NATIONAL MENTORING RESOURCE CENTER
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MENTORING LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUESTIONING, INTERSEX, AND GENDER NONCONFORMING YOUTH

National Mentoring Resource Center Population Review

Christian L. Rummell, American Institutes for Research

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Summary

This review examines research on mentoring for youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and gender nonconforming (LGBTQI-GNC). It is organized around four topics: a) the documented effectiveness of mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth; b) the extent to which mentor, youth, and program characteristics influence effectiveness; c) the processes that may link mentoring to outcomes in LGBTQI-GNC youth; and d) the extent to which efforts to provide mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth have reached and engaged these youth, been implemented with high quality, and been adopted and sustained by host organizations and settings. At present, few empirical studies have been conducted to address any of the above questions. However, a growing body of literature has identified patterns of risks faced by LGBTQI-GNC youth and points also to the types of support that may be most closely associated with facilitating positive outcomes in this population. This research, alongside early insights from available research on mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth, points to the following preliminary (i.e., in large part, not directly tested), but noteworthy possibilities:

- In-person mentoring relationships may serve an important protective role for LGBTQI-GNC youth, helping them to confront challenges such as lack of acceptance from peers and parents; however, available research is too limited to offer more than tentative and very preliminary support for this possibility.
- Informal mentoring relationships with adults may promote positive educational outcomes among LGBTQI-GNC youth.
- Some subpopulations of LGBTQI-GNC youth—including youth of color, gender nonconforming

youth, transgender youth, youth at earlier phases of identity development, and systems involved youth—may experience intersections of risks that hinder their development of trust, which is seen as the foundation of high-quality, effective mentoring relationships.

- Mentors that take youth-centered approaches inclusive of the experiences and needs of LGBTQI-GNC youth may foster greater benefits.
- Ensuring the quality of mentoring relationships for LGBTQI-GNC may necessitate the use of mentor-youth matching criteria that are inclusive of—but not limited to—shared sexual orientation and gender identity/expression between youth and mentors.
- Mentors appear well-positioned to offer ongoing support that can attune to the needs of youth as they navigate through phases of exploring, accepting, and sharing their identity with others.
- Mentors who take advocacy roles may be able to offer emotional, informational, and interpersonal support for LGBTQI-GNC youth in ways that provide protection from risks associated with stigma and victimization.
- Youth serving agencies with inclusive programming and safe climates appear to offer additional levels of protection for LGBTQI-GNC youth against risks such as suicide.
- LGBTQI-GNC youth are greatly underserved by youth mentoring programs, with few formal mentoring programs established that provide inclusive mentoring services responsive to specific needs of LGBTQI-GNC youth.
- Barriers to services, existing at the youth, staff, and program level, may impede access to high-quality mentoring relationships.
- A number of promising practices and program models offer insight for ways to strengthen mentoring services for LGBTQI-GNC populations.

The above considerations offer insight into the potential of mentoring relationships and programs to respond to the unique challenges, risks, and needs of LGBTQI-GNC youth. However, because of the scarcity of research specifically answering questions posed by this review, evidence-based conclusions cannot be reached at this time. Within the context of these explicitly stated limitations, this review concludes with an initial series of recommendations and suggestions for practice.

INTRODUCTION

An estimated 3.2 million LGBTQI-GNC youth between the ages of eight and eighteen—approximately 6% of this age group—are growing up in the United States today[1, i]. A well-documented body of research has captured environmental risks faced by this diverse group of young people, including stigma, victimization, and rejection.[2, 3, 4, 5] In tandem with these challenges, many LGBTQI-GNC youth are undergoing phases of identity development unique to being LGBTQI-GNC that are also associated with heightened levels of psychological distress—including feelings of isolation, confusion, depression, and questions about belonging and affiliation.[2, 6, 7] Given such challenges facing this

[i] The author uses LGBTQI-GNC as an umbrella term throughout this review. This choice is meant to support uniformity and ease of reading. The author recognizes that studies presented here may not have explicitly examined each subgroup contained within this acronym. For example this study by the Williams Institute did not track youth who are gender non-conforming or those that are intersex.

vulnerable group of young people, mentoring has been suggested as a viable and responsive support that can help to change current trajectories and lower risks.[1, 8, 9, 10]

DEFINING LGBTQI-GNC YOUTH

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and gender nonconforming youth are often grouped together under umbrella terms such as "LGBTQI-GNC," "SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression)," and "queer." However, significant differences exist among LGBTQI-GNC subpopulations and individuals that hold implications for population reviews such as this. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals are typically defined through features closely associated with human sexuality, including sexual orientation, sexual attraction, sexual behavior, and sexual identity.[11, 12] Intersex is "used to refer to individuals whose chromosomal makeup or biological characteristics do not align with those defined as male or female" (p. 58).[13] Distinctly, transgender is defined as "an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth" (p. 1).[14]

Importantly, sexuality and gender identity/expression at the individual level may not easily fit into rigid and fixed terminology. For example, incongruence between self-labels and actions may exist—an individual may self-label as "straight," but also engage in same-sex sexual behavior, possess same-sex attractions, and a same-sex sexual orientation. Youth may use self-labels protectively, describing themselves as "straight" or "bisexual" in response to societal or familial expectations of heterosexuality or concerns that others may not accept a same-sex sexuality. Further, sexuality and gender identity/expression may occur along a spectrum of possibilities—a transgender male, for example, may be sexually attracted to females or males or both. Lastly, as individuals navigate through various phases of understanding, accepting, and sharing their identity, they may access and use different language that reflects how they want to be seen by others, which can change over time. Therefore, using uniform, static, and rigid labeling criteria can be problematic, especially for younger cohorts of individuals that view sexuality and gender more fluidly.[12]

CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON LGBTQI-GNC YOUTH

In close connection to stated difficulties regarding the use of LGBTQI-GNC umbrella terminology, there are a number of significant methodological challenges for conducting research on this population that also hold implications for engaging in a review of effective and evidence-based practices. Foremost, securing large enough sample sizes to conduct rigorous research on LGBTQI-GNC youth is often problematic.[15] Second, many youths under age 18 may not be ready to self-label because they are not far enough along in their phases of identity development to do so.[2, 15] Third, accessing parent consents to allow for LGBTQI-GNC youth to participate in research may be tricky—inherent challenges exist if such youth are not "out" to their parents but are being asked to participate in an LGBTQI-GNC-focused study.[15] Such concerns have led to a number of institutional review boards (IRB) to waive parental consent due to the potential risks associated with "outing" LGBTQI-GNC youth to nonsupportive parents. Last, important differences have been suggested to exist between youth who are "out" and accessing support services versus those who may not have access to such support or who may still be struggling with formative stages of identity development, thus posing challenges for research that seeks to identify generalized needs and risks for the population.[15, 16]

QUESTIONS

In the context of the above definitions, challenges, and limitations, this review examines research that bears on the following questions:

1. What is the documented effectiveness of mentoring[ii] for LGBTQI-GNC youth?
2. What factors condition or shape the effectiveness of mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth?
3. What are the intervening processes that are most important in linking mentoring to outcomes for LGBTQI-GNC youth?
4. To what extent have efforts to provide mentoring to LGBTQI-GNC youth reached and engaged targeted youth, been implemented with high quality, and been adopted and sustained by host organizations and settings?

