.[166] Staff and dedicated centers for queer

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[163] Wright & McKinley, 2011, p. 138
[164] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[165] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[166] Greathouse, et al., 2018

and questioning students provide students space to find community, identity-specific resources, and access to skilled professionals who provide support and referrals to students experiencing psychological distress. The lack of identity-specific support puts the onus on students to create their own social support networks, navigate internalized heterosexism and monosexism, manage tensions in family relationships, and respond to bias-motivated behavior they experience directly or observe, among many other challenges.

CAMPUS HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY

The basic function of campus housing is to provide students comfort, support, and a sense that they are at home.[167] Students who live on campus may "receive social support, resources, and integration into both a residential community and the campus community, giving them an advantage over students living off campus," and ameliorating the impact of psychological stressors, such as loneliness, isolation, or anxiety.[168] Further, multiple studies have found a significant correlation between on-campus housing and retention.[169]

One study[170] found that over three-quarters of college students across multiple institution types were aware as to whether or not their institution had LGBTQ+ inclusive housing policies, suggesting this was important to them. While knowledge of these resources exist, queer and questioning students continue to experience hostility and barriers to locating affirming on-campus housing environments.[171] Students may feel policed by peers and staff for their appearance or queer-performative behavior (e.g., wearing LGBTQ-affirming clothing, speaking up when hearing anti-LGBTQ jokes, presenting a masculine gender presentation on an all-female floor) and/or feel that reporting incidents of harassment would be more of a "hassle" that would further ostracize them from peers than address and

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[167] Pryor & Hoffman, 2020
[168] Schudde, 2011, p. 582
[169] Astin, 1984; Pascarella, et al., 1994; Schudde, 2011
[170] Nguyen, et al., 2020
[171] Marine, 2011

remedy the problem.[172] These experiences may sometimes be exacerbated by other intersections of identity. For instance, a student in one study chose to live in a housing unit focused on religious diversity and found that her peers frequently made derogatory comments or excluded her from activities on the basis of her minoritized sexual identity.[173] Some common experiences leading to negative perceptions of residence halls include:[174]

- Lack of visibility of other lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. students or staff
- Disproportionate presence of fraternity/sorority members, athletes, or first-year students
- Direct harassment or harassment of others
- Heterosexist comment or nonverbals (e.g., looks)
- Defacement/graffiti
- Lack of visible support
- Lack of social activities
- Non-supportive roommates or members of floor (e.g., gossip, discouraging towards visits by queer and questioning individual's friends or partners)
- Feelings about coming out to roommate (e.g., hesitance, fear of rejection)
- Resident assistant indifference to heterosexist issues (e.g., lack of support when experiencing heterosexist behavior from roommate)

Multiple studies recommend that institutions establish LGBTQ-themed residential hall floors, create gender neutral housing options, and/or find other ways to fortify an affirming environment for queer and questioning students (e.g., LGBTQ-themed learning communities, LGBTQ residence hall associations or subgroups). While queer-affirming room assignments may have positive effects on student experience, they may not be fully accessible. LGBTQ-themed floors, residence halls, and/or informally "known" residence halls/floors with an affirming reputation may be in high demand, lack visibility or accessibility based on one's circumstance, or require an interview (requiring one disclose their sexual identity

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[172] Kortegast, 2017, p. 55-57
[173] Kortegast, 2017
[174] Evans & Broido, 2009

and after which a student may not be accepted).[175] Moreover, to locate and apply for these housing opportunities, students may be required to "out" themselves to administrators with whom they have limited interactions,[176] requiring disclosure that may result in psychological distress. These practices, while appearing to be inclusive, may leave students who cannot access these housing assignments to find or create affirming environments on their own.

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Multiple factors interrupt the academic engagement of queer and questioning students. One study found a positive relationship between psychological distress and negative academic experiences, such as getting a lower grade on a project or in a class, dropping or not completing a course, or suffering significant disruption to a thesis/dissertation/research/practicum.[177] For college students, additional factors include the culture of their academic major or minor, the climate in the classroom, their comfort level on campus, and the larger climate of the institution. While the focus of this review is on risk and protective factors for mental health, it is critical that we also understand the elements of the academic environment that exacerbate psychological distress and potentially impact persistence, stop out, dropout, or push out.

ACADEMIC MAJOR/MINOR

The culture of an academic discipline can have a push or pull effect on a college student's program of choice. One study[178] found that queer and questioning students were substantially underrepresented in the fields of engineering, health professions, business, while overrepresented in social sciences and fine arts when compared to heterosexual peers. The overt and covert heterosexism found in these

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[175] Kortegast, 2017; Mollet, et al., 2020
[176] Kortegast, 2017
[177] Oswalt & Wyatt, 2011
[178] Greathouse, et al., 2018

professions is likely a major contributing factor to the academic decisions of queer and questioning students. One study[179] found that LGBT engineering students believed their field to be heteronormative, lack LGBT visibility, feel excluded among peers, and lack support from faculty and other students. Business students in another study lamented that many of their professors were heterosexual men who were "uncomfortable" with LGBTQ issues.[180] This study found that these students spent a great deal of time trying to reconcile their queer identity with their professions, bearing the burden to identify LGBTQ friendly employers and publishing LGBT-friendly internship and summer job opportunities for their peers— all shaping their experience of belonging within their program and their identity development, experiences that may exacerbate negative mental health outcomes.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE

