AN ANALYSIS OF LGBT YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS
AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS AT REDUCING ANXIETY
AND EMPOWERING LGBT YOUNG ADULTS

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An Analysis of LGBT Youth Organizations and their Effectiveness at Reducing Anxiety and Empowering LGBT Young Adults

INTRODUCTION

Studies conducted within the past decade all report that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth are struggling. The National School Climate Survey found that 82% of LGBT youth reported struggling with aspects of their sexual orientation in the previous year, 64% felt unsafe during school due to their sexual orientation, and 44% felt unsafe during school due to their gender identity (LGBT Bullying 2014). Cyberbullying Statistics reports that 42% of LGBT youth are victims of cyberbullying and 35% receive online physical threats. According to stopbullying.gov, 33% of the LGBT youth population have stopped going to school out of fear of bullies. Additionally, LGBT children who are not accepted by their families are eight times more likely to commit suicide than non-LGBT children (LGBT Bullying 2014). These studies show that LGBT youth are vulnerable to higher levels of social anxiety that ultimately make them more likely to be victims of suicide.

To combat the anxiety felt by LGBT youth, many advocates have dedicated resources to finding solutions to the difficulties these youth face. Solutions range from social groups of supportive peers to leadership positions and seminars in how to be role models to others. One of the most important of these potential solutions is the Gay-Straight Alliance, or GSA. GSAs function as LGBT support groups and are found in many high schools across the United States. Research has shown that GSAs work well in reducing the amount of anxiety and depression felt by LGBT youth through their programming. The programming provided by GSAs typically works to empower the youth through opportunities to gain experience in education, activism, and leadership (Russell et al. 2009).
In more recent years, larger LGBT organizations have been modeling their own programs after the work done by GSAs, all while providing services to a larger age-range of youth within a broader community. These LGBT youth organizations typically receive funding from non-profit grants and are able to help support their participants financially and emotionally through enhanced programming. In addition, whereas GSAs generally include students in their high school years, these larger organizations can accommodate students aged 13 through 20 years of age. For instance, The Indiana Youth Group, or IYG, has been working with the Indianapolis, Indiana youth publically since 1998. They have a public facility that is open to youth and young adults (ages 12 through 20) every Wednesday through Friday. IYG focuses on a program-driven model in an effort to help reduce anxiety and empower its participants (Indiana Youth Group).

Although research suggests that GSAs are effective at increasing the overall well-being of their participants (Russell et al. 2009), larger LGBT organizations have not been as extensively studied. Given that larger LGBT youth organizations generally have more funding for programs, have private locations away from public school settings, and have the availability of full-time staff members, one might assume that they will be able to offer programming that is at least as effective, if not more effective, than the programming offered by GSAs. Unfortunately, the dearth of research on these groups means that this assumption remains unexplored.

This research takes a preliminary step toward examining the impact that larger LGBT youth organizations can have on LGBT youth. Using the Indiana Youth Group (IYG) as a case study, this research explores the degree to which IYG’s programming helps reduce anxiety and fosters empowerment among its participants. Results from this exploration can offer insights into the potential for large youth organizations to positively impact LGBT youth.
exclusive focus on IYG and the lack of comparative data with a similarly situated GSA ultimately precludes me from offering a rigorous test of the benefits of large organizations relative to GSAs, these data will offer initial insights into the effectiveness of these larger programs, thereby extending the literature on programming for LGBT youth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a great deal of research that notes the association between being LGBT and having an increased level of anxiety and depression (LGBT Bullying). In order to understand why LGBT individuals experience anxiety and depression differently than non-LGBT individuals, one must understand how discrimination and prejudicial attitudes have been institutionalized into American society. Heteronormative society labels LGBT persons as deviant, stigmatizing them as inferior to non-LGBT persons, and thus causing social anxiety (McDermott et al. 2008).

