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A guide for innovation in LGBQ+ youth peer relationships research

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A B S T R A C T

LGBQ+ youth (youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or with diverse identities other than straight or heterosexual) contend with unique stressors in the context of their peer relationships. They also access critical support from peers. These circumstances likely influence how LGBQ+ youth navigate and experience their relationships. Nevertheless, research remains limited in its breadth and depth of coverage of LGBQ+ youth's peer relationships. We suggest ways to advance such research within the following areas: (a) identity development in the peer context; (b) identity disclosure and "coming out" to peers; (c) initiating, developing, and maintaining friendships under marginalizing conditions; (d) homophily or diversity in LGBQ+ youth's friendships; (e) visualizing LGBQ+ youth's positions in their peer networks; (f)

bias-based harassment, hypervigilance, and rejection sensitivity; and (g) peer action and advocacy. This work could yield richer understandings of how LGBQ+ youth cultivate meaningful, lasting peer relationships and thrive.

Peers play a central role in shaping youth's development (Bukowski, Laursen, & Rubin, 2018). Their influence on health and well-being, attitudes, and behaviors is well documented (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Bukowski et al., 2018; Sijtsema & Lindenberg, 2018). Nevertheless, peer research remains limited in scope among youth from marginalized groups in society. We focus here on youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or with diverse identities other than straight or heterosexual (LGBQ+ youth) and their peer relationships (see Underwood and Kurup, in this special issue, for their focus on gender diversity within peer relationships; certain issues we discuss here could apply to trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse youth as well).

LGBQ+ youth contend with unique stressors as a result of marginalization and stigma in society (Goldbach & Gibbs, 2017; Meyer, 2003). They continue to experience greater victimization at school than their heterosexual peers, with a large majority of LGBQ+ youth reporting bias-based harassment due to their sexual orientation (Kosciw, Clark, Truong, & Zongrone, 2020). Discrimination is linked to myriad health risks and health disparities for LGBQ+ youth relative to their hetero- sexual peers. These disparities can be found across many areas including mental and physical health, substance use, and academic performance, among others (Russell & Fish, 2016). All of these experiences likely come to bear significantly on how LGBQ+ youth navigate and experience their peer relationships.

The unique issues that LGBQ+ youth face in the context of their peer relationships warrant greater focus. There are a host of questions pertaining to LGBQ+ youth's peer relationships that carry implications for promoting their

resilience and thriving. We aim to highlight some of these questions (see Table 1) in a call to action to expand the scope and nuance of our attention to the attributes, roles, and influences of peers in the lives of LGBQ+ youth.

Frameworks for studying peer relationships among LGBQþ youth

Youth develop within a larger social context. As such, youth's peer relationships can be sources of stress or strength to them as they develop. The relational developmental systems paradigm is a meta-theory which draws from multiple specific ecological development models to under- score the need to examine youth in context (Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). In brief, youth are embedded within various social systems, ranging from proximal systems (e.g., peer groups or families) to more distal systems (e.g., communities or societies; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Systems can overlap and exert reciprocal influences. Thus, there can be bidirectional influences between youth and their environments. In some ways, the broader social context shapes youth's experiences and their development. In other ways, youth themselves influence their environments and enact changes within them. The relational developmental systems paradigm emphasizes that youth are active participants in their own development and subsequently have an ability to adapt. Peer relationships can be a source of support to promote thriving as well as resilience in the face of adversity (Lerner et al., 2015). We reasonably assume that many of these general processes apply to LGBQ+ youth just as they do for heterosexual youth; their peer relationships show many similarities. At the same time, there are important differences between LGBQ+ youth and heterosexual youth in their peer relationships, in part due to the marginalization of LGBQ+ youth as they form and develop their relationships.

Table 1

Sample questions to advance research on LGBQ+ youth's peer relationships.

Identity Development in the Context of Peer Relationships

- How do peers play positive socializing and supportive roles as youth develop their sexual orientation identities?
- How do peers come to form a collective, generally shared understanding of identities as they emerge within various peer networks?
- How might youth's development of their sexual orientation identity be shaped by their other social identities and backgrounds, language, and the identities of their peers?