Multiple factors impact the classroom climate for queer and questioning college students, a place where students build social support and mentoring relationships. One national study[181] found that 42% of the harassment that queer and questioning students face happens in the classroom. Unsurprisingly, students who are "out" in a course report a chillier classroom environment than those who conceal their identity, a decision that likely leads to greater exposure to bias incidents.[182] In another study, queer and questioning students who present in a gender normative way reported a more positive classroom climate than gender non-conforming students, and that students who were "more out and open about disclosing their LGBTQ identity experience[d] a less accepting classroom climate (e.g., perceived safety in classroom buildings, overall comfort with the classroom climate, LGBTQ inclusive curriculum, inclusion of LGBTQ issues and authors in coursework, administrator/faculty support).[183] In yet another study, an overwhelming majority of

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[179] Trenshaw, et al., 2013
[180] Vacarro, 2012
[181] Rankin, et al., 2010
[182] Garvey & Rankin, 2015
[183] Garvey and Rankin, 2015

graduate student participants (82%) did not encourage students to dialogue on queer issues when they arose in class, **77% reported a lack of queer representation in the curriculum and course discussion, and found they had to connect outside of class to feel a sense of support that facilitated their learning.**[184]

NON-INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

Teachers/faculty whose curricula are not inclusive of queer and questioning students create a classroom environment perceived as chilly and unwelcoming-- an environment that impacts mental health outcomes.[185] Curriculum that assumes heterosexuality, lacks content on the experiences and culture of queer people, and omits scholarship written by queer people all contribute to queer and questioning students feeling invisible and undervalued.

ATHLETICS

High school and intercollegiate athletics struggle to overcome stigma related to mental health issues among student athletes.[186] Students fear rejection by teammates and coaches over suspicion of their "mental toughness."[187] Although the climate is improving, a factor compounding mental health stigma in athletics is a culture of hypermasculinity and heterosexism.[188] One study[189] of LGBTQ youth found that students were the least comfortable reporting incidents of discrimination, bullying, or harassment to their coach or physical education teacher than to any other school personnel. This environment not only alienates queer and questioning student athletes, it creates a climate that impacts the mental health of these students. One study[190] with 259 LGBTQ identified student athletes found that the

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[184] Turkowitz, 2012
[185] Garvey & Rankin, 2015
[186] Carr & Davidson, n.d.
[187] Carr & Davison, n.d, para 7
[188] Pariera, et al., 2021
[189] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[190] Pariera, et al., 2021

most commonly reported forms of discrimination were attempts to suppress or erase queer and questioning students' existence on the teams. Students were prevented from openly talking about their LGBTQ identity, forming LGBTQ athlete groups, and discouraged from talking to other athletes about LGBTQ issues. The demand to conceal one's identity exacerbates internalized heterosexism and alienation, as discussed earlier, issues that significantly contribute to psychological distress.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

For many queer and questioning students, the process of choosing a career path can be more complicated than identifying a field of interest. Myths and misinformation about queer people in the workplace present challenges to students choosing a profession and to counselors who advise queer and questioning students. As a reminder from earlier in this literature queer and questioning students and teachers/faculty are underrepresented in multiple disciplines, including the health professions, business, and engineering.[191] One study[192] found that perceived discrimination and social support related to career development contributed to vocational indecision and college maladjustment. Queer and questioning students lack LGBQ role models in the workplace, deal with vocational hostility, often must focus resources on positive sexual identity development versus career development.[193]

Another study[194] found that campus climates that were unsupportive of or hostile to queer and questioning students, negatively compromised their vocational purpose (i.e., vocational competence, commitment, and organization) and psychological vocational development (i.e., career indecision, decision-making self-efficacy, and vocational identity. Further, the decision to disclose LGBTQ-related

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[191] Greathouse, et al., 2018
[192] Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2010
[193] Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2010
[194] Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003

leadership experiences, or to disclose one's sexual orientation at all exacerbate anxiety and fear of prejudice/discrimination.[195] All of these concerns exacerbate individual-level factors like fear of disclosure, internalized heterosexism and monosexism, etc.

SUMMARY

Queer and questioning students face structural barriers to inclusion, safety, and visibility at their respective institutions, which creates and/or contributes to depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. Queer and questioning students are often unaccounted for in admissions data and student surveys, they lack sufficient protections and recourse against interpersonal violence, and school personnel and administrators target and/or punish queer and questioning students for being out or for protecting themselves against victimization, leading to significantly higher rates of detention, suspension, expulsion, and greater involvement in the justice system than their heterosexual peers. Additionally, many high schools, colleges, and universities still lack services that meet the needs of queer and questioning students such as affirming and inclusive residential communities, student organizations, and LGBTQ+ offices with dedicated professional staff. Although some queer and questioning students have affirming experiences with in-school and campus-based clinicians, many face ill-informed practitioners and/or endure heterosexist and monosexist microaggressions when seeking mental and physical health services.

In academic departments, the classroom, the curriculum, career development offices, and athletics, queer and questioning students face underrepresentation, harassment, and invisibility. They find teachers/faculty, coaches, and career counselors ill-prepared to handle discussions about sexual identity as well as pressure to suppress their identity in order to mitigate others' discomfort. These experiences leave queer and questioning students feeling

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[195] Greathouse, 2019

invisible, excluded, and undervalued, all elements that create and/or exacerbate psychological distress. Moreover, when high school, college, and universities policies, practices, and provisions exclude, punish, and/or neglect queer and questioning students, they engage in institutional betrayal by doing harm to students who depend on them to provide a safe and equitable learning environment.

