

Lesbian and Bisexual Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

The NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women



Objectives

Understanding LBQT Youth:

- ❖ Review sexual orientation and identity development
- ❖ Risk factors and special considerations for LB girls
- ❖ Unpack bias and discrimination

Exploring interventions:

- ❖ Behaviors
- ❖ Boundaries
- ❖ Best Practices
- ❖ Honor and celebrate diversity in all its forms 😊



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Chronological Progression of Sex, Gender and Sexuality

Birth → Infancy → Childhood → Adolescence → Adulthood

Biological
Sex

Gender
Roles/
Identity

Sexual
Orientation

Sexual
Identity

- ◆ Biological Sex: Determined by chromosomes, hormones and internal and external genitalia
- ◆ Gender Roles: Reflect the ways in which our culture invites us to behave depending on our biological sex
- ◆ Gender Identity: Personal internal recognition of one's gender

(Attonito, J. & Craig, S., 2008, The Alliance, 2008)

Chronological Progression of Sex and Sexuality

Childhood/ Adolescence Adulthood



- ◆ Sexual Orientation: Emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to persons of the same or different sex
- ◆ Sexual Identity: The manner in which someone identifies sexually or lives their sexual life
- ◆ **List all of the different labels for sexual orientation.**

Sexual Identities

Labels may include:

- ◆ ambisexual - attracted to females - attracted to the person - attracted to a special woman
- ◆ bi-lesbian - bi-queer – bisexual - bisexual, depends on person - bisexual in lesbian relationship - bisexual transgender - dating/loving a woman - female-identified bisexual - fluid bisexual
- ◆ heterosexual - heterosexual, lesbian tendencies
- ◆ heterosexual-identified bisexual - heterosexual with bisexuality - heterosexual with questions
- ◆ lesbian - lesbian-identified bisexual - lesbian who has sex with men
- ◆ dyke – gay – not straight – pansensual – pansexual - polyfide - polysexual - questioning - queer - unlabeled



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Myths about Sexual Orientation/ Gender Identity

- ◆ Only LGBTQ youth question their sexual orientation/ gender identity.
- ◆ Adolescents girls are too young to know if they are lesbian or bisexual.
- ◆ “Acting gay” is just a phase that girls will grow out of



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Risk Factors for Lesbians and Bisexual Girls

- ◆ Girls in the justice system experience trauma at almost *200 times* the national rate (Smith et al., 2006)
- ◆ 3 times the number of lesbian and bisexual girls report PTSD compared to gay boys.
- ◆ ***Lesbians and bisexual justice system involved girls may be at an increased risk of trauma.***



Abuse and Victimization

- ◆ Lesbians and bisexual girls report the highest rates of sexual and physical abuse by **family members** (Saewyc et al., 2006)
 - ❖ Physical abuse:
 - ◆ 19% of LB girls vs. 11-12% Heterosexual/Questioning
 - ❖ Sexual abuse:
 - ◆ 22% LB girls vs. 13-15% Heterosexual/ Questioning
- ◆ More common for lesbians to be threatened and attacked (by **mothers**) when they disclosed their sexual orientation (D'Augelli et al., 1998)



Unique Risk Factors

Sexual orientation violence

- ❖ rejection and abuse by family, peers or others due to actual or perceived sexual orientation

Gender atypicality trauma

- ❖ targeted because do not fit stereotype of what girls should look/dress/act like

Stigmatization

- ❖ marginalized due to sexual orientation

Other Common Risk Factors for LGBTQ Youth

School violence: 86% experience harassment at school

Substance use: Odds of use are 340% higher for bisexual youth, 400% higher for females

Depression/ Suicide: 4-5 times more depressed, 33% of teen suicides

Homelessness: 20%- 40% of all homeless youth identify as GLBT

Commercial/ Survival Sex: Lesbian and bisexual teenagers were 5x more likely to have exchanged sex for money, food, etc.



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Lesbians and Bisexual Girls in the Justice System

- ◆ Girls are 6 times more likely to identify as bisexual and 3 times more likely to identify as homosexual compared to boys (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006)
- ◆ One study found 23% of the girls in detention facilities were “not straight”



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Bias and Homophobia: Staff Reports

- ◆ 50% of detention staff knew of situations where youth were mistreated due to sexual orientation
- ◆ Estimates of about 75% of lesbians and bisexual girls typically do not feel comfortable sharing personal information with staff due to safety concerns



LGBTQ Youth Reports

- ◆ High rates of physical, sexual and emotional abuse reported in facilities
- ◆ Report that services, policies and treatment is lacking
- ◆ Staff have misconceptions regarding sexual orientation



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Bias and Homophobia

Discussion:

- ❖ How are youth treated in facilities?
- ❖ Do these statistics seem accurate?
- ❖ Do you think staff bias and homophobia are issues in facilities?



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Behaviors: True or False?

LBTQ youth should be discouraged from being too open about their sexual orientation	
LBTQ youth should be separated from the general population to ensure their safety	
LBTQ youth use manipulative behaviors to get special treatment or privileges.	
It is best not to discuss sexual orientation in facilities	



Boundaries

- ◆ Sexual behaviors may stem from a variety of sources
- ◆ Girls have needs for intimacy, care, and respect
- ◆ ***Healthy boundaries should be modeled and enforced which teach girls how to get needs met appropriately***



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Best Practices

- ◆ Safety is #1
- ◆ Promote positive adolescent development
- ◆ Model positive behavior
- ◆ Community connection

Safety

- ◆ Females were more likely than males to report forced sexual activity with other youth at the facility.
 - ❖ 9% of females and 2% of males reported forced sexual activity with another youth.
- ◆ Female-only facilities had the highest rates of youth-on-youth sexual victimization (11.0%)

All staff must intervene and report abuse by youth and staff.



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Positive Development

- ◆ Understand adolescent development and typical tasks associated with gender, racial/ethnic and sexual identity development
- ◆ Support the positive development and expression of sexual orientation
- ◆ Encourage the development healthy self-esteem
- ◆ Help youth manage the stigma sometimes associated with difference



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Model Positive Behavior

- ◆ Closely monitor threats of violence, actual violence, or disrespectful or suggestive
- ◆ Respect for all youth; reinforcing respect for differences
- ◆ Prohibit all practices that pathologize, punish or criminalize LGBTQ youth
- ◆ Maintain and manage confidentiality



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Connection to Community Resources

- ◆ Include LGBT-affirming books, magazines, movies, and other materials
- ◆ Display materials, such as posters that convey a LGBT-friendly environment
- ◆ Employees are aware of and reach out to the LGBT community to find organizations which provide supportive services to LGBT youth.



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Recommendations

Needs assessments should include questions about sexual orientation (JAIS)

- ❖ Information should be asked in a non-threatening way about sexual orientation
- ❖ JAIS asks if girls have a significant/special partner and to describe the relationship



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Model Standard's Project Recommendations

- (1) Creating an inclusive organization culture
- (2) Recruiting and supporting competent caregivers and staff
- (3) Promoting healthy adolescent development
- (4) Respecting privacy and confidentiality
- (5) Providing appropriate placements
- (6) Providing sensitive support services

Trauma-informed Services Covington and Bloom (2003)

- (1) Take the trauma into account
- (2) Avoid triggering trauma reactions and/or traumatizing the individual
- (3) Adjust the behavior of counselors, other staff, and the organization to support the individual's coping capacity
- (4) Allow survivors to manage their trauma symptoms successfully so that they are able to access, retain, and benefit from the **services** (Harris & Fallot, 2001)

Diversity



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Thank you!



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