PROUD & THRIVING

PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENT
& LITERATURE REVIEWS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF LGBTQ+
HIGH SCHOOL, COLLEGE, AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

JUNE 2021

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.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

We believe that language matters, and we are intentional about the terms we use in this project. In this report, we use **LGBTQ+** as shorthand to describe an incredibly heterogeneous population of people who hold a minoritized gender and/or sexuality, with the plus sign acknowledging the vast range of identities beyond Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. When discussing sexual identity specifically, we use the phrase **queer and questioning.** Among many LGBTQ+ people and scholars, 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. It includes people who identify asexual, demisexual, fluid, omnisexual, pansexual, and more. The term questioning is included 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.

Similarly, we use **trans and non-binary** as an umbrella term for people who hold a sex, gender identity, and/or gender expression that deviates from their sex assigned at birth and the characteristics associated with this sex designation (male = men = masculine; female = woman = feminine). While these two terms are not mutually exclusive, we separate them to acknowledge that the word trans has become increasingly associated with binary-identified people. Trans and non-binary encapsulates those who identify as agender, aggressive, agokwe, bigender, female, genderfluid, genderqueer, male, two-spirit, nádleehí, and/or transsexual, among many other identities. Likewise, the term **cisgender** (including cis or cissexual) refers to those who have a gender (or sex) identity and expression that are congruent with the sex they were assigned at birth.

This project also uses the terms **heterosexism, monosexism, and cissexism,** instead of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. Phobias narrowly depict individual- and interpersonal-level fears, dislikes, and aversions while -isms not only capture attitudes and beliefs, they also describe institutions, social structures, and cultural norms. Heterosexism and monosexism are ideological systems that denigrate and stigmatize any behavior, attraction, identity, or relationship that falls outside heterosexuality or the exclusive desire for one gender, respectively. Similarly, cissexism depicts ideological systems that denigrate and stigmatize any behavior, expression, body, or identity that falls outside of a fixed, immutable binary sex model (male = man = masculine versus female = woman = feminine). Paralleling and intersecting with racism, sexism, ableism, and other -isms, this language allows us to critically examine the individual, interpersonal, and structural factors that shape the lives of LGBTQ+ students.

Additionally, we intentionally use the term minoritized and the acronym BIPOC in this project. While underrepresented, underserved, at-risk, vulnerable, and minority may be useful in some contexts, they can also elicit deficit-based stereotypes. Instead, minoritized calls attention to the processes by which groups of people are disempowered and marginalized. It is a reminder that institutions, communities, and individual actors create the environment in which LGBTQ+ students live and learn. We use BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) instead of POC or "people of color" because 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 racism.

OVERVIEW

Heterosexism, monosexism, and cissexism remain a pervasive threat to the well-being of LGBTQ+ high school, college, and university students. Heterosexist, monosexist, and cissexist policies and practices create unsafe and inequitable learning environments and anti-LGBTQ+ stigma leaves LGBTQ+ students to grapple with self-acceptance and positive identity development, navigate compromised social support networks, and endure significantly higher rates of mental distress, interpersonal violence, and self-injury than their heterosexual and cisgender peers.[1]

The Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health 2021,[2] which captured the experiences of 35,000 LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13-24, found that 42% of LGBTQ youth reported seriously considering attempting suicide in the past year. The rate of reported suicide attempts in the past year is similarly grim (15%), especially for LGBTQ youth who are 13-17 years old (20%), transgender and nonbinary (20%), Native/Indigenous (31%), Black (21%), multiracial (21%), and/or Latinx (18%), as compared to LGBTQ youth who are 18-24 years old (9%), cisgender (10%), Asian/Pacific Islander (12%), and/or White (12%).

> *LGBTQ+ high school, college, and university students urgently need administrators to understand their experiences and implement comprehensive and sustainable changes that lead to better mental health outcomes.*

The Proud & Thriving Project is designed to equip high school, college, and university administrators and other key stakeholders with the resources they need to accomplish this goal. This document is the starting point. It contains a summary of two comprehensive literature reviews exploring mental health concerns for LGBTQ+ students (with links to the full papers), items to consider while awaiting the release of action steps in the full project report, as well as next steps for the project. In order to thoroughly examine the factors that contribute to or exacerbate psychological distress (risk factors) and factors that buffer against or reduce psychological distress (protective factors) for LGBTQ+ high school, college, and university students, the project team created separate literature reviews for queer and questioning students and for trans and non-binary students. Each review approaches the topic from an intersectional lens in order to highlight the disparate experiences of BIPOC LGBTQ+ students and other LGBTQ+ students who hold multiple minoritized identities. Furthermore, the reviews differentiate mental health trends in secondary and higher education settings, and, later in this document, distinct considerations are offered that are relevant to each setting.