INDIVIDUAL & INTERPERSONAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors are viewed in this literature review as characteristics of queer and questioning individuals or their environments that reduce the likelihood of the incidence of psychological and behavioral distress. Due to the burden of negative health outcomes experienced by queer and questioning students, it is important to explore and cultivate the protective mechanisms that can contribute to the development of their resilience. Research on resilience has focused primarily on minoritized populations, particularly as a result of the observance of individuals' or groups' remarkable adaptation and ability to thrive despite a series of negative circumstances or experiences. This section will review individual and interpersonal protective factors for queer and questioning students.

POSITIVE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION

One study found that self-acceptance mediated psychological distress for queer and questioning college students.[196] Internalized heterosexism and monosexism (and related links to low self-worth and depression) may respond well to cognitive behavioral therapy interventions to identify, challenge, and release negative thoughts and feelings about being queer or questioning.[197] To expand beyond this, assisting students in integrating and navigating multiple marginalized

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[196] Woodford, et al., 2014
[197] Hall, 2018

identities may assist with positive identity integration. Identity pride was found to be a protective factor for queer and questioning BIPOC students, associated with reduced risk of depression and anxiety, among a sample of LGBTQ BIPOC students in the Northeast.[198]

SELF-ESTEEM

One study[199] found that positive self-esteem significantly reduced the presence of depression, anxiety, and negative physical health symptoms, which is the case for all populations. Global self-esteem may mitigate the effects of negative perceptions of one's sexuality, as a student grows to understand their sexuality in the context of their whole self.[200] This mitigates internalized heterosexism and monosexism and encourages confidence and pride with the disclosure of one's sexual identity to others.

SELF-COMPASSION

Other research has shown that developing adaptive coping responses to stigma can promote resilience among queer- and questioning students. Self-compassion was found to serve as a protective factor against mental health symptomology in the face of bias-based bullying.[201] Other coping strategies that have been deemed useful for LGBTQ+ students include situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation.[202] These strategies mitigate internalized heterosexism and monosexism and encourage confidence and pride with the disclosure of one's sexual identity to others.

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[198] Conron et al., 2015
[199] Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2015
[200] Hall, 2018
[201] Vigna, et al., 2018
[202] McCormick, 2016

DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL IDENTITY

Research suggests that disclosure of one's sexual identity to others ("outness") contributes to more positive outcomes for queer and questioning students, including positive self-esteem and lower depression,[203] opportunities for affiliation, support, and coping assistance,[204] overlapping with the process of identity integration (including involvement with LGB activities, developing positive attitudes towards homosexuality/bisexuality, feeling comfortable with others knowing their sexual orientation, and disclosing identity to people in their life who are important to them).[205] However, the same study found that outness is also associated with increased victimization (e.g., bullying, harassment) among students, particularly in rural areas. To help students integrate their identity and prepare for potential outcomes associated with greater visibility, mental health professionals should familiarize themselves with queer and questioning identity development models and their students' unique cultural contexts to assist students in navigating the challenges that arise when deciding if, when, and how to disclose to others.

One study suggests that "interventions that are introduced early in the [sexual identity development] process are important to instill an initial and lasting positive and cohesive identity."[206] For students that feel disclosure of their sexual identity would place a "burden" on others if they chose to disclose, it may be useful to remind them that disclosing this identity could offer great relief, allowing them to be more open and honest with others and build closer relationships.[207] Additionally, while outness serves as a mental health protective factor, outness may also place a burden of safety and a need to educate others while managing the environment of heterosexism and monosexism that exists at their school or institution.

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[203] Kosciw, et al., 2015
[204] Hall, 2018
[205] Rosario, et al., 2011
[206] Hall, 2018, p. 298
[207] Hall, 2018

COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

Cognitive flexibility is "the awareness that in any situation there are options and alternatives available, the willingness to be flexible and adapt to situations and the competence to be flexible."[208] It has been found to be a buffer for queer and questioning students in the way they make sense of discrimination, approach romantic relationships, form social support networks, and cope with life events.[209]

BICULTURAL & MULTICULTURAL SELF-EFFICACY

Bicultural and multicultural self-efficacy is the ability to navigate multiple cultures and build satisfying relationships that allow one to thrive in their contested social location(s). Specific to bisexual/pansexual and queer and questioning individuals holding multiple marginalized identities, bicultural self-efficacy has been found to serve as a protective factor.[210]

EXERCISE

One study[211] found that exercise moderates the relationship between heterosexist harassment and both depression and anxiety. While exercise has multiple health benefits, clinicians must be careful to ensure the student is not over-exercising or doing so to mitigate feelings of unworthiness.

SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Encouraging students to pursue friendships with queer-affirming peers, as well as participating in queer-affirming programs, could reduce social isolation and facilitate a sense of belonging. One scholar recommended that queer and questioning youth be encouraged to pursue "relationships and interactions with accepting and affirming individuals, groups, and communities."[212] Encouraging

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[208] Kim & Omizo, 2006, p. 247
[209] Brewster, et al., 2013
[210] Brewster, et al., 2013
[211] Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2015
[212] Hall, 2018, p.299

queer and questioning students to connect with other queer and questioning students can provide opportunities for students to process shared experiences of stigma, promote a strengthened network of social support, reinforce positive identity development, and reduce internalized stigma. Indeed, one study[213] found that supportive friends and family were positively correlated with both self-acceptance and disclosure of one's sexual identity, and negatively correlated with psychological distress.