A systematic search was conducted to identify research reported in articles, book chapters, dissertations, and evaluation reports relevant to one or more of these questions. This search identified four reports of research on mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth, including one such study of participants older than 18. In the sections that follow, the review of available research for each question begins with a background section. These sections are intended to help frame the question and to orient the reader to findings of related research, if any (e.g., social support for LGBTQI-GNC youth, risks faced by LGBTQI-GNC youth, literature on counseling).

1. What Is the Documented Effectiveness of Mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC Youth?

Research specifically examining the effectiveness of mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth is limited in scope, with two available mentoring-specific studies located at the time of this review. Therefore, effectiveness considerations presented in this section are more heavily reliant on background insights, especially those drawn from literature documenting risks faced by LGBTQI-GNC youth and findings from more established—but less population-specific—research on mentoring.

BACKGROUND

Risks faced by LGBTQI-GNC youth. A growing body of literature has documented risks and challenges faced by LGBTQI-GNC adolescents. For example, substantial percentages of LGBTQI-GNC youth—especially youth of color—report frequent experiences with bullying, verbal and physical harassment, and also describe feeling unsafe in school settings due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression.[4, 17] This type of victimization has been closely linked to depression, risks for contracting STDs and HIV, and later adult mental health challenges.[18]

[ii] This review considers mentoring to be relationships and activities that take place between youth (i.e., mentees) and older or more experienced persons (i.e., mentors) who are acting in a nonprofessional helping capacity—whether through a program or more informally—to provide support that benefits one or more areas of the young person's development (for further detail, see What Is Mentoring? on the National Mentoring Resource Center website).

At home, many LGBTQI-GNC youth also report challenges with family members. More than 25% of LGBTQI-GNC 13- to 17-year-olds describe family disapproval of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression.[19] Family rejection of LGBTQI-GNC youth is linked with increased attempts at suicide, depression, and use of illegal drugs.[20] Family rejection was also linked to increased engagement by gay male youth in unprotected sex and contracting HIV.[21] LGBTQI-GNC youth are also estimated to comprise up to 40% of all youth who are experiencing homelessness[22] and many of these young people are on the streets because they have been kicked out of their homes and/or are fleeing abusive situations.[23]

The importance of role models and nonparent adults. As sizeable numbers of LGBTQI-GNC youth face bias and rejection from peers and parents, research has begun to examine availability and impact of social support for this population. Such inquiry has been linked to the research-supported premise that resilient youth are likely to possess relationships with nonparent adults.[24, 25]

Youth who **lacked accessible role models** also reported **increased levels of psychological distress** in comparison to youth who described having affirming in-person role models or no role models at all.

There is some evidence, for example, that LGBTQI-GNC youth may benefit from having access to in-person role models.[26] A survey of 496 ethnically diverse LGBTQI-GNC 16- to 24-year-olds found that nearly 60% reported having role models, responding affirmatively to the question, "Is there a person or individual you really want to be like (this could be someone you know personally, or someone you have read about or seen on TV or in the movies, or that you know in some other way)?". Among respondents with a role model, 60% were inaccessible (i.e., someone on TV or in the movies) and 30% were personally known by the youth. Notably, youth who lacked accessible role models also reported increased levels of psychological distress in comparison to youth who described having affirming in-person role models or no role models at all. The findings of this study thus suggest that in-person role models—such as mentors—may play an especially important and beneficial role in the lives of LGBTQI-GNC youth.

Unfortunately, research has also noted that many LGBTQI-GNC youth lack the types of relationships with nonparent adults expected to be most likely to offer protective benefits.[27] A study of 175 male youth (54% African-American, 21% Hispanic/Latino, 14% Caucasian; ages: 17–23) indicated that their relationships with nonparent adults typically fell into one of three categories: strictly social (62%), complex (24%), and risky (14%). These findings suggest that whereas many LGBTQI-GNC male youths have relationships with nonparent adults, such relationships may not be optimized to provide needed support. In fact, for a small but notable number of youth, the presence of these relationships may actually indicate negative and harmful attachments. Not unlike what has been observed in other studies on nonparent adults in the lives of older adolescents,[28] such considerations point to a potential for some relationships that have mentoring components to nonetheless have adverse effects on LGBTQI-GNC youth.

Mentoring's potential to address risk factors for LGBTQI-GNC youth. The broader literature on mentoring highlights a number of benefits that could be of importance to this population. From a theoretical lens, mentors are seen to offer support for resilience—serving as protective and compensatory influences that reduce deficits and assist youth in gaining assets to overcome challenges they face.[29] As they help to bolster resilience, mentoring relationships are posited to offer youth a range of social, emotional, cognitive, and identity development benefits.[30] Accordingly, when LGBTQI-GNC youth experience stigma and victimization, mentors might serve in a protective role—helping youth work through their feelings, identifying solutions and resources, fostering positive views of themselves, and attuning to youth needs during phases of identity development and/or gender transitions.

Research that focuses more generally on mentoring has documented a number of benefits that are of significance for LGBTQI-GNC youth. For example, high-risk populations of formally mentored youth were less likely to display signs of depression than non-mentored youth.[31] In addition, in the landmark Public/Private Ventures study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America community-based mentoring program, youth with mentors were found to have improved reports of parent and peer relationships and were less likely to report behaviors associated with delinquency, such as skipping school and hitting others.[32] These findings suggest that high-quality mentoring relationships could reduce feelings of distress among LGBTQI-GNC youth, while also supporting improvements in the quality of their relationships within peer and family networks and reducing their susceptibility to involvement in problematic behavior.

RESEARCH

What are the documented benefits to LGBTQI-GNC youth participating in mentoring relationships? Two studies offer an initial look into this question.

In a study using data from Wave III of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) that contains 4,882 cases, researchers compared data between heterosexual youth and subsets of LGBTQI-GNC youth (lesbian females, bisexual females, gay males, bisexual males, youth of color, and white youth).[33] Youth were surveyed in grades 7 through 12 (Wave I: 1994–1995), Wave II (1996) and Wave III (2001–2002) and were asked to describe their sexual identity using the following: 100% straight; mostly straight but attracted to people of the same sex; bisexual; mostly gay but sometimes attracted to people of the same sex; 100% gay; or not sexually attracted to males or females. Measures included presence of teacher mentors and post-secondary participation. Overall findings indicate that LGBTQI-GNC youth were more likely to report informal mentors than heterosexual youth (32% vs. 23%). Of LGBTQI-GNC youth with informal mentors, 36% reported this relationship with a teacher-mentor. LGBTQI-GNC youth—especially males—with teacher mentors were more likely than non-mentored youth to have completed at least one year of college. However, benefits for LGBTQI-GNC youth with mentors as compared to heterosexual youth with mentors were 30% less.