LITERATURE REVIEWS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY[3]

There is a significant correlation between mental health and educational outcomes, retention, and completion. Multiple studies[4] on high school, college, and university 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. As this review demonstrates, there are sizable mental health disparities between LGBTQ+ students and their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, especially when it comes to LGBTQ+ BIPOC students and trans and non-binary students. The data signal an urgent need for administrators to develop a comprehensive understanding of LGBTQ+ students' experiences and implement a thoughtful and thorough approach to intervention.

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(1)   Greathouse, et al., 2018; Johns et, al., 2019, 2020; The Trevor Project, 2020
(2)   The Trevor Project, 2021
(3)   For a visual representation of Risk Factors and Protective Factors, see Table 1 (p. 10) and Table 2 (p. 11)
(4)   Eisenberg, et al., 2009; Eisenberg & Lipson, 2018; Kolbe, 2019; Rasberry, et al., 2017

Risk Factors: Queer & Questioning Students

Queer and questioning students experience individual, interpersonal, and structural risk factors due to a climate of prejudice and discrimination. Heterosexist and monosexist stigma leave queer and questioning youth to grapple with self-acceptance, navigate compromised social support networks, and endure signifcantly higher rates of mental distress and self-injury than their heterosexual peers.[5] Individual risk factors arising from internalized heterosexism and/or monosexism include identity concealment, perceived budensomeness, and thwarted belongingness, which are linked to depression, suicidality, and coping mechanisms that exacerbate negative mental health outcomes.[6] Consequently, rates of substance misuse, eating disorders, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal ideation/attempts are higher for queer and questioning students than for their heterosexual peers.[7]

In terms of interpersonal risk factors, queer and questioning students face rejection and victimization from unsupportive peers, family and caregivers, faith communities, as well as from teachers/faculty, staff, and high school, college, and university administrators.[8] Where schools can and should be a site of relationship and community building, queer and questioning students experience greater rates of interpersonal victimization than their heterosexual peers, including higher rates of bullying, harassment, physical assault, and sexual violence, especially for BIPOC students.[9] This is compounded by the reality that many schools lack non-discrimination and anti-harassment/bullying policies that include sexual orientation, as well as clear processes for reporting, responding to, and remediating victimization. While queer and questioning students lack a sense of safety at school compared to their heterosexual peers, they are also disciplined at disproportionately higher rates, leaving them at greater risk of dropping out or transferring.[10] Other risk factors for queer and questioning students that exist at the structural level are the lack of resources and student services (e.g., housing, physical health and counseling services, and career services) that specifically address their needs and experiences, pressure to conform to heterosexual norms on athletic teams, invisibility in surveys and institutional data, and barriers to academic engagement (e.g., excluded from curriculum, classroom bullying or invisibility).[11]

Risk Factors: Trans & Non-Binary Students

Due to a climate of prejudice and discrimination, trans and non-binary students experience various individual, interpersonal, and structural risk factors that contribute to and/or exacerbate psychological distress. Cissexist stigma and the systemic reinforcement of the gender binary leave trans and non-binary youth to grapple with self-acceptance, navigate dysfunctional healthcare systems and compromised social support networks, and endure significantly higher rates of mental distress and self-injury than their cisgender peers.[12] Individual risk factors arising from internalized cissexism include lack of pride in trans and non-binary identity, investment in "passing" as cisgender, social isolation, and shame, which are linked to maladaptive behaviors and coping mechanisms that exacerbate negative mental health outcomes.[13]