Community connectedness has been studied as a protective factor for queer and questioning students. A community building model promotes a sense of affiliation to something larger than oneself, promoting pride and empowerment. For minoritized youth populations, connectedness to parents and school/college/university may help reduce students' levels of depression, suicidal ideation, conduct problems, and social anxiety, while promoting self-esteem.[214] Connectedness has also demonstrated a compensatory effect on students; whereas connectedness in one area, such as family, could help to buffer the negative effects of a lack of connectedness in a different area, such as school.[215]

AFFIRMING PEERS

Peer groups influence psychological development and constitute a critical source of social support for queer and questioning students, particularly as they transition from high school to college/university life.[216] Again, they are "the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years."[217] For high school students, school is the primary location for developing peer relationships and peers may be the first people queer and questioning students entrust with information about their sexuality.[218]

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[213] Shilo and Savaya, 2011
[214] Foster et al., 2017
[215] Loukas, et al., 2010
[216] Vaccaro & Newman, 2016
[217] Astin, 1993, p. 398
[218] Roe, 2015

- Heterosexual Friends. One study[219] found that participants who developed authentic relationships with heterosexual allies felt a greater sense of belonging on campus. Even acquaintanceships can be a protective factor when students are shown that they're not alone. One study[220] found that queer and questioning students felt supported when their heterosexual peers intervened when they were being bullied or teased.

- Queer and Questioning Friends. The presence of queer and questioning friends has been associated with lower rates of academic disengagement, higher grade point average, increased satisfaction with a student's school/college/university, and increased feelings of acceptance on campus.[221] One study[222] found that the presence of four or more LGB friends mediated the relationship between heterosexist harassment and alcohol abuse. Another study[223] found that group belonging to GSAs or LGBT student organizations and clubs were crucial to creating a sense of belonging at school/college/university, managing internalized heterosexism, and building a social support network.

AFFIRMING FAMILY

For queer and questioning students, family members' support of their sexual identity is associated with decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety,[224] decreased fear of disclosure,[225] decreased internalization of heterosexism,

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219 Vaccaro & Newman, 2016
220 Roe, 2015
221 Kosciw, et al., 2020; Roe, 2015; Woodford & Kulick, 2015
222 Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2015
223 Vaccaro & Newman, 2016
224 Doty, et al., 2010
225 D'amico, et al., 2015

decreased fear of rejection (e.g., rejection sensitivity) based on sexual identity, and lessened the impact of discriminatory incidents on overall mental health.[226]

AFFIRMING MENTORS

Providing access to role models, such as queer teachers/faculty and staff who are happy and thriving, may assist students in envisioning a future that is positive and hopeful. One study found that positive interactions with faculty significantly reduced the risks of depression, anxiety, and negative physical health.[227] Another study found that positive relationships with faculty decreased rates of academic disengagement, had an association with higher grade point average, increased satisfaction with a student's institution, and increased feelings of acceptance on campus.[228]

AFFIRMING FAITH COMMUNITIES

Queer and questioning students who develop a relationship with a "higher power" may experience greater self-efficacy, sense of spirituality, sense of self and personal strength, and overall identity integration.[229] While queer and questioning students often experience exclusion and isolation in their religious communities, some queer and questioning students consider faith a source of strength in their lives by seeking out religious communities that are accepting of queer identities or participating in faith traditions that are typically accepting of queer and questioning individuals (e.g., Wicca, Paganism).[230] In addition to this, queer and questioning students are more engaged than heterosexual peers in formal and informal interfaith experiences across religious/worldview on campus, which "may be advantageous for personal and spiritual growth"[231] and facilitate informal

[226] Feinstein, et al., 2014
[227] Woodford, et al., 2015a
[228] Woodford & Kulick, 2015
[229] Rockenbach, Lo, & Mayhew, 2016
[230] Higa, et al., 2012
[231] Rockenbach, Lo, & Mayhew, 2016, p. 503- 504

engagement with diverse peers. This is unsurprising, as queer and questioning students must often reconcile sexuality with faith and explore different religious traditions to find a spiritual home.[232]

SUMMARY

Secondary and higher education institutions can cultivate individual and interpersonal protective mechanisms that help mitigate the psychological distress caused by heterosexist and monosexist environments. Self-esteem, self-compassion, identity disclosure, cognitive flexibility, bicultural and multicultural self-efficacy, and exercise are all protective factors that mitigate the effects of heterosexism and monosexism, and they reduce the presence of depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. Teachers/faculty, administrators, clinicians, and other staff can promote these factors by providing opportunities for queer and questioning students to positively develop and integrate their sexual identity.

Social support networks are critical to queer and questioning students' mental health and well-being. Community connectedness not only serves as a protective factor, it also buffers the negative effects of a lack of connectedness in other areas of a person's life. By encouraging students to pursue friendships with queer-affirming peers and participate in queer-affirming programs, schools and institutions can reduce social isolation and facilitate a sense of belonging. They can also provide access to role models, such as queer teachers/faculty and staff who are happy and thriving. Affirming and supportive family members and faith communities also positively contribute to queer and questioning students' self-esteem, sense of belonging, and overall well-being.

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[232] Rockenbach, Lo, & Mayhew, 2016

STRUCTURAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In addition to individual and interpersonal protective factors, institutional operations, policies, and facilities can also serve as protective factors that mitigate the impact of minority stress caused by heterosexism and monosexism. There are various ways that institutions can be inclusive and affirming places for queer and questioning students. This section will review structural protective factors for queer and questioning students that can be implemented in educational settings.