A second study examined experiences of gay male college students participating in formal or informal mentoring relationships with gay mentors. Ross[34] conducted interviews with seventeen self-identified gay males at two universities. Mentees participated in one of three potential mentoring environments: 1) university-sponsored program with peer mentors; 2) university-sponsored program

with faculty mentors; or 3) participation in a naturally formed mentoring relationship not sponsored by the university. Findings from grounded theory analysis indicated that mentors played a role in fostering identity development in mentees. In addition, mentees also gained a number of described benefits from the relationship, including improved feelings of well-being, success as a college student, and commitment to giving back to the LGBTQI-GNC community.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In-person mentoring relationships may serve an important protective role for LGBTQI-GNC youth, helping them to confront challenges such as lack of acceptance from peers and parents; however, available research is too limited to offer more than tentative and very preliminary support for this possibility.

2. Informal mentoring relationships with adults may promote positive educational outcomes among LGBTQI-GNC youth; however, this conclusion is speculative given that this possibility has been examined within only one study.

3. At the college level, it appears that informal and formal mentoring relationships may be linked with improved feelings of well-being, success as a college student, commitment to the gay community, and support for identity development; however, evidence to support this possibility is preliminary.

2. What Factors Condition or Shape the Effectiveness of Mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC Youth?

BACKGROUND

In general, a number of moderating factors have been posited to condition or shape the effects of mentoring on youth.[30] These include the youth's interpersonal history, social competencies, developmental stage, program practices, family context, and neighborhood ecology. In addition, mentor characteristics (e.g., LGBT mentors, mentor approach with youth) and program supports may also serve as potential shaping influences for youth. Research, however, is limited in capturing whether such factors condition (i.e., enhance or diminish) benefits of mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth.

Youth. LGBTQI-GNC youth have diverse risk profiles that may limit or enhance the extent to which they benefit from mentoring relationships. For example, youth of color, transgender youth, gender nonconforming youth, youth that have been involved in the juvenile justice and/or child welfare systems, and youth at earlier phases of identity development may have difficulty maximizing opportunities available to them through mentoring relationships due to additional levels of stigma, stress, and challenge experienced reflecting intersections of risks. In contrast, LGBTQI-GNC youth with accepting parents, supportive social networks, and at more advanced phases of identity development might be better positioned to form trusting relationships and to access support and resources targeted at their unique needs.

Gender nonconforming, transgender, and LGBTQI-GNC youth of color. LGBTQI-GNC youth of color, transgender youth, and gender nonconforming youth appear to experience victimization and stress at higher levels than their peers. For example, LGBTQI-GNC youth of color report more intense levels of bullying and harassment than other subgroups of LGBTQI-GNC youth,[17] are more likely to be involved in the child welfare system,[35] and also are significantly more likely to become HIV positive than other peers.[36] Gender nonconforming youth are also more likely to report experiences with hostile school climates,[37] poor psychosocial adjustment, and suicidality in adolescence.[38] Last, transgender youth are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, suffer from anxiety, attempt suicide, and engage in self-harming activities than their cisgender peers.[39] These findings highlight important trends of risk that are greater for some populations of LGBTQI-GNC youth than others. Given that 52% of LGBTQI-GNC youth are youth of color,[1] these findings also indicate that a majority of LGBTQI-GNC youth are potentially experiencing oppression related to multiple aspects of their identity—including race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Research on gay Latino males from low-income backgrounds illustrates how experiences of oppression based on race, sexual orientation, and poverty may have intersecting impacts on the mental health outcomes of LGBTQI-GNC youth.[40] Using focus groups, interviews, and survey data, the authors examined symptoms of psychological distress, experiences of homophobia, racism, and poverty, social isolation and low self-esteem, and resiliency. Findings indicated that youth experiencing more encounters with social oppression exhibited larger amounts of psychological distress. These experiences were also associated with isolation and lower feelings of self-esteem. Findings presented in this study offer an example of the magnifying effect of exposure to more than one form of oppression on the negative impacts experienced by youth.

Youth who have experienced marginalization based on multiple aspects of their identity—e.g., homophobia, transphobia, and racism—may also be more disadvantaged in trying to access benefits from mentoring relationships. In general, as noted previously in this review, many LGBTQI-GNC youth are faced with day-to-day experiences of social rejection from peers, family, teachers, their community, and even society. Research has indicated a close connection between these experiences and feelings of anxiety regarding social interactions.[41] In this way, previous rejection or fear of rejection may make relationship building activities that are central to mentoring more difficult for LGBTQI-GNC youth. Further, youth of color may also be experiencing stereotype threat and cultural mistrust, which have also been viewed as potential moderators for developing close and trusting mentoring relationships.[42] These are only a few of the many potentially moderating influences that could limit how diverse LGBTQI-GNC youth participate in relationship development activities with mentors. These considerations also suggest that mentoring relationships could tend to be of lower quality for LGBTQI-GNC youth with more notable experiences of social rejection and thus, in turn, less positively impactful for this subgroup of youth. Alternatively, high-quality mentoring relationships, when fully accessed by LGBTQI-GNC youth, may offer a milieu for benefits not previously available.

Juvenile justice and child welfare system involvement. LGBTQI-GNC youth who have been system-involved (e.g. child welfare, juvenile justice) may also have different risk profiles and barriers that could moderate how they participate in and benefit from mentoring relationships. Recent estimates indicate that 50% of LGBTQI-GNC youth (1.6 million) are exposed to one or more risk factors

associated with delinquency and juvenile justice system involvement.[1] LGBTQI-GNC youth are estimated to comprise 13% to15% of all youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system[43] with an estimated 300,000 gay and transgender youth arrested each year.[44] Once inside the system, research has indicated that LGBTQI-GNC youth are likely to experience bias from staff, poorly trained counselors, and disproportionate levels of detention along with policies and practices that do not ensure their safety.[45]

LGBTQI-GNC youth are also disproportionately represented in child welfare systems. In a study of the Los Angeles County child welfare system, 19.1% of youth in out-of-home care were LGBTQI-GNC.[35] Of foster care youth sampled, 13.6% self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning, and 5.6% identified as transgender. LGBTQI-GNC youth also had higher numbers of placements and were more likely to live in a group home.[35] Relative to non-LGBTQI-GNC youth, LGBTQI-GNC youth were also more likely to report being treated poorly by the foster care system and were more likely to have been hospitalized or homeless in their lifetimes.