Deviance is usually a behavior or physical characteristic that falls beyond the boundaries of social acceptance. Alexander Liazos, in his article “The Poverty of the Sociology of Deviance: Nuts, Sluts, and Perverts” (1972), argues that labeling an action as deviant behavior works to create boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate conduct. In the United States, heteronormativity describes the cultural hierarchy of gender and sexuality binaries. For instance, gender is seen as male and female, with male being superior; similarly, sexuality is seen as heterosexual and homosexual, with heterosexual being superior. These assumptions are normative, meaning that they are shared and reinforced by the majority of social institutions, such as religion, education, media, etc. Since any actions that are not in accordance to the
established norms are considered deviant behaviors, it is easy to comprehend how LGBT behavior has historically been considered deviant in heteronormative cultures.

In order to maintain that societal status quo, individuals caught participating in deviant behaviors must be identified and marked as inferior. This process is referred to as stigmatization. Stigmatizing someone essentially encapsulates the person into a category from which they will not easily escape (Hinshaw 2006). Erving Goffman wrote extensively on stigmas and their role in a person’s social identity. He traced the idea of a stigma back to the Greeks who utilized stigmas to physically mark people as inferior. According to Goffman (1963:57):

The Greeks…originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.

Obviously, the practice of burning a literal stigma onto a body is not common, if at all present, in today’s society. However, the metaphorical practice of stigmatizing persists, and is evident in the treatment of LGBT persons.

*Stigmatization and Social Anxiety*

The LGBT community has been stigmatized in many ways, but perhaps the most historically impactful was the inclusion of homosexuality and Gender Identity Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manuel of Mental Disorders (DSM). Homosexuality was labeled as a mental disorder between the years 1952 and 1973. For transgender and other gender non-conforming individuals, their presence in the DSM has remained since the mid-1970s under various titles and descriptions. Although the cultural views of sexual orientation and gender are
shifting, and more progressive understandings are being used, there is no doubt that the historical mistreatment has left a lasting effect on the LGBT community. In other words, even though the classification of mental illness for LGBT people has changed, the historical labels of deviance continue to carry a stigma of being unhealthy and insane. Goffman described the residual effect of mental illness labels as a “reduc[tion], in our minds from a whole and usual person, to a tainted, discounted one” (1963:57). He specifically referred to the stigma of mental disorders as a “blemish of character” (Hinshaw 2006:30).

Moreover, even implicit stigmatization causes harm to individuals and families fearing condemnations of others. The “blemish” may not be visible or easily detected, but it will have identical affects. Additionally, Goffman warns that stigmas harm individuals through “self-harm and self-derogation” because they begin viewing themselves as less than human and inferior to “normal” society (1963:59). In other words, even if such an individual is the only person aware of their stigma, they will still begin to view themselves in negative connotations. Consequently, social anxiety is the stress that one feels after having been perceived as inferior or stigmatized by other members of society.

Social anxiety contributes to the increased rates of depression and suicidal ideation among LGBT persons, and specifically LGBT youth. As of November, 2014, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention noted that LGBT adolescents are twice as likely to have attempted suicide as compared to non-LGBT youth (LGBT Youth). Additionally, LGBT youth still report experiencing higher levels of bullying, substance abuse, dating violence, sexual assault, and victimization than non-LGBT youth (LGBT Youth).

LGBT youth-related research on social anxiety often focuses on one of two explanatory factors. First, psychological studies typically emphasize the mental health status and coping skills
of individuals struggling with anxiety (Bauermeister et al. 2010). In contrast, sociological studies focus on larger cultural forces, including homophobia, heterosexism, social pressure, and stigma. For instance, McDermott et al. (2008) found that exposure to homophobic comments and slander was internalized by the LGBT person as “shame.” The students who internalized the shame worked to rationalize it in several different ways. Some felt that being shamed was a part of growing up and becoming an adult. Others accepted the shame and described themselves as “shameful people;” those who felt like they were indeed shameful were the most likely to revert to self-harm techniques and suicidal ideation (McDermott et al. 2008:821).