(5)   Greathouse, et al., 2018; Johns, et al., 2020; The Trevor Project, 2020
(6)   Hall, 2018; Kulick, et al., 2017; Silva, et al. 2015
(7)   Greathouse, et al., 2018; Ivey-Stephenson, et al., 2020; Johns, et al., 2020; Parker & Harrigar, 2020; The Trevor Project, 2020
(8)   Duran, 2019; Kosciw, et al., 2020; The Trevor Project, 2020; The Trevor Project, 2021
(9)   CDC, 2019; Greathouse, et al., 2018; Interfaith Youth Core, 2014; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Puckett, et al., 2017
(10)   GLSEN, 201; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Palmer & Greytak, 2017; Snapp, et al., 2015
(11)   Greathouse, et al., 2018; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Pariera, et al., 2021
(12)   Greathouse et al., 2018; Johns et, al., 2019; The Trevor Project, 2020
(13)   Bocktin, et al., 2020

Consequently, rates of substance misuse, eating disorders, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal ideation/attempts are higher for trans and non-binary students than for their cisgender peers.[14]

Like queer and questioning students, trans and non-binary students face rejection and victimization from unsupportive peers, family and caregivers, faith communities, as well as teachers/faculty, staff, and school administrators.[15] Where schools can and should be a site of relationship and community building, trans and non-binary students experience greater rates of interpersonal victimization than their cisgender peers, including higher rates of bullying, harassment, physical assault, and sexual violence, especially for BIPOC students.[16] This is compounded by the reality that many schools and institutions lack chosen name processes, gender-inclusive facilities and athletics teams, non-discrimination and anti-harassment/bullying policies that include gender identity or expression, and clear processes for reporting, responding to, and remediating victimization. While trans and non-binary students lack a sense of safety and privacy, they are also disciplined at higher rates than their cisgender peers, leaving them at greater risk for dropping out or transferring.[17] At the structural level, additional risk factors include a lack of resources, facilities, information systems, and student services (e.g., counseling services, housing) that account for and address their needs and experiences, invisbility in surveys and institutional data, and barriers to academic engagement (e.g., excluded from curriculum, classroom bullying).[18]

Protective Factors: Queer & Questioning Students

Protective factors typically exist in the form of individual characteristics such as personality traits or coping skills and external characteristics, such as supportive environments, protective interpersonal relationships, or access to medical services that bolster health. There are many individual, interpersonal, and structural protective factors for queer and questioning students that can buffer against and/or reduce psychological distress caused by a heterosexist and monosexist learning environment. Individual protective factors for queer and questioning students include positive identity development and integration, self-esteem, self-compassion, identity disclosure, cognitive flexibility, bicultural and multicultural self-efficacy, and exercise, all of which can be fostered in a supportive and affirming learning environment.[19] Similarly, community connectedness and support from affirming peers, family, mentors, and faith communities can reduce queer and questioning students' levels of depression, suicidal ideation, and social anxiety while also promoting self-esteem.[20]

Taken individually or collectively, these environmental stressors have a deleterious impact on psychological distress and communicate to LGBTQ+ students that they are neither valued nor considered worthy of attention by their institutions. Further, when a school or institution's policies, practices, and provisions exclude, punish, and/or neglect LGBTQ+ students, they engage in institutional betrayal by doing harm to students who depend on them to provide a safe and equitable learning environment.

(14)   Greathouse et al., 2018; Johns et, al., 2019; The Trevor Project, 2020
(15)   Greytak, et al., 2016; James, et al., 2016; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Nicolazzo, 2016; The Trevor Project, 2020
(16)   Greathouse, et al., 2018; Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2020; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Vance, et al., 2021
(17)   GLSEN, 2016; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Palmer & Greytak, 2017; Snapp, et al., 2015
(18)   Nicolazzo, 2016; Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2018; Woodford, et al., 2017
(19)   Hall, 2018; Johns, et. al, 2018; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016; Woodford, et al., 2017
(20)   Foster et al., 2017

Due to the burden of negative health outcomes experienced by LGBTQ+ students, it is important for high schools, colleges, and universities to cultivate protective mechanisms that contribute to the development of students' resilience.