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Findings from research on juvenile justice and child welfare hint at potential ways that youth experiences within these setting might moderate benefits of future mentoring relationships. Many LGBTQI-GNC youth describe negative—and even traumatic—experiences within the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Research has highlighted exposure to abuse, attempts at conversion, placement into isolation, and harassment from peers and staff.[45] LGBTQI-GNC youth with previous traumatic experiences in these settings may understandably feel mistrust of other social service programming. As such, previous system involvement could moderate the development of trust with formal mentors assigned through programs, thus attenuating benefits of program participation.

Identity development. Phase of identity development may also be a potential moderator for effectiveness of mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth. Research has indicated that the average age that young people "come out" has dropped over the last thirty years—from youth in their late teens/early twenties in the 1980s[46] to youth who are 16 or 17 years old more recently.[2, 47] In the last decade, gay males, on average, report same-sex feelings at age 10, self-label at age 15, and disclose to others for the first time at age 16.[2] Lesbians follow similar trends, reporting same-sex feelings, on average, at age 11, self-labeling at age 16, and disclosing for the first time at age 17.[2] As youth come out at earlier ages, they are likely to fall under the custodial care of their parents or guardians and thus to experience the unique difficulties of understanding, accepting, and sharing an identity within this context, in addition to all of the risks and challenges more generally associated with the transition to adolescence.

Research has also noted that heightened feelings of internalized homophobia that may often be present in those at earlier stages of identity development are linked to greater risk-taking behavior.[48] Conversely, youth who are "out" appear to have acquired strengths associated with resilience and

have shown to possess higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression than those that have not disclosed to others.[37] Although evidence is limited, such studies hint that questioning youth may be experiencing greater levels of psychological distress while also lacking access or experiencing barriers to resources most targeted to their needs and circumstances.

Mentor background and approach. Research on the moderating influence of mentor similarity (e.g., shared sexual orientation between mentor and mentee) and mentor approach is lacking. However, counseling literature offers clues as to which relationship qualities appear most beneficial to LGBTQI-GNC populations. Studies on parent and peer rejection also hint at notable risks for LGBTQI-GNC youth matched with unsupportive mentors.

Research on the benefits of similarity of sexual orientation in counseling relationships is inconclusive. One study of 83 male-male client counselor dyads recruited from LGBT affirming practices examined session experiences, client/counselor perceptions of similarity, and counselor self-reports of universal-diverse orientation to diversity.[49] Findings indicate that the perceived quality of the counseling sessions was closely linked to factors such as working alliance between counselor and client, session depth, and smoothness of time spent together. A measure of perceptions of similarity based on sexual orientation was not linked to any counseling-related variable. In addition, client religious commitment and counselor reports of low levels of universal-diverse orientation were negatively associated with client perceptions of improvement. Such findings hint that mentoring relationship quality for LGBQTI-GNC youth may be influenced by a number of considerations, including personality dimensions and how time together is spent, that go beyond shared sexual orientation. Accordingly, matching mentors and mentees based only on sexual orientation or shared gender identity/expression may serve to optimize outcomes for this population of youth.

Literature from counseling also provides key suggestions for how to create supportive and beneficial milieus for LGBTQI-GNC youth. In general, person-centered approaches[50] have been recommended for LGBTQI-GNC youth.[51] Such an approach consists of providing the youth with unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy; adopting the youth's perspective; emphasizing the notion of self-concept; highlighting the youth's potential for growth; and taking a youth-directed growth process. Counselors working with LGBTQI-GNC youth are also encouraged to explicitly validate the youth's identity, work with youth to assess risks regarding disclosure to others, and help youth access and gain exposure to positive socialization to LGBTQI-GNC communities.[51] This type of mentor approach, although not confirmed by research, appears well-equipped to extend benefits—giving LGBTQI-GNC youth new types of social, emotional, cognitive, and identity development benefits that are seen as critical to positive outcomes in mentees.

In contrast, research also offers caution about potential harm for LGBTQI-GNC youth matched with mentors who are unsupportive of their mentee's sexuality. As noted, family rejection is closely linked to risk-taking behavior in LGBTQI-GNC youth.[21] In addition, youth who experienced rejection from peers during disclosure were more likely to attempt suicide.[52] Although evidence is lacking, mentor rejection during youth disclosure may also hold similar outcomes. Therefore, additional inquiry may well yield findings that highlight the need to create matching strategies that protect youth—whether out or not—from mentors that may be unsupportive of their sexuality.

RESEARCH

Research on the moderating and shaping influences of mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth has been extremely limited. Within studies described previously in this review, there are hints as to how mentor and youth characteristics may contribute to or limit the benefits of mentoring relationships. However, given the limitations of rigor and the size and scope of existing studies, research findings do not currently allow for conclusions to be drawn.

Gastic and Johnson,[33] for example, noted differences in how LGBTQI-GNC females of color participated in mentoring relationships with teachers. LGBTQI-GNC females of color were significantly less likely than white LGBTQI-GNC females to report having teacher-mentors (20% to 35%). Further, youth with teacher-mentors were seen to engage in post-secondary participation at higher rates than youth with other types of mentors (71% to 54%). Such findings note that LGBTQI-GNC females of color may not be receiving mentoring and its benefits at the same level as other youth. However, this study examined only the presence and type of mentor and did not account for mentor approach or similarity to youth.

Ross[34] also identified benefits available for gay mentees matched with gay mentors—offering clues as to how similarity in background may help to promote social, emotional, and cognitive benefits more widely associated with mentoring, along with targeted support for identity development—features closely linked to positive outcomes in this population. However, this study did not include any comparison groups and no research appears to have examined ways in which straight mentors may be able to provide similar levels of support. Further, this study also lacked a discussion of criteria used, if any, to match mentors and mentees.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Some subpopulations of LGBTQI-GNC youth—including youth of color, gender nonconforming youth, transgender youth, youth at earlier phases of identity development, and systems involved youth—may experience intersections of risks that hinder the development of trust and for this reason make it more challenging for them to experience high quality, effective relationships with mentors; research directly examining this possibility, however, is lacking.

2. Existing research suggests that mentors who take youth-centered approaches inclusive of the experiences and needs of LGBTQI-GNC youth may foster greater benefits for this population of youth; in contrast, mentors who are experienced as unsupportive—especially with respect to disclosure of feelings or questions regarding sexual orientation —pose the potential to create harm.

3. There is indirect and preliminary evidence that the use of criteria that are inclusive of—but not limited to—shared sexual orientation and gender identity/expression between youth and mentors may be important for enhancing the quality of mentoring relationships for LGBTQI-GNC; other relationship features with indicated potential to be influential (e.g., amount of time spent together) are similar to those identified as important for mentoring relationship quality among youth more generally.