Identity Disclosure and "Coming Out" to Peers

- What social norms, behaviors, and other attributes of LGBQ+ youth's social networks and peers encourage them to disclose their identities to their peers?
- In a time of expanding social transparency and decreasing privacy, how do LGBQ+ youth navigate disclosure in their coming out process, especially selective disclosure?
- What roles do peers play in protecting LGBQ+ youth who are more out about their identities from potential social risks?

Initiating, Developing, and Maintaining Friendships under Marginalizing Conditions

- What features do LGBQ+ youth prioritize when determining with whom to form friendships? Are there shared beliefs, values, interests, or behaviors that they tend to prioritize?
- What unique interpersonal or social factors affect friendship satisfaction between LGBQ+ youth and their LGBQ+ or heterosexual friends? To what extent do minority stressors elevate the instability of LGBQ+ youth's friendships?
- What affirming characteristics of social environments promote the stability of LGBQ+ youth's peer friendships in the face of broader societal stigma and oppression?
- What minority stressors or unique sources of strength contribute to certain patterns of relationship development

between LGBQ+ youth and their friends over time?

Homophily or Diversity in LGBQ+ Youth's Friendships

- To what extent does similarity on sexual orientation come into play as LGBQ+ or heterosexual adolescents identify and form friendships? How might this be informed by youth's other salient social identities and backgrounds?

- What provisions are afforded by intergroup friendships among LGBQ+ youth and heterosexual youth?

- What are the challenges to maintaining intergroup friendships between LGBQ+ and heterosexual peers? What factors increase their potential stability?

- Do LGBQ+ youth prioritize similarity on some characteristics for friendships with heterosexual peers and other characteristics for friendships with LGBQ+ peers? How may prioritized characteristics vary based on LGBTQ+ youth's identity development?

Visualizing LGBQ+ Youth's Positions in their Peer Networks

- How are LGBQ+ youth positioned within their peer groups; or more broadly, how are their peer groups positioned within a larger social network? Where might some LGBQ+ youth be at in proximity to supportive resources and peers, and what may be barriers or pathways to access supportive individuals and spaces?

- How do LGBQ+ youth in positions of prestige socialize LGBQ+ affirming attitudes and behaviors within their networks?

- How does cohesion among LGBQ+ youth and their peers impact their ability to mobilize and respond to instances of discrimination?

Bias-based Harassment, Hypervigilance, and Rejection Sensitivity

- How do peers respond to bias-based harassment? What responses do LGBQ+ youth prefer, and ultimately, which are

most effective?

- How do rejection sensitivity and hypervigilance affect ways in which LGBQ+ youth interact with their peers or act as barriers to friendship formation and stability?

Peer Action and Advocacy

- To what extent do youth's efforts to raise awareness of and counteract discrimination affect others in their social networks more broadly? How does this process unfold within a network, and how do certain network characteristics facilitate or inhibit it from occurring?
- How do LGBQ+ youth build coalitions with individuals and groups in their larger network who experience similar or unique constellations of oppression or privilege?
- How do LGBQ+ youth engage in advocacy with peers through social media?

Alongside these general theories of youth development, there are models that focus on the social experiences and development of marginalized youth. These models include minority stress models (Goldbach & Gibbs, 2017; Meyer, 2003), the integrative model (García Coll et al., 1996), and others (e.g., Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory [PVEST]; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). They highlight unique stressors faced by youth in marginalized populations while also pointing to sources of strength and resilience. Most notably, LGBQ+ youth face discrimination (e.g., harassment, exclusion, oppressive policies), stigma, and invisibility in society, which can compromise their well-being through social isolation and other processes (Hatzenbuehler, 2009). Within a society that perpetuates marginalization, stigma, and invisibility of LGBQ+ youth, some peers and peer experiences may be sources of stress for LGBQ+ youth. Protective factors and supportive social settings (e.g., referred to as promoting environments in the integrative model; García Coll et al., 1996) can facilitate LGBQ+ youth's adaptation in response to

such oppression. In this way, peers could be key sources of support and promote thriving and social connection for LGBQ+ youth. In this paper, we suggest how peer researchers can consider both the risk and potential of LGBQ+ youth's peer relationships in order to advance the field.