Encouraging students to pursue friendships with queer-affirming peers, as well as participating in queer-affirming programs, could also reduce social isolation and facilitate a sense of belonging.[21]

At the structural level, policies and practices can be modified or established to increase queer and questioning students' sense of belonging.[22] These include collecting sexual identity in enrollment data, enumerating sexual orientation in non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and anti- bullying policies, creating clear reporting and response mechanisms, and instituting school-wide positive and restorative discipline practices. Further, schools and institutions can foster an inclusive and affirming climate for queer and questioning students by providing LGBTQ+ focused learning opportunities to students, teachers/faculty, staff, coaches, administration, and board members. Where there are deficits, high schools, colleges, and universities can improve or add LGBTQ+ focused services, academic curriculum, and residential communities as well as assess and update case management practices, mental and physical health services, career counseling services and sexual violence prevention resources to ensure they're meeting the needs of queer and questioning students.

Protective Factors: Trans & Non-Binary Students

Correspondingly, there are various protective factors for trans and non-binary students that can buffer against and/or reduce psychological distress caused by a cissexist learning environment.[23] Individual and interpersonal protective factors include positive identity development and integration, self-esteem, self-efficacy and proactive agency, body image and congruence, identity disclosure, being treated with respect and dignity, and having affirming social support networks.[24] As is the case for queer and questioning students, encouraging trans and non-binary students to pursue friendships with gender-affirming peers, as well as participating in trans and/or non-binary affirming programs, could also reduce social isolation and facilitate a sense of belonging.[25]

By the same token, connectedness to a broader trans and non-binary community reduces fearfulness and suicidality and having trans and non-binary role models and mentors increases academic and career aspirations.[26] At the structural level, policies and practices should be modified or established to increase trans and non-binary students' sense of belonging.[27]

(21)   Hall, 2018
(22)   Garvey & Rankin, 2015; GLSEN, 2020; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016
(23)   Garvey & Rankin, 2015; GLSEN, 2020; The Trevor Project, 2020
(24)   Garvey and Rankin, 2015; Johns, et al., 2018; Singh, et al., 2013; The Trevor Project, 2020
(25)   Malatino, 2020; Nicolazzo, 2017; Singh, 2013; The Trevor Project, 2020;
(26)   Johns, et al., 2018; Malatino, 2020
(27)   Garvey & Rankin, 2015; GLSEN, 2020; Johns, et al., 2018; Kosciw, et al., 2020; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016

These include making facilities, athletic teams, and information systems trans-inclusive, collecting chosen name/pronouns/gender identity in enrollment data, enumerating gender identity or expression in non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and anti-bullying policies, creating clear reporting and response mechanisms, and and instituting school-wide positive and restorative discipline practices.

Schools and institutions can foster an affirming climate for trans and non-binary students by providing LGBTQ+ focused training and education to students, teachers/faculty, staff, coaches, administration, and board members. Where there are deficits, high schools, colleges, and universities can improve or add LGBTQ+ focused services, academic curriculum, and residential communities as well as assess and update case management practices, mental and physical health services, career counseling services, and sexual violence prevention resources to ensure they're meeting the needs of trans and non-binary students.

COMPLETE LITERATURE REVIEWS

For a thorough and comprehensive exploration of risk factors, protective factors, and additional mental health considerations for LGBTQ+ high school, college, and university students, you can access the full literature reviews by clicking on the links below:

Click here **PROUD & THRIVING: Exploring Mental Health Considerations for LGBQ+ Students**

Click here **PROUD & THRIVING: Exploring Mental Health Considerations for Trans & Non-Binary Students**

Connectedness to a broader trans and non-binary community reduces fearfulness and suicidality and having trans and non-binary role models and mentors increases academic and career aspirations.

TABLE 1. RISK FACTORS

Individual Risk Factors	**Queer & Questioning Students:** • Internalized heterosexism and/or monosexism; • Identity concealment, perceived burdensomeness, and thwarted belongingness. **Trans & Non-Binary Students:** • Internalized cissexism; • Lack of identity pride, investment in "passing" as cisgender, social isolation, and shame.
Interpersonal Risk Factors	**All LGBTQ+ Students:** • Unsupportive social networks and rejection from peers, family and caregivers, faith communities, teacher/faculty, staff, and administrators; • Interpersonal victimization including bullying, harassment, physical assault, and sexual violence.
Structural Risk Factors	**Queer & Questioning Students:** • Non-discrimination, anti-harassment/bullying policies do not enumerate sexual orientation. **Trans & Non-Binary Students:** • Non-discrimination, anti-harassment/bullying policies do not enumerate gender identity or expression; • Gender-segregated facilities (e.g., restrooms, locker rooms, housing); • Inability to put chosen names and pronouns into student information systems. **All LGBTQ+ Students:** • Lack of clear processes for reporting, responding to, and remediating victimization; • LGBTQ+ self-identification excluded from surveys and institutional data; • Targeting and inequitable enforcement of disciplinary policies and practices; • Lack of resources and student services that address their needs and experiences (e.g., LGBTQ+ office and staff, culturally competent physical health, counseling, and career services); • Barriers to academic engagement (e.g., excluded from curriculum, classroom bullying or invisibility).