3. What Are the Intervening Processes that Are Most Important in Linking Mentoring Outcomes for LGBTQI-GNC Youth?

BACKGROUND

There is strong indication that support for identity development is one of the most important pathways through which positive outcomes in LGBTQI-GNC youth can be achieved. In addition, literature from counseling and the broader youth mentoring research points toward the importance of service provider and volunteer approach when working with LGBTQI-GNC youth.

The importance of supporting LGBTQI-GNC youth through phases of identity development. Research has shown that youth who are open about their sexuality report lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression[53, 54] and may also possess higher levels of self-esteem and be less likely to engage in risky behaviors than those who are in earlier phases of identity development.[12] Many of these young people appear able to access supports that specifically address their needs as a marginalized minority, potentially demonstrating greater resilience than present in earlier phases of identity development.[16]

Because of robust links between identity development and resilience in LGBTQI-GNC populations, intervention strategies for this population that involve supporting youth as they navigate through this process have been theorized to be beneficial.[55] Underscoring the potential significance of such support is the idea that LGBTQI-GNC youth may feel unprepared and unsupported in trying to find congruence and meaning in complex and changing affects, behaviors, and cognitive processes that lie outside the defined societal norm of heterosexuality.[56]

In line with these considerations, identity development has been conceptualized as both an internal (individual) and a social (group membership/affiliation) process in the *Inclusive Model of Sexual Minority Identity Formation*.[7] This model includes the following individual and group membership phases: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis. Individuals are seen to have internal and relational experiences that can help them move forward or backward between these phases—with the resolution consisting of a sense of synthesis between public and private selves, a recognition of belonging to a group that is marginalized, and also that this belonging is only one part among many that constitute an individual's identity.

In related research, youth participating in programs such as gay-straight alliances in school have reported feeling more comfortable with their sexuality, described improvements in relationships with peers and family members, and expressed feeling supported during their coming out process.[57] Youth participating in programming within community centers also reported important benefits such as feeling safe and feeling connectedness to other LGBTQI-GNC individuals in their group activities.[58] Such findings are consistent with the idea that targeted, safe, and responsive support constitutes an important pathway through which LGBTQI-GNC youth can explore their identity while also forming bonds and connection to others, thus fostering both individual and social components of identity development.

Mentoring. The indicated importance of social processes of support for LGBTQI-GNC youth suggests that supporting youth as they question, explore, accept, and share their identity could be a salient pathway through which mentoring can promote positive outcomes. In general, mentors who are empathetic and have positive regard for a mentee are most likely to form bonds that can be used to facilitate change.[59] These bonds appear to be strengthened when mentors and mentees have similarities of interest and experiences[60] and when mentors take developmental and/or instrumental approaches (i.e., taking the time to get to know the youth and working to support achievement of goals) instead of prescriptive approaches (i.e., telling the mentee how to behave and act).[61, 62] In addition, mentors that play advocacy roles in their mentee's lives also appear to facilitate positive benefits in youth.[63]

There are a number of important pathways through which mentors are posited to provide intervening support to LGBTQI-GNC mentees as they navigate through external risks and internal identity development phases. First, matching LGBTQI-GNC youth with positive adult role models that are LGBT may be a way to connect young people with others from their community, helping them learn from others that have navigated through the tension and difficulty associated with identity development. Second, mentors—regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression—might be able to serve in advocacy roles, helping youth access community and counseling resources while also working with them to navigate challenges at home and at school. The next section describes the few research studies that highlight how these activities can serve to yield benefits for youth.

RESEARCH

Only three studies were located that address how mentors and mentoring relationships might serve in an intervening role for LGBTQI-GNC youth. Two studies examine how mentors offered support for identity development among gay male youth and young adults. A third study examined the types of support identified by gay males with informal mentors.

In addition to identifying a range of benefits for gay mentees, Ross[34] also examined ways in which the mentoring relationship offered support for identity development. The author identified strategies through which mentors worked with mentees to support identity development—e.g., gay male youth worked with their mentors to unlearn previous negative beliefs held about their sexuality and learned new ways of thinking about their possible selves through their mentor's example and encouragement. Mentors also helped their mentees with the coming out process, provided opportunities to help mentees meet other people from the LGBTQI-GNC community, offered advice about dating and relationships, and supported students when they had conflicts. These activities were noted to closely align with support at the group and individual levels, with mentors having served as cultural guides who also helped students learn more about and explore their identity.

Another qualitative study looked more closely at the characteristics and benefits present within a long-term formal mentoring relationship between an adult and a youth from the LGBTQI-GNC community.[64] Using data collected during in-depth interviews at the 17- and 22-month point in the mentoring relationship, several key themes highlighting the unique role that the mentor played in the youth's identity development were detailed. Findings suggested that the 1:1 format of a formal mentoring relationship provided a safe space for identity exploration and allowed mentees to feel comfortable sharing more about their experiences and challenges growing up LGBTQI-

Findings suggested that the **1:1 format** of a formal mentoring relationship **provided a safe space for identity exploration** and **allowed mentees to feel comfortable sharing more** about their experiences and challenges growing up LGBTQI-GNC.

GNC. This positive relationship was different from those previously experienced in group and peer programming in which fears of rejection felt inhibiting to the mentee. The mentor also took a responsive mentee-centered approach (i.e., a milieu for support that was individualized to the needs of the youth), key features of which consisted of introducing the mentee to LGBTQI-GNC community resources, helping the mentee talk to his family about his sexuality, and problem solving with the mentee about dating and relationships.

A third qualitative study examined processes of support within natural mentoring relationships experienced by LGBTQI-GNC male youth.[65] Analysis of interview data collected from 39 self-identified gay, bisexual, and questioning male youth between the ages of 15 and 22 suggested that mentors offered diverse types of support to the youth, including social support, emotional support, informational support, self-appraisal support, and unconditional support. Mentees viewed emotional support as one of the most important features of their relationship. Findings also highlighted potential ways that natural mentors might be able to offset identity intolerance by helping LGBTQI-GNC youth learn new and more positive ways of appraising themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Support for identity development and gender identity/expression may be a critical pathway through which mentoring relationships are able to promote positive outcomes for LGBTQI-GNC youth; however, research directly addressing this possibility is extremely limited and thus inconclusive.

2. Processes that involve mentors taking an advocacy role and offering emotional, informational, and social forms of support may be significant in contributing to positive outcomes for LGBTQI-GNC youth, but existing research is only broadly suggestive of this possibility.

4. To What Extent Have Efforts to Provide Mentoring to LGBTQI-GNC Youth Reached and Engaged Targeted Youth, Been Implemented with High Quality, and Been Adopted and Sustained by Host Organizations and Settings?