We focus specifically on LGBQ+ youth's peer friendships. Other types of peer relationships exist, such as romantic (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009) or antipathetic relationships (Card, 2010), and they too deserve attention among LGBQ+ youth. Still, with attention to peer friendships, we elaborate on needed work in the following areas: (a) identity development in the peer context; (b) identity disclosure and "coming out" to peers; (c) initiating, developing, and maintaining friendships under marginalizing conditions; (d) homophily or diversity in LGBQ+ youth's friendships; (e) visualizing LGBQ+ youth's positions in their peer networks; (f) bias-based harassment, hypervigilance, and rejection sensitivity; and (g) peer action and advocacy.

Identity development in the context of peer relationships

Sexual orientation identity development is a part of the larger process of identity formation that occurs throughout adolescence, a hall- mark of this developmental period (Meeus, 2011). Likewise, it can be seen as part of the process by which individuals come to develop their broader self-concept during adolescence (Byrne & Shavelson, 1996). Much attention has been given to racial and ethnic identity development among youth of color (Uman˜a-Taylor et al., 2014), as well as to gender identity development (Kornienko, Santos, Martin, & Granger, 2016). Research also has considered how youth's self-concepts are shaped in part by their minority identities and living within a majority context (Santo et al., 2013).

Sexual orientation identity development models have evolved from stage-based models wherein one's identity is assumed to be fixed (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989), to models that specify dimensions of sexual orientation identity and which assume that one's identity can be fluid (e. g., Diamond, 2008; Katz-Wise, Reisner, Hughto, & Keo-Meier, 2016). Furthermore, scholars have

emphasized that sexual orientation identity development applies to all individuals, including those who may identify as heterosexual (Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002).

A number of adolescents indicate that they are exploring, questioning, or not yet sure of their sexual orientation identity (Glover, Galliher, & Lamere, 2009; Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009; Shearer et al., 2016; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). Adolescents who adopt a particular sexual orientation identity may continue to develop a richer understanding of their identity over time, while some youth also show a degree of fluidity in their identities, attractions, or behaviors (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). On that note, there is interest in the role of a stable self-concept as a part of identity development among LGBQ+ youth (known as self-continuity; Martin-Storey, Recchia, & Santo, in press).

Identity development is shaped by one's social and cultural context (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). This could apply to sexual orientation identity development because an individual's sexual orientation identity conveys, in part, their relational orientation to others (e.g., one's romantic or sexual attraction or behavior in relation to others). Peers may shape how youth come to understand their sexual orientation identities. Youth's self-concept and self-expression can be affected by the feedback or reactions they receive from their peers. In some cases, this can be a source of stress. For instance, some youth use homophobic behavior to police gender role conformity (Pascoe, 2012), and in one study, youth who experienced homophobic name-calling from peers later identified less with their own-gender peers and more with their other-gender peers (DeLay, Martin, Cook, & Hanish, 2018). Less is known about how peers play a positive and supportive role as youth develop their sexual orientation identity. This focus would be important, as a positive sexual orientation identity could buffer against otherwise detrimental out- comes of discrimination and other negative experiences.

Researchers must consider youth's identity development through a social lens. Many youth continue to describe their sexual orientations by drawing upon

identities that have existed for some time (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual), yet a growing number of youth describe their sexual orientations with an expansive range of emerging identities that reflect additional nuance (e.g., demisexual, pansexual, or queer, among others; Watson, Wheldon, & Puhl, 2020). How do peers come to form a collective, generally shared understanding of these identities as they emerge within various peer networks? From an intersectional lens, how might youth's development and understanding of their sexual orientation identity be shaped by their other social identities and backgrounds, language, and the identities of the peers with whom they are connected?

Identity disclosure and "coming out" to peers

Interpersonal dynamics change over the course of a relationship. As a relationship develops, there tends to be greater self-disclosure, vulnerability, interdependence, and less inhibited self-expression between partners (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Sexual orientation identity disclosure, or the process of sharing one's sexual orientation identity with others, can be framed within the larger process of identity formation, and is considered a developmental milestone among LGBQ+ individuals (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). Sharing this deeply personal information with peers could be seen to fall within the broader developmental process of increased intimacy that often begins in adolescence. Generational trends suggest that LGBQ+ youth now are coming out, on average, at younger ages than in prior generations (Russell & Fish, 2019). Contemporary LGBQ+ youth report first disclosing their sexual orientation identities generally in their early teenage years. Notably, a number of LGBQ+ youth first choose to come out to friends prior to parents (Rossi, 2010). For LGBQ+ youth who are not yet out to their peers or whose past experiences of discrimination have contributed to greater rejection sensitivity and hypervigilance, these typical develop- mental processes may elicit significant stress (Watson, Wheldon, & Russell, 2015). Some LGBQ+ youth might possibly withdraw from friendships, face isolation, or have fewer opportunities to develop peer friendships.