TABLE 2. PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Individual Protective Factors	**Queer & Questioning Students:** • Self-compassion, cognitive flexibility, bicultural and multicultural self-efficacy, and exercise. **Trans & Non-Binary Students:** • Self-efficacy, proactive agency, and body image and congruence. **All LGBTQ+ Students:** • Positive identity development and integration, self-esteem, and identity disclosure.
Interpersonal Protective Factors	**Trans & Non-Binary Students:** • Connectedness to trans and non-binary community; • Having trans and non-binary role models and mentors. **All LGBTQ+ Students:** • Affirming peers, family, mentors, and faith communities; • Friendships and community connectedness.
Structural Protective Factors	**Queer & Questioning Students:** • Enumerating sexual orientation in non-discrimination, anti-harassment/bullying policies; **Trans & Non-Binary Students:** • Enumerating gender identity or expression in non-discrimination, anti-harassment/bullying policies; • Gender-inclusive information systems, athletic teams, and facilities (e.g., restrooms, locker rooms, housing). **All LGBTQ+ Students:** • Clear processes for reporting, responding to, and remediating victimization; • School-wide positive and restorative discipline practices; • Collecting chosen name, pronouns, gender identity, and sexual orientation on surveys, enrollment data, and institutional data; • Providing LGBTQ+ focused training and education to students, teachers/faculty, staff, coaches, administration, and board members; • LGBTQ+ focused services, academic curriculum, and residential communities; • Culturally competent case management, mental and physical health services, career counseling services, and sexual violence prevention resources that address the needs of LGBTQ+ students.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

LGBTQ+ students at secondary and higher education institutions share many overlapping features, however there are also distinctive qualities to each of these environments that require different considerations. As you prepare for the release of practical action steps in the full report, we want you to keep the following in mind.

Considerations for all schools:

- Action steps will likely include suggestions for education and training. How will you implement or upgrade educational opportunities for students, teachers/faculty, staff, administration, and other members of your school community?

- How do you collect data on your LGBTQ+ students? How might you incorporate questions about sexuality and gender identity in school surveys and admissions or enrollment forms?

- Are your incoming and returning trans and non-binary students able to have their chosen name reflected in your student information systems? What might you need to do in order to prepare for this?

- Do your non-discrimination and anti-harassment/bullying policies explicitly enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity or expression? If not, how might you go about doing so?

- Action steps will likely include suggestions for gender-inclusive facilities (e.g., locker rooms, restrooms, dormitories). How will you transition your gender-segregated facilities? How will you prioritize short-term and long-term changes in your budget?

Considerations for high schools:

- Parents, caregivers, and guardians may be a risk factor or a protective factor in the lives of LGBTQ+ high school students. How might you leverage their support and advocacy? How might you create a supportive and affirming environment for students to be their authentic selves at school knowing that they may have to hide who they are at home?

- Do you have a social and emotional learning curriculum? If so, how might you incorporate protective factors for LGBTQ+ students?

- Are your school-wide discipline policies and practices positive and restorative? If not, how might you transition your current policies and practices in order to adopt this protective factor for LGBTQ+ students?

Considerations for colleges and universities:

- Familiarizing yourself with high school trends will help you prepare for your incoming classes of LGBTQ+ students. What buy-in do you have or need from senior leadership to create a more LGBTQ+ inclusive and affirming institution?

- If your institution has buildings (domestically and internationally), do students, faculty, staff, and campus visitors know which ones have gender-inclusive facilities? Are they located all across campus? Are they easy to find?

- Does your institution have an office/center, personnel, and financial resources specifically dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ students? If not, what does your direct support for LGBTQ+ students look like? Which needs are these resources meeting, which are still unmet, and how do you know?

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