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES & PRACTICES

There are a myriad of policies and practices that can be modified or established to include queer and questioning students. These policies and practices assist in increasing queer and questioning students' sense of belonging and communicate that they are valued members of their school or college/university community.[233]

ADMISSIONS & ADMITTED/ENROLLED STUDENT SURVEYS

Campus Pride found that colleges/universities have found ways to collect information on sexual identity, including required/optional admissions questions, explicit encouragement to discuss sexual identity in written statement, and on enrollment/admitted student surveys where students may answer the questions directly or check off "LGBTQ" in special interests.[234] This may serve as a resource for high schools as well.

NON-DISCRIMINATION, ANTI-HARASSMENT/BULLYING, AND BIAS POLICIES

Although sexual orientation is currently covered under the umbrella of Title IX protections against sex discrimination and gender-based harassment, this may continue to be a contested interpretation of the federal law. To ensure coverage,

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[233] Vaccaro & Newman, 2016
[234] Campus Pride, 2019

high schools, colleges, and universities should include "sexual orientation" as an enumerated category in their non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and anti-bullying policies. Studies have found that enumerating sexual orientation in high school anti-bullying policies is associated with better mental health outcomes for queer and questioning youth, including reduced risk of suicide attempts.[235] All policies should include guidance for effectively administering and enforcing the policy including an established system of reporting, remediating harm, and data tracking.[236] Furthermore, institutions must provide that their non-discrimination policies include "admissions, employment, educational programs, athletics, student health insurance, gender-inclusive facilities (e.g., locker rooms, restrooms, residence hall rooms) and prohibition of harassment."[237] Such policies provide "affirming messages, decrease the perception that anti-LGBT discrimination and bias is officially sanctioned, and provide a sense of social support.[238] One national study[239] found that queer and questioning students in high schools with comprehensive, enumerated policies experienced the lowest levels of anti-LGBTQ victimization.

BIAS RESPONSE TEAMS

Creating an affirming environment for queer and questioning students to thrive is to first create a safe environment for students to live and learn. It is critical that high school and college/university administrators create clear and visible mechanisms for students to report bias, harassment, and discrimination from peers, faculty, and/or staff.[240] It is also critical that administrators, judicial affairs staff, Title IX staff, and public safety or school resource officers who may be involved in responding to or investigating an incident are capable of doing so in an affirming

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[235] Kosciw, et al., 2015; Kull, et al., 2016; Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013
[236] CDC, 2018
[237] Renn, 2017, para 7
[238] Strunk & Takewell, 2014
[239] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[240] Rankin & Garvey, 2015

manner. This includes being sensitive to issues of privacy and disclosure, fear of stigma, fear of being outed without their consent, and fear of law enforcement officers (e.g., public safety officers, school resource officers), the latter being especially salient when supporting queer and questioning BIPOC students.

School/Campus-Wide Positive and Restorative Discipline. With multiple studies[241] highlighting the disparate disciplining policies and practices in high schools that contribute to educational inequity, dropout, pushout, greater involvement in the justice system, and negative mental health outcomes for queer and questioning students, it is critical that administrators monitor disparities in disciplinary processes and outcomes and adopt positive and restorative discipline policies and practices. While these studies focus on high schools, colleges and universities may suffer from the same types of bias in their policies, practices, and personnel and they would similarly benefit from the adoption of positive and restorative conduct policies and practices. GLSEN's[242] recommendations for positive school discipline policies include:

- Adopt and adequately fund, at the state and federal levels, legislation that supports development of positive behavior intervention systems and supports.
- Adequately fund and support mental health professionals in schools so they can provide necessary resources and interventions to students facing adverse experiences inside and outside of the school setting; ensure that such professionals receive appropriate training to support all students, regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and religion.
- Monitor disparities in school climate by disaggregating relevant data by race, ethnicity, disability, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression), and national origin.
- Eliminate the use of corporal punishment in all schools.
- Eliminate the use of school resources officers (SROs).
- Eliminate seclusion and restraint practices in schools.

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[241] GLSEN, 2016; Palmer & Greytak, 2017; Snapp, et al., 2014; Snapp & Russell, 2016
[242] GLSEN, 2020

- Increase funding for the development and implementation of restorative practices in lieu of punitive and exclusionary discipline policies.
- Eliminate district and school policies and practices that discriminate, including policies related to clothing/dress code, and those that limit access to restrooms and other school facilities for transgender and gender non-conforming students.
- Eliminate zero-tolerance policies, which have a disparate impact on LGBTQ students and students of color. Ensure that schools have practices in place to guard against other inequitable enforcement of discipline policies.
- Employ graduated approaches that consider the seriousness of offenses to keep students in school whenever possible. Implement restorative justice practices that focus on resolving conflicts, repairing relationships, and building community.
- Provide embedded professional development and coaching for educators on culture competency and establishing equitable learning environments.

LGBTQ-FOCUSED TRAINING/EDUCATION

While institutional staff dedicated to serving the needs of queer and questioning students typically provide education and training, not all institutions have these staff resources, and many rely on community resources to fill this role. Irrespective of who is doing the training, it is a critical protective factor to provide education to teachers/faculty, staff, and students that prepares them to understand, support, and affirm the experiences and needs of queer and questioning students.[243] These forms of education and training may include consciousness-raising campaigns on inclusive language, sexual diversity, queer history and cultural practices, bystander intervention, and ally/accomplice-ship.