Identity disclosure is associated with a mixture of potential benefits and

stressors. In terms of benefits, coming out to others is associated with better mental health, self-acceptance, greater connection to the larger LGBQ+ community, and can ameliorate stress tied to identity concealment (Cain, 1991; Cox, Dewaele, Van Houtte, & Vincke, 2010; Mohr & Fassinger, 2003). At the same time, LGBQ+ youth who report being out to others also can face potential social adversity such as discrimination, which is associated with poorer health outcomes (Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2015; Watson et al., 2015). Some findings suggest nuance in the conditions under which being out to others is associated with greater discrimination (Dewaele, Van Houtte, Cox, & Vincke, 2013; Watson et al., 2015). One study found that youth who were either out to no one or out to everyone reported the least harassment relative to youth who were out to some groups of people but not others (Watson et al., 2015). Findings such as these highlight the need to identify conditions that maximize the benefits for youth who disclose their sexual orientation while also protecting them against social risks.

Peers may have a role in whether and how LGBQ+ youth decide to disclose their sexual orientation identities, and in their experiences upon disclosing their identities to others. Youth may decide to come out to some peers based on their perception of a peer's likely affirmation of their sexual orientation or anticipated rejection. This may be the case especially for youth whose identity is marginalized even within the LGBQ+ community (e.g., bisexual, pansexual, or asexual youth). There is some indication that LGBQ+ individuals are more likely to come out in contexts that are supportive of their autonomy and self-expression (Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012). Expanding from a dyadic lens to one focused on the larger social network, LGBQ+ youth may decide to disclose their identities to specific peers based on their assessment of a peer's likelihood to either safeguard or spread this information to other peers in their network.

We propose several other questions in this line of work. What social norms, behaviors, and other attributes of LGBQ+ youth's social net- works and peers may encourage them to disclose their identities to their peers? In a time of

increasingly expanding social transparency and decreasing privacy, how do LGBQ+ youth navigate disclosure as part of their coming out process, especially with regard to selective disclosure? What roles do peers play in protecting LGBQ+ youth who are more out about their identities from potential social risks?

Initiating, developing, and maintaining friendships under marginalizing conditions

Many LGBQ+ youth must initiate, develop, and maintain their relationships under broader conditions of marginalization. Due to the stress associated with stigma and discrimination, they also face higher rates of mental health concerns than their heterosexual peers (Russell & Fish, 2016). These forces may exert a significant influence on how LGBQ+ youth select or initiate friendships, shape how these friendships develop over time, and have some bearing on how LGBQ+ youth sustain their friendships under these conditions. We propose several questions that speak to these processes and which could capture greater complexity in how LGBQ+ youth form and cultivate their peer friendships.

What characteristics do LGBQ+ youth prioritize when determining with whom to form friendships? Are there shared beliefs, values, interests, or behaviors that they tend to prioritize? Under what circum- stances is similarity along these characteristics or experiences beneficial (e.g., support in shared experiences of victimization) versus potentially detrimental (e.g., when depressive symptoms tied to victimization may be exacerbated through depression contagion among friends)? Data on these questions could inform efforts intended to facilitate LGBQ+ youth's connections with peers who could have a stronger potential to develop into healthy friendships.