BACKGROUND

At present, LGBTQI-GNC youth are greatly underserved by youth mentoring programs. Only a small number of programs are providing mentoring services specifically responding to the needs of this population—with some estimates indicating fewer than 5 of the approximate 5,000 mentoring programs matching adult community-based mentors with LGBTQI-GNC youth.[1, 9, 64] Given such a strikingly small number of mentoring efforts reaching and engaging this targeted population, research regarding high-quality program implementation is extremely limited. Therefore, background literature contained in this review focuses more closely on research and practitioner-identified practices linked to improving access and quality of services for LGBTQI-GNC youth.

Accessibility barriers and promising practices. With so few mentoring programs intentionally providing services to LGBTQI-GNC youth, research on accessibility offers clues as to challenges that may prohibit bringing this type of support to scale. For example, a study of 29 youth-serving program staff identified four broad types of barriers that were noted to impede LGBTQI-GNC youth access to support services: 1) societal barriers, 2) provider-related barriers, 3) youth-related barriers, and 4) resource-related barriers.[66] Societal barriers included prejudice and discrimination directed at LGBTQI-GNC youth, such as lack of social support, stereotypes, and lack of parental or societal acceptance. Provider-related barriers included requirements that LGBTQI-GNC youth "come out" to access services, lack of provider knowledge of gay-affirmative practices-resources, and lack of confidentiality. Youth-related barriers consisted of a safety (LGBTQI-GNC are afraid for their safety) and awareness issues (LGBTQI-GNC youth are unaware that services are available or feel that services don't apply to them), a lack of self-acceptance, and uncertainty about sexual orientation and/or gender identity(questioning). Last, resource-related barriers included lack of health resources in public schools, lack of transportation, and financial issues faced by LGBQT youth. Such findings offer insight into the great difficulties experienced in attempting to create programming that is responsive and inclusive.

Program staff in this study also identified provider level approaches believed to increase LGBTQI-GNC youth accessibility,[66] including creating safe/open environments for all youth, offering ongoing diversity education of providers and program staff, allowing LGBTQI-GNC youth to contribute to programming, partnering with other organizations to increase capacity to serve all youth, educating providers on LGBTQI-GNC youth service needs, allowing LGBTQI-GNC youth to receive services without parental consents, providing training in specific LGBTQI-GNC advocacy skills, and providing one-to-one sessions for LGBTQI-GNC youth.

Such accessibility and inclusion suggestions are closely related to the *Ten Standards of Care for LGBTQI-GNC Youth*.[67] These standards describe research- and practitioner-informed practices for

creating inclusive programming for LGBTQI-GNC youth and include the following recommendations: 1) conduct regular needs assessments to understand staff capacity and guide/monitor improvement efforts; 2) establish and enforce nondiscrimination policies; 3) build staff awareness, knowledge, and skills by providing training and professional development opportunities; 4) incorporate appropriate intake and data collection processes; 5) promote safe, supportive, and culturally competent environments; 6) implement practices that support preferences and affirm identity; 7) promote healthy, supportive peer connections; 8) strengthen family connections; 9) promote access to affirming services and supports; and 10) collaborate and foster relationships with other supportive youth and family organizations.

The U.S. Department of Education[68] also released examples from school districts across the country—offering suggestions for schools to create a welcoming, accessible, and responsive environment for transgender students. Policy examples from this document offer guidance that supports student transitions, establishes policies for privacy and confidentiality, ensures equal access to facilities and activities, and creates an inclusive school climate.

Emerging support from funders and policy-makers. Although efforts to create targeted and formal mentoring programming for LGBTQI-GNC youth have been limited, funding opportunities are beginning to emerge indicating that policy-makers are recognizing the importance of extending the reach of mentoring to address the risks faced by this population. For example, in 2015 the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) released a solicitation to fund mentoring programming for underserved populations of youth, including those that are LGBTQI-GNC. In 2016, OJJDP also identified LGBTQI-GNC youth as a target population for funding national mentoring programs. Foundations are also beginning to fund various initiatives to help bring mentoring to scale for LGBTQI-GNC youth. In 2016, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America received funding to initiate a pilot program at five sites to identify and implement inclusive practices for LGBTQI-GNC youth—including screening and intake, matching, training, support, and case management (H. Bardwell, personal communication, May 15, 2016). Such opportunities hint at growing concern that this population of young people may be struggling to access benefits and support associated with mentoring.

RESEARCH

Research documenting ways in which mentoring efforts have reached and engaged LGBTQI-GNC youth is extremely limited. One recent report,[1] using data from the "Mentoring Effect" national survey of mentoring experiences of young persons in the United States,[69] estimates that 1.66 million

This report also raised questions about the **quality of mentoring relationships available for this population**, recommending updates for **nondiscrimination and confidentiality policies**, inclusion of **LGBTQI-GNC identity-affirming language** on website and other materials, creating **training to improve mentor competence** when working with LGBTQI-GNC youth, creating **opportunities for LGBTQI-GNC youth to develop relationships with LGBT affirming mentors,** and conducting outreach and **building partnership with LGBT community organizations.**

LGBTQI-GNC (89% of at-risk LGBTQI-GNC youth) never had a structured mentoring relationship while growing up, whereas 616,000 at-risk LGBTQI-GNC (37% of at-risk LGBTQI-GNC youth) never had a mentor of any kind. These figures describe a significant mentoring gap for this population—LGBTQI-GNC youth are participating in formal mentoring relationships at very low levels. This report also raised questions about the quality of mentoring relationships available for this population, recommending updates for nondiscrimination and confidentiality policies, inclusion of LGBTQI-GNC identity-affirming language on website and other materials, creating training to improve mentor competence when working with LGBTQI-GNC youth, creating opportunities for LGBTQI-GNC youth to develop relationships with LGBT affirming mentors, and conducting outreach and building partnership with LGBT community organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Few formal mentoring programs appear to exist that provide mission-driven mentoring services to LGBTQI-GNC youth; however, research documenting the prevalence of such programs or the success of mentoring programs, more generally, with engaging LGBTQI-GNC youth is lacking.

2. A number of promising practices for providing services to LGBTQI-GNC youth are emerging, offering initial clues as to how to create safe climates and responsive programming for this population.

3. Funding for mentoring programs and initiatives focused on LGBTQI-GNC youth is starting to appear.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(Mike Garringer, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership and Christian Rummell, American Institutes for Research)

One of the more interesting aspects of these National Mentoring Resource Center (NMRC) population reviews is seeing exactly how much high-quality research the youth mentoring field actually has to draw from to improve the quality and quantity of mentoring services. This particular review has highlighted the paucity of rigorous research on the impact of mentoring on LGBTQI-GNC youth—needless to say that four studies is not exactly a treasure trove of actionable information. What makes this all the more frustrating from a research-to-practice angle is that there are LGBTQI-GNC youth being served by pretty much every mentoring program in the United States that works with adolescents, especially if we are honest about including the q of questioning. Many of the youth served in our programs are not "out" in the traditional sense. Rather, they may be exploring their sense of identity and questioning their orientation, but have not divulged this information to parents or other caring adults, let alone a new mentor in their lives. This explains, in part, why the research has lagged behind a bit with regard to these youth: they can be hard to identify and may not even identify themselves as being part of this group.