- Teachers/Faculty and Staff. Teachers/Faculty, in particular, should be educated on ways to create a more affirming classroom environment, given the chilly classroom climate that students reported in multiple studies. However, students interact with many folks on campus, from food service workers to financial aid representatives, to counselors, to the frontline staff in

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[243] Garvey & Rankin, 2015

the registrar's office. All of these individuals should engage in practices that affirm and empower queer and questioning students. Education and training are critical, particularly among those who think they need it the least. These educational workshops or series should teach educators how to infuse queer-affirming curriculum into syllabi or program curricula, use affirming language, reflect on the inherent biases in their discipline and the climate it creates, increase the visibility of their support and ability to serve as a resource to queer and questioning students, and be mindful of the heterosexist and monosexist language and assumptions that guides their instruction.[244]

- Peers. Peers assist students with building social support networks, feeling accepted, and feeling a sense of belonging among their peers.[245] Educating students on the experiences of queer and questioning peers dispels harmful myths and misinformation, facilitates greater understanding and appreciation of individual differences, reduces instances of harassment and discrimination, encourages respect and appreciation of the challenges facing queer and questioning students, and expands needed social support to mitigate isolation, alienation, and harassment that queer and questioning students face at school or on campus. It is important to note that while queer students have often bore the burden of providing this education to their schools/college/universities, it may force students to relive or reflect on past or current traumas in ways that exacerbate mental health outcomes. Instead, high school, college, and university personnel should work with queer and questioning student to elevate their narratives while relieving them of the burden of providing formal education to their peers, educators, and administrators.

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[244] Garvey & Rankin, 2015
[245] Astin, 1993

STUDENT SERVICES

While there are many structural factors that reduce symptoms of psychological distress, high school, college, and university administrators and teachers/faculty must do the work of creating a safe environment for their students. Visibility and comprehensively communicating a commitment to queer and questioning students, teachers/faculty, and staff and an institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion is a critical step in creating an affirming environment for queer and questioning students. The following sections will detail areas that may foster an affirming school or campus climate for queer and questioning students.

IDENTITY-BASED SUPPORT SERVICES

LGBTQ lounges, student organization offices/spaces, or staffed resource centers facilitate a trusted point-of-entry for students to disclose their identity, feel understood, and find social support. High school GSAs with a faculty advisor serve a similar role for queer and questioning youth.[246] These hubs serve as a place to highlight school and community resources, promote peer and professional mentorship, and referral to students under duress or in need of mental health support services. Recent research indicates that queer and questioning students expect to find comfort in a safe supportive network such as social networking spaces specifically for queer and questioning youth. These youth also highly value the ability to reach out to experts in times of crisis. For example, 98% believed that a safe social networking location for LGBTQ+ youth would be valuable to them.[247] Additionally, 87% of LGBTQ youth said it was important to them to reach out to a crisis intervention organization that focuses on LGBTQ youth. One study[248] found that the presence of and advertising for an LGBT Center or GSA contributed to a

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[246] Kosciw, et al., 2020
[247] The Trevor Project, 2019
[248] Kosciw, et al., 2020; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016

sense of comfort at school/on campus and a sense of belonging at their institution, regardless of whether or not resources were utilized by study participants.

CAMPUS HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES

Queer and questioning students report various negative experiences in campus housing that can be mitigated by greater queer and questioning student support, educational initiatives, training of student and professional staff, and community-building strategies. One study[249] found that queer and questioning students feel a greater sense of belonging/value when they have access to queer-affirming social support. LGBTQ+ themed living-learning communities or queer-focused housing programs/groups provide queer and questioning students with a concentration of resources and avenues for social support from queer and questioning peers. In addition to queer friends, students in this study also found the positive impact of having queer-affirming heterosexual roommates and floormates—relationships that sustained this study's participants throughout the college experience.[250]

Should a student be experiencing hostility with their assigned roommates, mitigating the mental health impacts may be best met by moving the student to a single room either permanently or temporarily (until they are able to find a more suitable roommate). This, however, "may not be space that [a queer-spectrum] student needs"[251] or may prove cost-prohibitive for a student who comes from a lower socioeconomic background. Institutions must take the intersection of identities into account when developing policies and practices in the housing setting. Moving a queer or questioning student into a higher cost room in order to remove them from a hostile living environment should trigger a cost-increase exemption.

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[249] Mollet, et al., 2020
[250] Mollet, et al., 2020
[251] Kortegast, 2017, p. 67

Furthermore, it is imperative to train staff, residence hall assistants (RAs), live-in faculty or administrators, and other building personnel on the experiences, needs, and interests of queer and questioning students—individuals who have a notable impact on the experiences of students as they manage campus life.[252] One study notes that residence life staff should be more proactive in educational efforts, increase verbal support of queer and questioning identities, and respond more swiftly and decisively to acts of heterosexism and/or monosexism experienced by queer and questioning students among their peers and staff alike.[253] Lastly, it is important to note the value of non-verbal support (e.g., pride flags, ally stickers) in fostering sense of belonging.[254]

CASE MANAGEMENT AND BASIC NEEDS RESOURCES

With the increasing demand for mental health services and growing need for wrap-around support, many high schools, colleges, and universities utilize case managers (e.g., social workers) to shepherd students through difficult times.[255] While queer and questioning students benefit from academic, physical, and mental health services, there may be multiple risk factors impacting their wellbeing that may be more comprehensively supported by also working with a case manager. For instance, the Trevor Project found that 29% of LGBTQ youth have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or run away, and of those who experienced housing instability, 28% reported a suicide attempt in the past year.[256] They also found that 30% of LGBTQ youth experienced food insecurity in the past month. Disaggregated by race, Native/Indigenous (50%), Latinx (36%), Multiracial (36%), and Black (35%) LGBTQ youth experienced food insecurity at significantly higher rates than White (27%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (18%) LGBTQ youth. More notably, LGBTQ youth who reported having trouble affording enough food in the past month were more