Relationship satisfaction and stability fall under the umbrella of relationship development (Poulin & Chan, 2010; Ramsey & Gentzler, 2015). Although satisfaction and stability are sometimes correlated, they are distinct, and it is possible for individuals to be in relationships that are satisfying yet unstable, or unsatisfying but stable (Hiatt, Laursen, Mooney, & Rubin, 2015;

Shafer, Jensen, & Larson, 2014). There remains limited attention to friendship satisfaction and stability among LGBQ+ youth, or factors contributing to either. Some LGBQ+ youth report lower quality relationships with their peers than hetero- sexual youth (Bos, Sandfort, de Bruyn, & Hakvoort, 2008). This may be due, in part, to having fewer reciprocal friendships: though LGBQ+ youth report having the same number of friends as heterosexual youth, fewer peers nominate them as friends in return (Martin-Storey, Cheadle, Skalamera, & Crosnoe, 2015). One-sided friendships like these might offer less social support to LGBQ+ youth and they may be more likely to dissolve over time. Other factors such as microaggressions or level of outness about one's identity also might underlie these differences and should be considered.

We pose several additional questions for further consideration. What unique interpersonal or broader social factors contribute to either increased or decreased friendship satisfaction between LGBQ+ youth and their LGBQ+ or heterosexual friends? To what extent do stigma, discrimination, or other minority stressors elevate the instability of LGBQ+ youth's friendships, even for friendships which LGBQ+ youth consider satisfying? By contrast, what affirming characteristics of social environments promote the stability of LGBQ+ youth's peer friendships in the face of broader societal stigma and oppression?

Research also remains crucial on LGBQ+ youth's experiences of isolation within their larger peer networks. The link between social isolation and lower psychological well-being has been well established (see Berkman, 1995). One study using data at different schools found mixed evidence of social isolation of LGBQ+ youth (Martin-Storey et al., 2015). Still, many LGBQ+ youth report experiencing peer rejection, exclusion, and a sense of invisibility due to bias and stigma (Russell & Fish, 2019). Researchers may wish to consider the circumstances under which LGBQ+ youth are more likely to experience isolation, or from whom they feel isolated. The sociopolitical climate of their schools or the larger communities in which LGBQ+ youth live could affect the extent to which they are recognized, affirmed, or fully included in their peer networks.

One overarching question to address may be as follows: What minority stressors or unique sources of strength contribute to certain pat- terns of relationship development between LGBQ+ youth and their friends over time? This question underscores the need to move from a static to dynamic understanding of LGBQ+ youth's peer friendships and with attention not simply to their number of friends but also to the depth and sustainability of such friendships. Under conditions of marginalization, LGBQ+ youth face unique challenges in cultivating closer, more meaningful, and authentic relationships with their peers over time. For researchers and practitioners, it would be important to consider not simply the number of friends that LGBQ+ youth may have, but also the quality of their friendships and the barriers to their growth.

Homophily or diversity in LGBQ+ youth's friendships

Peer relationships research focuses frequently on peer *homophily*, or the extent to which peers are similar to one another on certain individual attributes, attitudes, and behaviors (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Research among marginalized youth populations also has approached this issue, albeit from a perspective focused more on diversity among peers and intergroup friendships. Researchers have attended to cross- ethnic and cross-racial peer relationships, for example, and how they are associated with various social outcomes for youth (Graham, Munniksma, & Juvonen, 2014; Shi & Xie, 2014). Researchers have lagged in giving comparable attention to friendships among peers of diverse sexual orientations, but one study showed that LGBQ+ youth report meaningful and beneficial relationships with other LGBQ+ youth as well as heterosexual peers (Ueno, Gayman, Wright, & Quantz, 2009).

To what extent does similarity on sexual orientation come into play as LGBQ+ youth or heterosexual youth form friendships with peers? Among adolescents, who may be less likely than adults to be out to peers, sexual orientation seems to have a weaker effect on this process than other demographic factors, such as race (Ueno, 2010). Studies often consider demographic homophily in a way that treats each demographic factor as

independent of one another (e.g., peer homophily along race, or along sexual orientation, or along gender). Yet, some work highlights the need to consider multiple demographic characteristics more holistically in combination and at their intersections for individual youth. For example, LGBQ+ youth of color report that they face a decision between LGBQ+ peer networks that are largely cross-racial, or peer networks specific to their racial or ethnic groups but largely heterosexual (McCready, 2004). Attention to homophily with this greater level of nuance in the friendship formation process could uncover unique barriers or facilitators to LGBQ+ youth establishing friendships with peers of similar or different backgrounds from their own. In addition, re- searchers may consider whether youth are motivated to form friendships based on shared lived experiences (e.g., experiences of marginalization) than on shared sexual orientation identity in and of itself.