Likewise, a study conducted in Massachusetts focused on the emotional distress of high school students, and wanted to test the effects of perceived discrimination, which they defined as discrimination based on one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. They found that perceived discrimination among gay or transgender boys increased their likelihood of depression by nearly 30%. Furthermore, the perceived discrimination increased an LGBT student’s likelihood of contemplating suicide at a rate five times higher than non-LGBT students (Almeida et al. 2009). This study found similar results to the McDermott et al. study in which LGBT youth were more likely to use self-harm techniques and have suicidal ideation when in homophobic and discriminatory environments. Furthermore, these same students were less likely to report the events to parents or school administrators, isolating themselves from those who could potentially help (McDermott et al. 2008; Almeida et al. 2009).

An additional important factor for predicting LGBT anxiety and suicide is the degree to which young people feel isolated and are forced to develop their sense of self in private. McDermott et al. argued that the essence and purpose of a social identity is for it to be shared, and the inability to do so is isolating (2008). These findings support a study conducted in 2012
that discussed LGBT youth and their access to positive role models. For youth who had role models, but named a celebrity or other person who was not a significant other in their life, the reduction in anxiety was not found. The researchers stated, “[W]hen LGBT youth can only identify nonproximal role models in their lives, the inaccessible role models may become a stark reminder that the youth does not have anyone in their lives who can understand them or accept them for who they are, exacerbating feelings of isolation and loneliness” (Bird, Kuhns, and Garofalo 2012).

Understanding how prominent social anxiety is in the LGBT community is the first step in identifying ways to reduce it. In recent work, advocates have begun using the research on stigma and deviance to help LGBT youth overcome the social pressures that they face. The solutions that show the best outcomes are not individualistic treatments of anxiety; instead, LGBT advocates have been using various techniques that work to empower the youth through community-based programming. In other words, if the problem is a result of the isolation and shame that LGBT youth face, then the solution should be to minimize the isolation and provide support that validates these youth and their existence.

Solutions

In an effort to reduce the level of anxiety and depression that LGBT youth experience, researchers have investigated the role of empowerment. For the purposes of this study, empowerment is viewed as the antithesis of anxiety; it is the alleviation of stigma. According to several contemporary studies, LGBT youth navigate their anxiety and search for empowerment through a variety of social interactions. There are four concepts in particular that are important for promoting empowerment among LGBT youth. The most common is social support (Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz 2009). Social Support refers to groups of individuals that interact based on
shared experience or with the common goal of supporting the other members of the group. In addition to support groups, empowerment is gained through safe spaces (Cerezo and Bergfeld 2013). A safe space is an area that is designated open and affirming of all sexual orientations and gender variations. Third, LGBT youth find empowerment through positive peer interaction (Bauermeister et al. 2010). These relationships can be with family members, peers, or romantic partners. And finally, empowerment is experienced through interactions with positive adult role models (Bohan et al. 2002). These interactions tend to be more effective with knowledgeable young adults who are only a few years older than the participant.

**Social Support.** Several studies have found that social support groups can reduce the anxiety and suicidal thoughts that LGBT students face. For instance, research on the effects of relationships for individuals who have previously struggled with suicide found that positive relationships significantly changed the reported levels of distress and anxiety (Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter 2005). Additional research conducted in 2013 found that anti-suicide programs should focus their efforts on individuals who experienced a same-sex attraction at a very young age because they are more likely to experience depression (Cerezo and Bergfeld 2013). Furthermore, it is important to include social support and awareness of resources for depression. A similar study found that depression was less likely to be observed when the LGBT student participated in support groups, such as their school’s GSA (Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz 2009).

**Safe Spaces.** Previous research suggests that LGBT youth find empowerment when they are provided a safe place to explore their identities, social roles, genders, and sexualities (Cerezo and Bergfeld 2013). Unlike non-LGBT youth, they are not able to openly develop their identities during their daily lives. In order to decrease these feelings of isolation, and to build
social support, members need a physical location to meet, a safe atmosphere, and emotional support as they explore and develop their identities. Identity development, along with their abilities to express their feelings openly with their peers, and the activities that are aimed at raising awareness of LGBT culture, history, and oppression all create an environment of empowerment.