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[252] Mollet, et al., 2020
[253] Evans and Broido, 2009
[254] Vaccaro & Newman, 2016
[255] Adams, et al., 2014
[256] Trevor Project, 2020

than twice as likely to have attempted suicide in the past year than those who did not have trouble affording enough food.[257] One study found that queer and questioning college students were at greater risk for basic needs insecurity (e.g., housing insecurity, food insecurity) than their heterosexual peers with bisexual students being at the highest risk.[258] Case managers should receive formal training on the ways heterosexism and monosexism are associated with basic needs insecurity for queer and questioning students and have an awareness of affirming resources for food and housing.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH SERVICES

Students in a study of experiences with campus health/counseling centers suggest that all clinicians should receive formal training on queer and questioning students' mental and physical health needs and overall cultural competency to effectively address their own internalized heterosexism and monosexism. One study recommends the following questions be used to assess the extent to which mental and physical health services departments provide an affirming environment for queer and questioning students[259] [Note: We updated the language from the original questions for use in contemporary practice.]

- Are queer and questioning students and staff included on task forces and committees representing health issues?
- Do program advertisements include sexuality and relationship diversity and references?
- Do health fairs on campus include representation from queer and questioning student groups and community, state, and national agencies?
- Are considerations given to the safety of queer and questioning students on campus? Is the counseling center sensitive to social and legal issues involving sexual assault and abuse of these students? Is there awareness and cooperation with campus safety officers?
- Are threats to queer and questioning student health addressed regularly within the population? What programs address suicide, substance abuse,

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[257] The Trevor Project, 2021
[258] Goldrick-Rab, 2018
[259] McKee & Hays, 1994

safer sex, and bias/hate-related violence specifically for queer and questioning students?

- Does substance abuse programming include references to queer and questioning students? Are queer and questioning support groups available on campus? If not, are appropriate referrals known and offered on a regular basis?
- Does written educational material include references to queer and questioning students? Do health center resource areas and campus libraries have information, books, and other materials specific to queer and questioning students?
- Are there regular campus-wide programs dealing with queer and questioning students and health issues?
- Is sexuality- and relationship-inclusive language used in all written and oral materials and presentations (e.g., using "partner" instead of boyfriend/girlfriend)?
- Do health services staff regularly attend in-service training dealing with queer and questioning health issues?
- Within appointments, do staff use inclusive language when taking health histories or discussing sexuality with students?
- Are programs offered in health education and counseling services in which the concerns of queer and questioning students are addressed?
- Are health services staff comfortable in addressing the concerns of queer and questioning students in appointments? Are inclusive and affirming services offered to all students and staff?
- Are staff aware of the legal issues in dealing with sexual assault/rape for queer and questioning students?
- Are heterosexist or monosexist remarks in staff meetings and in the health center challenged and discussed as promoting discrimination?
- Are health services staff brought up to date on the status of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS/ HIV data and prevention strategies in the queer and questioning communities?
- Are physicians, gynecologists, and nurses sensitive to the health of queer and questioning people with uteruses? Are they available on a regular basis to consult with concerned students? If requested, are women and/or queer physicians and gynecologists available for student appointments?
- Are physicians, nurses, therapists, and others who write charts sensitive to maintaining the privacy of students' sexual identity or sexual practices when noted in medical records?

- Are queer staff hired, supported, and encouraged to come out and be known to students and staff?

SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCES

Campus resource providers of sexual assault services should integrate queer and questioning student needs into all aspects of their educational and support resources. Prevention education should not operate in a heterosexist and/or monosexist framework, such as prevention efforts designed for heterosexual men and women.[260] Educators should be up to date on prevention, sexual health, relationship and dating dynamics, and queer and questioning students' unique risk factors related to sexual violence and intimate partner violence. It should also be noted that educators should be able to provide intersectional trainings, advice, and resources. Moreover, prevention education for queer and questioning individuals should not just occur in the context of LGBTQ-targeted prevention education efforts in order to reach students who do not identity and/or affiliate with the LGBTQ community.[261]

It is imperative that health care professionals, emergency medical personnel, law enforcement, advocates, therapists, and support group facilitators are trained on sexuality-inclusive practices. These may include training on confidentiality and disclosure of one's sexual identity (e.g., leaving it to the victim to self-identify), ensuring privacy and explaining disclosure requirements (e.g., gender of alleged perpetrator), focus on victimization/injuries sustained (and not real or perceived sexual identity), attentiveness to sexuality-sensitive exam procedures, obtainment of explicit permission on who from a victim's support network may be contacted and/or briefed on a survivor's progress, and guidance on how to make a formal complaint if services are non-inclusive.