Individuals tend to seek and affiliate with peers who are similar on attributes which they consider important to them (McPherson, Smith- Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Researchers have sought to identify various qualities that individuals look for in their friendships (Vitaro, Boivin, & Bukowski, 2009). Certain desired features tend to be widely agreed upon, such as companionship and support. Other attributes deemed important could vary from youth to youth. In part, this could depend on their position of privilege or marginalization (e.g., white LGBQ+ youth may consider homophily based on race or ethnicity more important than homophily based on sexual orientation; Galupo, 2009; Hamm, 2000). With this in mind, we propose questions that could offer a more nuanced understanding of how LGBQ+ youth relate with peers based on their shared or different sexual orientation identities.

Several questions stem from a focus on intergroup friendships between LGBQ+ youth and heterosexual youth. How typical are they, and does their likelihood vary across settings? Some findings show that LGBQ+ youth tend to have more reciprocated friendship nominations with other LGBQ+ peers than heterosexual peers (Martin-Storey et al., 2015). Other findings do not show that LGBQ+ youth are necessarily well connected with one another within a large

network (Ueno, 2005). Still, there may be more proximal and specific settings in which inter- group friendships based on sexual orientation are highly likely and may be cultivated. Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs)—which aim to bring together youth from diverse sexual orientations and gender identities for support, socializing, and advocacy to address discrimination—are one such exemplar setting in schools (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004).

Additionally, what provisions are afforded by intergroup friendships among LGBQ+ youth and heterosexual youth? For example, do friend- ships with heterosexual peers offer opportunities for LGBQ+ youth to access a larger social network? For heterosexual youth, do friendships with LGBQ+ peers promote social awareness, empathy, and advocacy?

With regard to friendship stability, are intergroup friendships be- tween LGBQ+ youth and heterosexual youth less stable than friendships among peers with similar sexual orientations? This has been found in some cases with inter-ethnic friendships (Jugert, Noack, & Rutland, 2013), but not necessarily for cross-gender friendships (Nielson, Delay, Flannery, Martin, & Hanish, 2020). What are the challenges to maintaining intergroup friendships between LGBQ+ and heterosexual peers? What factors increase their potential stability?

Finally, research needs to give attention to friendships among LGBQ+ peers. From an intersectional perspective (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013), to what extent are these peer relationships diverse along other sociodemographic factors (e.g., ability, gender, race, social class)? Do LGBQ+ youth prioritize similarity on some characteristics for friendships with heterosexual peers and other characteristics for friendships with LGBQ+ peers? Are there meaningful distinctions in how LGBQ+ youth conceive of their friendships with other LGBQ+ peers who do or do not share their specific sexual orientation identity (e. g., lesbian, bisexual, or pansexual)? Such information could illuminate potential frictions, misunderstandings, or differences that might arise in interactions among LGBQ+ peers, or alternatively how their shared experiences of marginalization may facilitate their friendships with one another.

Visualizing LGBQ+ youth's positions in their peer networks

How are LGBQ+ youth positioned within their peer groups; or more broadly, how are their peer groups positioned within a larger social network? With these questions, we attend to several structural and compositional characteristics of peer networks that could depict LGBQ+ youth's peer relationships with added complexity. Descriptive data could depict how LGBQ+ youth see themselves in proximity to their peers, reveal how they navigate their peer relationships, and suggest how interpersonal processes unfold within their peer network.

Researchers often gather friendship nomination data and other network data from youth to map social networks and to describe ties among individuals (e.g., Frank, Muller, & Mueller, 2013; Knecht, Burk, Weesie, & Steglich, 2011). These data could be used to visually depict how LGBQ+ youth and their peers are situated within larger social networks. Doing so could show their proximity to important resources and supportive individuals. Further, these depictions could highlight either barriers or pathways for LGBQ+ youth to access supportive peers or resources in a given setting. Network data also may help to identify and characterize peers who are in a position to meet certain needs of LGBQ+ youth (e.g., peers whose connections span across a number peer groups at school who could welcome an LGBQ+ youth who may be isolated).