**Positive Peer Interaction.** Previous research suggests that LGBT youth are empowered through other forms of social interaction such as relationships. Peer interaction empowers them by increasing the love and support they feel, along with a sense of acceptance that they might have not yet experienced. A study conducted on the well-being of LGBT students in intimate relationships found a few interesting associations. Researchers first interviewed students about their personal lives and relationships; then, each participant was given a series of tests that rated their levels of self-esteem, internalized homophobia, and overall well-being. For the male participants who reported having intimate relationships, they scored much higher on the tests of self-esteem. Similarly, females with intimate relationships had decreased levels of internalized homophobia (Bauermeister et al. 2010). Overall, this study suggests that intimate relationships have an empowering effect on individuals. If accurate, LGBT youth may find it useful to receive more programming about maintaining friendships and safe dating, and, if possible, have a safe place to interact openly with those friends.

**Positive Adult Role Models.** In addition to research about different forms of interactions, some research provides insight into who LGBT youth interact with. For example, a study conducted in 2002 looked at the interactions between LGBT adults and LGBT youth. The study found the two groups rarely communicate, and researchers speculate that this divide exists due to a rapidly changing political climate. For instance, LGBT individuals raised in the mid-1900s
were socialized to understand homosexuality as a behavior that indicated mental illness (Ussher 1997). It was not until homosexuality was removed from the DSM in 1973 that sexuality became an identity. Due to the rapidly changing Gay Rights Movement, each generation of LGBT individuals see different political and social climates, making the life experiences of adult LGBT individuals very different than the experiences of young LGBT people. Because of this, there is little relatability between the generations. The authors suggested that LGBT youth see generations in terms of several years instead of 20 or 30 years (Bohan, Russell, Montgomery 2002). Furthermore, some studies show a greater level of empowerment for certain types of interactions. For instance, Russell et al. (2009) argued that a practice called power-sharing is a positive interaction that not only improves the relationship, but also empowers the youth’s intellectual confidence. Power-sharing involves the adult delegating authority and decision-making roles to the youth.

These solutions (social support, safe spaces, positive peer interactions, and positive adult role models) have been implemented in cities all over the United States through youth programming. Gay-straight alliances (GSAs) have become an increasingly popular form of youth programming that many high schools across the country have adopted. GSAs generally meet on their school’s campus and have a faculty advisor who helps them maintain a safe environment. The popularity and community support for GSAs varies drastically depending on the region it is located in and the social climate of that particular school.

*Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in Research*

Research on GSAs has provided good insight into the programming and social aspects that work well to empower their LGBT populations. Social support, safe spaces, positive peer interactions, and positive adult role models are all found in GSAs, which research suggests
would make them useful resources for LGBT youth. A study completed on San Francisco’s LGBT students showed that GSAs change the school’s climate simply by existing as a student organization (Cerezo and Bergfeld 2013). This same study also discussed what GSAs offer the students who participate. First, they are safe spaces where LGBT students can escape the heteronormative society and the pressures to conform to social standards. Second, these groups act as ‘counterspaces’ for the students. The term counterspaces was coined within the context of racial minorities who would find similarly racially diverse students to spend time with while away from home (Cerezo and Bergfeld 2013). A student’s counterspace would work to reaffirm their values, beliefs, and dualistic identities. This same concept is attributed to LGBT students who find peers facing similar struggles to include in their group (Cerezo and Bergfeld 2013).