Given the substantial risks experienced by this group, as detailed in the review, practitioners must understand that ignoring this need, or worrying about pressure from certain religious or community groups, is potentially doing harm.

So how can practitioners make sure that they serve this population well? Even taking into account the limited research to directly inform mentoring for this population, the overall body of available knowledge points to several things practitioners would do well to keep in mind as they attempt to build responsive, evidence-based services for this population:

1. LEARN THE DEFINITIONS BEHIND THE ACRONYM AND BECOME CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY COMPETENT WHEN DESIGNING AND DELIVERING SERVICES.

One of the unfortunate realities of our society's thinking about the LGBTQI-GNC population is that the acronym itself lumps together many groups of young people who are dealing with very different feelings, discovery processes, and needs. As noted in this review's background sections, this diverse population defines itself across a wide spectrum of experiences and circumstances. Perhaps the best first step in serving this population well is to become more familiar with what each of these groups is dealing with, the unique stigmas and challenges of each group, and the different ways in which mentors (and your staff) might need to provide support.

Detailed information about each of these groups should be a required part of staff training and considered an absolute requirement for any program serving adolescents. Remember, ignoring the existence or challenges of this population is tantamount to potentially doing harm. So make sure that direct service staff knows what they are talking about when it comes to this group. (A good starting point for learning more about this topic is the *Guide for Understanding, Supporting, and Affirming LGBTQI2-S Children, Youth, and Families*, published by AIR.)

Programs may also want to take some time educating their board of directors, funders, and other important stakeholders about the need to be welcoming of this population and transparent in providing services explicitly to LGBTQI-GNC youth. Think back to the importance of trust and inclusion for these youth noted earlier in this review and determine how you can build that within the many layers of your program leadership. Everyone associated with the program needs to be on the same page about the importance of this work and the reality that the program does serve young people going through this aspect of identity development.

2. MAKE SURE YOUR PROGRAM CULTURE AND MATERIALS ARE WELCOMING TO THIS POPULATION.

Chances are that your program already spends considerable time ensuring that recruitment messages and other materials are racially and culturally appropriate and welcoming, as well as reflective of the youth you serve. Take a fresh look at your recruitment materials and messages through the lens of an LGBTQI-GNC youth or their family. Or a gay or transgender mentor, for that matter. Are these program participants represented visually? Is there language that lets them know that they are welcome? Stating these things explicitly is likely to be better than hoping that an often-marginalized person sees themselves represented when they look at your program.

There are several things beyond just freshening up your recruitment literature that programs can do to make their work more welcoming. The most obvious one is to address the topic during orientations and initial trainings of mentors, youth, and parents. Talk openly about your policies around participation and matching. Share your program's values and make sure that all participants know that your program is committed to making your services safe, supportive, and honest about serving all youth, including LGBTQI-GNC youth.

Programs can also spend some time looking at their physical space. Are there symbols, posters, or other visuals that would let participants know that this is a program that welcomes them?

3. CONSIDER RECRUITING MENTORS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE IN THIS AREA.

As with other aspects of supporting youth identity development, mentors with "lived experience" in this area may be particularly impactful and more skilled in providing the right messages at the right time. Mentors who have directly struggled with many of these same challenges may be especially well-equipped to provide the empathy, understanding, and perspectives noted as critical earlier in the review (at the very least, one assumes that mentors will not be harmfully unsupportive of the youth's LGBTQI-GNC identification). Whether just exploring feelings around orientation (questioning), contemplating "coming out," or dealing with negative peer and parent reactions, mentors who have been through these experiences in their own lives may have an authority and authenticity that matters to the young person. They can model certain aspects of this journey and can allow youth to see their future selves in a new light.

Mentors who have **directly struggled with many of these same challenges** may be especially well-equipped to **provide the empathy, understanding, and perspectives noted** as critical earlier in the review.

Programs should certainly not get hung up on the risk management aspects of making same-sex matches here (don't unwittingly, and unethically, equate being gay with risk for being a pedophile in your policies). Just provide your standard level of screening, monitoring, and support and make sure that your own hang-ups don't prevent youth from having the role models that can speak most directly to their experience.

That being said, make sure that your mentors are trained in how to provide support to this population. Extrapolating from the research considered in this review, a good deal of which comes from the broader mentoring literature, it is advisable to emphasize to mentors that their role is not to tell a young person how to handle things or ensure that they explore this the exact same way they did. Rather, they can be encouraged to provide caring, support, and advocacy, while allowing the youth to find her or his own way.

It's also worth noting that other individuals may have lived experience that speaks to LGBTQI-GNC youth. There are, unfortunately, plenty of other groups of individuals who have experienced marginalization, discrimination, and persecution at the hands of a dominant culture that does not understand or care for their stories. So, while recruiting gay and transgender mentors may be helpful, they are undoubtedly not the only individuals who can support an LGBTQI-GNC youth on her or his journey. It is clear from the available research that traits like empathy, resilience, and openness are also essential for serving LGBTQI-GNC youth.

4. SET (OR AUGMENT) CONFIDENTIALITY POLICIES TO ADDRESS INFORMATION SHARING AROUND THE TOPIC OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

Chances are that your program already has policies around what information can be shared with mentors about the background and circumstances of mentees and rules that govern what information mentors should or must share with parents and staff (such as mandatory reporting of abuse or reporting declarations of intent for self-harm or harm of others). But the waters around sexual identity are often harder to navigate, most importantly because the youth themselves may have very specific ideas about what information should be known by whom in their social network and the adults in their lives. As noted in the recent U.S. Department of Education guidance[68] on serving transgender youth, "In some cases a student may want school staff and students to know, and in other cases the student may not want this information to be widely known."

Although there is no single "right" way to disclose information like this, or to whom, programs would be well advised to take the lead of the mentees themselves and respect their wishes about who to share information with. If a youth does not want their mentor to be told about their sexual orientation status, that is their right, as is withholding that information from their parent or guardian (provided that it does not involve any mandatory reporting considerations per other aspects of the policy). Similarly, mentors need to know that they are under no obligation to share information disclosed to them by their mentee unless it triggers some other mandatory aspect of the confidentiality policy.

Programs may want to also look at "required" aspects of program data collection, such as gender identification on intake forms, as these can place youth in the situation of being forced to disclose or reveal aspects of their sexual orientation that they may not yet be comfortable expressing or sharing with others. Make sure that the process of simply providing information to the program or participating in data collection activities does not unwittingly make a mentee feel pressured into divulging this information or feel excluded from the rest of the mentees.