As part of visualizing LGBQ+ youth's position in their peer networks, researchers may consider their prestige within these networks. An individual's prestige can convey the extent to which others wish to be their friends or to be connected to them. It can be used to suggest a youth's degree of visibility, influence, or power in a network. Youth with a relatively higher status in a group exert stronger influence on other members (Crosnoe & Needham, 2004; Dijkstra, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2008; Shi & Xie, 2012). Highly prestigious youth tend to wield more power and to be more prosocial (Andrews, 2020).

It is likely that some LGBQ+ youth are well-connected, visible, and revered within their peer, school, or community networks or on social media. These youth could exert a significant positive influence by establishing and

maintaining social expectations and norms that affirm LGBQ+ people. It would be useful for research to consider how LGBQ+ youth in positions of prestige, for example, socialize LGBQ+ affirming attitudes and behaviors within their networks, or support LGBQ+ peers facing discrimination. At the same time, recognizing the bidirectional influences between individuals and their environments (Lerner et al., 2015), it would be important to identify the characteristics of social environments that enable LGBQ+ youth to be in these types of positions within their networks. Among other uses, these data could significantly inform peer-driven anti-bullying prevention and intervention programs. Group cohesion also could be an important element of LGBQ+ youth's peer networks to consider. Cohesion represents the level of interconnectedness among members of a peer group or network (Gross & Martin, 1952; Moody & White, 2003). For instance, cohesive groups may be ones wherein most individuals are connected to all other members or wherein members have few degrees of separation between themselves and any other given member (Borgatti & Everett, 2006; Moody & White, 2003). Cohesion also can be reflected in psychological or behavioral indicators such as youth's reported sense of connection with their peers or frequency of interaction with them (Shi & Xie, 2014; Wilson, Karimpour, & Rodkin, 2011).

Group cohesion may come into play for LGBQ+ youth in several ways. As one example, schools by and large enforce heterosexist norms and are a setting in which many LGBQ+ youth experience discrimination (Kosciw et al., 2020). Nevertheless, LGBQ+ youth in more cohesive peer groups could perceive greater peer belonging, even in a broader context of stigma and exclusion. As another example, youth's ability to mobilize and engage in advocacy plays a large role in counteracting discrimination (Ginwright & James, 2002). More cohesive groups of LGBQ+ youth and their peers may be able to mobilize and respond to instances of discrimination more effectively.

Bias-based harassment, hypervigilance, and rejection sensitivity

Peers have been featured in research on the socialization of homo-

phobic harassment and discrimination (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Plummer, 2001; Poteat, 2007), as well as in research on youth who are more likely to intervene or support peers when bias-based harassment occurs (Anto´nio, Guerra, & Moleiro, 2020; Poteat & Vecho, 2016; Wernick, Kulick, & Inglehart, 2013). We pose several questions to pursue with a continued peer-oriented focus. By what means do supportive peers respond to discrimination or bias-based harassment? Do their responses differ based on their own sexual orientation, the sexual orientation of the person victimized, the sexual orientation of those engaging in harassment, and their combinations? What responses do LGBQ+ youth prefer, and ultimately, which are most effective? These data could inform ecologically-based prevention programs on bullying and discrimination.

LGBQ+ youth experience other intrapersonal and interpersonal minority stressors in addition to, or as a result of, discrimination. Two stressors include rejection sensitivity and hypervigilance (Meyer, 2003). Rejection sensitivity can be described as an anxious expectation or anticipation of impending rejection from others when seeking their support and acceptance (Downey & Feldman, 1996). It is associated with greater discrimination, poorer health, and less satisfying relation- ships among LGBQ+ individuals (Feinstein, in press). Hypervigilance, or the heightened and selective attention to a perceived threat (Eysenck, 1992), also has been reported among LGBQ+ people in relation to discrimination and is associated with poorer health and relationships (Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016; Lick, Durso, & Johnson, 2013). Both stressors convey social and relational elements, such as perceptions of others' intentions (in the case of rejection sensitivity) and how individuals may closely monitor their peers' behaviors (in the case of hypervigilance). Thus, they are quite relevant to peer researchers.