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[260] Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020
[261] Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020

CLASSROOM CLIMATE & CURRICULUM

To improve classroom climate for queer and questioning students, multiple approaches may be undertaken. Using measures related to classroom climate cited in one study, improving the classroom climate requires faculty to examine overall comfort of LGBTQ students in the classroom, include LGBTQ-related content or content written by LGBTQ-identified authors in the syllabus), refrain from use of non-heterosexist language or curriculum, and offer visible support for sexual and gender identity concerns.[262] Further, another study recommends that institutions:[263]

- Create centers for interdisciplinary study and cross-cultural teaching and learning, inclusive of LGBTQ+ issues, that offer the necessary bases for education and scholarship that does not take place in existing departments.
- Support active and collaborative learning that enables students to connect their personal experiences with their in-class learning.
- Reconfigure the classroom, for example, by encouraging students to assist in developing or changing the syllabus at the start of and during the semester.

ATHLETICS

The National College Athletics Association[264] recommends the following things to create an LGBTQ-affirming athletics department,

- LGBTQ inclusive non-discrimination policies within athletic departments
- LGBTQ inclusive codes of conduct that ban anti-LGBTQ conduct by players, coaches, athletics administrators and fans.
- LGBTQ affirming communications in all media communications and recruiting materials (media guides, community outreach, team campus brochures)
- Accessible resources available to coaches, players, and staff throughout the year
- Annual LGBTQ Inclusion trainings for staff and students

Additionally, given the importance of peer relationships and identity disclosure to positive mental health, athletic departments should create policies and enact practices that create a welcoming environment for queer and

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[262] Garvey & Rankin, 2015
[263] Rankin, 2006
[264] n.d.

questioning students to disclose their identity. One study found that female athletes who came out to teammates achieved greater self-acceptance and closer relationships with their teammates by coming out.[265]

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

In the summer of 2020, the Supreme Court found that "firing individuals because of their sexual orientation (or transgender status) violates Title VII's prohibition on discrimination because of sex" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020). This alone is a significant protective factor for queer and questioning student career development as it reinforces Title VII's applicability to discrimination on the basis of sexual identity. Additionally, social support (both general and identity-specific) that facilitates sexual identity disclosure and authentic engagement should be a central consideration for queer and questioning students' career development. Social support is a protective factor that ameliorates some of the career indecision and adjustment issues facing students with minoritized sexual identities.[266] Social support may take the form of personal and professional mentorship and advising, access to visible queer role models in the workplace or field of study and having coworkers and workplace leaders that create an affirming environment for queer and questioning employees.

Queer and questioning students also benefit from the individual protective factor of vocational resilience[267] (e.g., the ability to bounce back from adverse experiences) in the face of hardships in the career development process. Interventions[268] that career counselors can make include examining one's own biases, affirming queer and questioning identities and experiences, learning about sexual identity development, familiarizing oneself with workplace culture as it

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[265] Stoelting, 2011
[266] Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2010
[267] Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2010
[268] Gedro, 2009

relates to queer and questioning people, talking openly about employment discrimination and self-advocacy, providing identity-based resources (e.g., professional networks, alumni connections), and helping students overcome internalized negative stereotypes.

SUMMARY

This literature review includes a combination of individual-, interpersonal-, and structural-level risk factors that contribute to psychological distress among queer and questioning students, as well as individual, interpersonal, and structural protective factors that mitigate psychological distress. Educational institutions are responsible for supporting positive identity development, social connectedness, and establishing or modifying policies and practices that reduce symptoms of psychological distress and communicate to queer and questioning students that they are valued and that they belong. These changes include collecting data on students' sexual identities, enumerating non-discrimination, harassment/bullying, and bias policies to include "sexual orientation," clarifying reporting and response processes, implementing bias response teams, and adopting school/campus-wide positive and restorative discipline practices. High schools, colleges, and universities should also provide ongoing LGBTQ-focused learning opportunities to students, teachers/faculty, staff (e.g., librarians, clinicians, coaches), and administrators for continuing education and to foster an environment of awareness and understanding.

To create more inclusive and affirming student services, high schools, colleges, and universities can create and/or increase resources dedicated to identity-based support services (e.g., LGBTQ+ and Multicultural offices and dedicated staff), offer LGBTQ+ themed residential communities, and provide culturally competent case management, mental and physical health services, sexual violence resources, and career development services. In the classroom, teachers/faculty can include LGBTQ-related content or scholars in their curriculum, and address cultures of heterosexism and monosexism in their courses and

respective academic departments. Last, athletic departments can foster inclusive environments for queer and questioning students by empowering students to express themselves and to address heterosexist and monosexist conduct by players, coaches, athletics administration, and fans.

FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

This literature review provides a comprehensive overview of contemporary research and scholarship on mental health risk factors and protective factors for queer and questioning high school and college/university students. In the creation of this document, we identified areas that may require additional investigation or review as well as areas that readers may want to explore in further depth. For instance, this literature review does not explore students' experiences in educational settings that are partially or fully online. It also does not explicitly expound on the role of social media in the lives of queer and questioning students. With the ubiquitous presence of social media in the lives of youth and increasing opportunities for online education, these topics may be worth examining, especially if they are areas of concern at particular institutions.

Additionally, this literature review demonstrates the ways that students with multiple minoritized identities face unique sets of circumstances that shape their experiences, risk factors, and protective factors. We do not, however, provide in-depth analyses of queer and questioning affinity communities, nor do we address rural/urban differences or other factors (e.g., nationality, citizenship status) that may differentiate the experiences of the diverse students who fall under the queer and questioning umbrella. Equally, we did not find studies that disaggregated "queer" or "other" into subsets of sexual identities like asexual, pansexual, etc. We encourage readers to explore our primary sources in the reference section to learn more about specific topics/communities and to advocate for institutional, district, and national data collection processes that will provide you with the information you seek.

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