It can be challenging for programs to keep track of who knows what about a youth's sexual orientation and wishes about how widely that information can be shared. But hopefully there is room for that kind of nuance within their program case files or records and mentors have been well-trained in how to handle that particular type of information. All it takes is one instance of a staff member or a mentor divulging privileged information to the wrong person for that all-important trust and feeling of acceptance to be irrevocably shattered for a young person. So make sure that your confidentiality and information-sharing policies address this. The aforementioned U.S. Department of Education guide for respectfully serving transgender youth offers a wealth of useful advice that can be applied to the broader LGBTQI-GNC population in mentoring programs.

5. TRAIN MENTORS WORKING WITH LGBTQI-GNC YOUTH IN RELEVANT TOPICAL AREAS.

Based on the needs and developmental processes highlighted in this review, mentoring programs would appear to be well-advised to train mentors working with LGBTQI-GNC youth on several meaningful topics, including:

- **Setting their own expectations.** The sad reality, as elucidated in this review, is that many LGBTQI-GNC youth have suffered tremendous rejection and stigmatization from peers and adults prior to entering a mentoring relationship and, as a result, can have anxiety around social interactions. They may be especially reluctant to open up to a new adult in their life if previous adults have not handled their identity development well. Be sure to caution mentors about expecting an instant rapport or assuming that their mentee will figure out this new sexual identity journey on some prescribed timeline. Encourage mentors to spend time early on having fun and building trust and respecting the mentee's right to disclose information at their pace.

- **Identity development and how to foster it.** This is critical for all adolescents, but one that this review notes may be especially challenging or complicated for LGBTQI-GNC youth. Programs may want to provide conversation starters that get youth thinking about their values, the many facets of their overall identity, their feelings about their own personality and relationships with others, and the life they imagine themselves leading as an adult. For youth who are already in the process of coming out or taking on a sexual identity, their mentors may choose to talk about their own experiences and strategies for overcoming bias and prejudice more directly. And remember that sexual orientation is just one of the many identities that these youth may have. It's an important one, but others—student, artist, activist, person of color—may also be equally important.

- **Referrals to other services, when needed.** Most mentoring programs are ill-equipped to directly handle the many needs and circumstances that can arise for mentees. Given the severe statistics around risky behaviors, self-harm, and depression among LGBTQI-GNC youth—and the potential for meaningful conflict in the home around their status—programs should have good connections to other service providers that can step in when a situation becomes too complicated or challenging for a mentor or staff to address. Make sure your mentors know when to seek help and how to get it. Part of being a welcoming organization to youth and families is providing access to a greater web of supports, so make sure you can connect all participants to relevant LGBTQI-GNC and other community resources and services.

- **Working effectively with parents.** In many instances, parents of an LGBTQI-GNC youth will be in their own process of finding understanding and meaning about this aspect of their child's life. They may have uncertainty about another individual, in this case a mentor, inserting themselves into this pivotal and meaningful moment for their family. On the other hand, other parents no doubt will be relieved to have someone who can guide their child through the road ahead and will welcome a partner that can provide perspectives they cannot. Each family and mentee will be different, but mentors should all have training on how to communicate with parents, respect confidentiality, maintain boundaries, and seek support within the context of an LGBTQI-GNC match. Also worth noting here is that some parents, as discussed earlier, may still be unaware of their child's LGBTQI-GNC status or may become aware at some point during the mentoring relationship. In these circumstances, programs may want to have a relationship with a local support organization, such as PFLAG, that can offer help to parents or guardians as they process this new information.

- **Handling critical moments.** This may be the trickiest topic to provide early training on, but programs should try and help mentors anticipate some critical moments where their support can be especially crucial. There may be essential moments in the development of a youth's sexual identity that may be empowering or scarring, depending on how they are handled, and mentors will want to be able to say the right thing at the right time when it matters the most. Programs may want to, either in a group or one-on-one context, provide mentors who may encounter issues around sexual orientation with various scenarios to consider and meaningful, respectful responses and talking points they can keep in mind if a critical moment of disclosure (or crisis) ever comes. Possible topics include: how to handle peer rejection, questions about when and how to share their identity with friends or family, instances of negative thoughts and stereotype threats related to their identity development, negative reactions to "coming out," and dealing with instances of prejudice or bias (i.e., "microaggressions"). As noted earlier in the review, research on the efficacy of these training practices is unclear, but given the importance of not alienating these youth further, any attention paid to these types of critical moments is likely a good thing.

6. ADVOCATE FOR LGBTQI-GNC YOUTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND THE FAMILY.

We have good research evidence that shows that mentors who are supported in taking on a meaningful teaching or advocacy role can have a stronger impact on youth. This stands to be particularly

valuable when youth need help navigating systems or dealing with institutions or communities that may not be responsive to their individuality and needs. And while you can certainly train mentors to advocate for the LGBTQI-GNC youth with whom they are working, program staff may want to consider how they can be more involved in higher-level community advocacy for these and other marginalized groups. As noted previously, being transparent and open about your support for the LGBTQI-GNC youth population is a start. This is especially important in communities that struggle with respecting and valuing LGBTQI-GNC youth. Programs should stand up proudly for their values of inclusion and equity. The fourth edition of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™* includes participation in social justice and equity-based movements as a key indicator of organizational health. So make sure your work is also focused on changing the landscape of how the community supports LGTBQ youth.

7. WHEN POSSIBLE, CONTRIBUTE TO THE RESEARCH BASE.

As already noted, the research on mentoring for LGBTQI-GNC youth is very limited. Our field is still struggling to even identify how many of these youth are being served in programs and how many programs are providing targeted support. So we end this commentary with an encouragement for programs to take some measures—both small and large—that can help build the base of research and practice-based knowledge on this topic:

- **Start asking more about who you are serving.** Programs might want to ask youth and families about sexual identification or questioning at the time of intake. Many programs do not have this on their intake forms. Although not all youth will disclose this information, even asking the questions will let them know you care about these topics.

- **Note the changes you make to your program's "mentoring as usual" to more effectively serve these youth.** There is a growing body of practitioner wisdom in our field about how to best serve LGBTQI-GNC youth, but others in your community and beyond might learn from strategies you've employed. So document how you give LGBTQI-GNC youth relevant, respectful, and responsive mentoring, and share that knowledge with others (including by submitting any policies, procedures, or training materials for inclusion in the NMRC Resource Collection).

- **Look for differential effects for the LGBTQI-GNC youth you serve.** If your program ever takes the step of doing a rigorous evaluation of its impact on youth, make an effort to examine the similarities or differences in impact among the types of youth you serve, including LGBTQI-GNC youth. They may benefit from mentoring in unique ways or through different pathways than other youth in the program. This can be a challenge due to limitations in sample size (number of youth served), but the dearth of research found currently can benefit from even the smallest of evaluations. Evaluate how your program best serves LGBTQI-GNC youth and make their voices heard in the broader mentoring literature as your mentors help them find their voices in the community.

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