Rejection sensitivity or hypervigilance could limit LGBQ+ youth's interactions with their peers. Qualitative work suggests that LGBQ+ youth may avoid participating in their school social networks (e.g., extracurricular groups or other social opportunities) to reduce potential exposure to discrimination (Gower et al., in press). Rejection sensitivity and hypervigilance might also shape the

ways in which LGBQ+ youth interact with their peers, as reflected by the depth, quality, or stability of their relationships. For example, individuals who are sensitive to the threat of rejection may engage in excessive reassurance seeking (Stewart & Harkness, 2017). This behavior may negatively impact the quality of the friendship (Schwartz-Mette & Smith, 2018). Furthermore, re- searchers might consider the extent to which rejection sensitivity and hypervigilance could be heightened from observing or learning of others' experiences of discrimination. Members of stigmatized groups anticipate stigma and unfair treatment in response to prejudice directed at others (Sanchez, Chaney, Manuel, Wilton, & Remedios, 2017) and experience vicarious stress from witnessing discrimination directed at others (Saleem, Anderson, & Williams, 2020). Thus, along with bias- based harassment, peer researchers should consider minority stressors more broadly so as to include indicators such as rejection sensitivity and hypervigilance and how they shape LGBQ+ youth's peer relationships.

Peer action and advocacy

LGBQ+ youth and their heterosexual allies engage in collective action to counteract oppression (e.g., discriminatory laws, bias-based harassment) and to promote LGBQ+ affirming norms and policies. How do LGBQ+ youth engage in this work through their peer networks in varying contexts? How do they come together to address these larger social issues? A key tenet of ecological theories is bidirectional influence between individuals and their environments (Lerner et al., 2015). LGBQ+ youth's peer relationships are inarguably affected by their social environments; at the same time, it is equally important to consider how they and their peers influence and enact changes in their schools, communities, and societies.

We propose several questions to better understand the social network sequalae of youth's efforts to counteract the norms of heterosexism and to consider the network positions of LGBQ+ youth and their allies who engage in these efforts. To what extent do youth's efforts to raise awareness of and

counteract prejudice and discrimination affect others in their social networks more broadly? How does this process unfold within a network, and how do certain network characteristics facilitate or inhibit it from occurring? How do LGBQ+ youth build coalitions with individuals and groups in their larger network who experience similar or unique constellations of oppression or privilege?

Research also should consider the physical and virtual spaces in which LGBQ+ youth and their ally peers engage in advocacy. As noted earlier, there is growing attention to GSAs in schools and organizations in the broader community (Fish, Moody, Grossman, & Russell, 2019; Poteat, Yoshikawa, Calzo, Russell, & Horn, 2017) that provide opportunities for youth to engage in advocacy with their peers. Visibly affirming spaces for LGBQ+ youth and their ally peers may be essential to foster and sustain youth's advocacy efforts, given the otherwise larger societal context of invisibility and marginalization they face. Complementary to this, research should consider how LGBQ+ youth engage in advocacy with peers through their networks on social media. Virtual networks could be a major outlet of support and action for LGBQ+ youth who live in areas with fewer affirming resources or spaces in their immediate environments, or for youth who live in areas that place greater restrictions on their efforts to engage in advocacy.

Conclusion

There is a clear need for LGBQ+ youth research to consider their development in context, particularly within their peer social networks. We contend that peers, especially friends, have key roles in promoting thriving and resilience among LGBQ+ youth. It is therefore worth considering LGBQ+ youth's dynamic, complex, and intricate relation- ships with their peers in much greater detail. Further underscoring the importance of this work, it is likely that LGBQ+ youth's peer friendships influence and are influenced by other peer relationships (e.g., romantic relationships).

Our aspirations have been to spotlight several major areas relevant to the lives of LGBQ+ youth that peer researchers need to consider with growing

complexity, and to spark interest in and ideas for advancing research in these areas. As we noted at the outset, many of the issues we have raised could translate to and be relevant points of inquiry for research among gender diverse youth (e.g., transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, or agender youth). Ongoing research among LGBQ+ youth must strive to consider the intersection of their myriad other sociocultural identities with their sexual orientation identity for a more holistic representation of their lives and their development. In all, we hope that this call to action will lead to a progressively richer under- standing of LGBQ+ youth's peer relationships and inform efforts to support LGBQ+ youth as they cultivate meaningful, lasting, and rewarding relationships with their peers.

Author notes

Author statement

VPP conceptualized the paper and led the writing of the article. SBR contributed to drafting and editing the article. RLS and JBS contributed to editing the article. All authors approved the final version of the article.

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