A similar study investigated the use of GSAs in empowering LGBT students. Results showed that students felt empowered through their participation in a GSA because it gave them a place to experiment with their identity (Russell et al. 2009). Young LGBT children find it difficult to develop into their adult identity without having a safe place to explore and, essentially, ‘try on’ different identities in a comfortable environment. Relatedly, students felt empowered through a process of power-sharing (Russell et al. 2009). They enjoyed having leadership opportunities that helped determine how the group functioned. They provided ideas, led discussions, and socialized with members of their groups. For LGBT youth, their ability to “power share” in their everyday life may be very limited. And finally, the students feel the most empowered by simply participating in the GSA (Russell et al. 2009). Organizations like GSAs provide the ability for students to be involved and be openly LGBT, which together, reinforce their self-confidence.
Similar to GSAs, the programming that the LGBT youth organizations provide should help reduce anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide. Although both GSAs and LGBT youth organizations strive to provide safe spaces for LGBT youth to escape the social pressures of the heteronormative culture, there are some distinct differences. For instance, Almeida et al. (2009) noted that GSAs are definitely needed in the school environment, but in terms of providing truly “safe” spaces, they are not entirely successful. For instance, students attending GSA programs can easily be identified entering and exiting rooms associated with the GSA, leaving them vulnerable to homophobic attacks. Additionally, GSAs provide most of their support through student leaders, diminishing the amount of adult interaction (Russell et al. 2009).

LGBT youth programs, like Indiana Youth Group (IYG), may be able to address some of the shortcomings of GSAs. These programs are operated by a mixture of full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff members. Additionally, these organizations are usually located in easily accessible areas of larger cities, independent of schools. Having adult leaders and neutral locations increases the level of empowerment experienced by the youth through better facilitated social support groups, safer meeting places, more diverse relationships, and more youth-adult interaction. Having an increased number of adults for the youth to interact with allows for more opportunity to experience power-sharing and other leadership opportunities.

Another distinction between GSAs and larger LGBT youth organizations pertains to the idea of counterspace. As previously mentioned, a counterspace is an environment utilized to combat oppressive ideologies and conditions of historically marginalized groups (Cerezo and Bergfeld 2013). One of the phenomenon that conveys the idea counterspaces is a shift in statuses. An LGBT person in their daily life will often experience being LGBT as a status that makes them unique. In some situations, holding that status will cause anxiety due to perceived
discrimination, overt discrimination, and homophobia. When an LGBT person is participating with a student group entirely of LGBT peers, their unique status is no longer based on their sexual orientation. Upon losing their stigmatizing master status, many LGBT youth experience a reduction in their reported level of anxiety (Cerezo and Bergfeld 2013).

Current Study

Previous literature suggests that GSAs are effective at reducing the anxiety of LGBT youth through their programming. Research, however, on the larger LGBT youth organizations is more limited, in part because these kinds of organizations are relatively new and, thus, still relatively limited in number across the U.S. This study takes a first step toward assessing the contributions of these larger organizations for LGBT youth. Specifically, this study works to answer three research questions. What role has stigmatization played in the social anxiety felt by LGBT youth? How do LGBT support groups help alleviate the social anxiety that the participants feel? And finally, how do the characteristics of larger LGBT youth centers compare to GSAs and how do these differences play a role in LGBT youth experiences? The answers to these questions help to understand the work that LGBT organizations are doing to reduce the anxiety felt by LGBT youth. Additionally, the results of this study could help justify new policies that help with programming at LGBT youth organizations.

METHOD

In order to address these three research questions, this paper uses a case study approach. For exploratory purposes, the case study method will provide a stable foundation for future studies that investigate the utility of LGBT centers for sexual minority and gender variant youth. This methodology allows for a thorough analysis of particular cases that maximize the
knowledge that can be gained from a certain setting and time. In exploratory research, case studies can be helpful for drawing connections between theory and applicable circumstances from many different perspectives. “This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them… [t]hey give a voice to the powerless and voiceless” (Tellis 1997).

My case study is based on the Indiana Youth Group (IYG). IYG is a particularly fitting organization for study because it is a non-profit organization that focuses its efforts on creating a better environment for LGBT youth, IYG strives to reduce the social anxiety experienced by LGBT youth, and increase their sense of self-worth. Its mission statement reads, “Indiana Youth Group (IYG) provides safe places and confidential environments where self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth are empowered through programs, support services, social and leadership opportunities and community service. IYG advocates on their behalf in schools, in the community and through family support services.” Additionally, the executive director stated that IYG offers a large variety of programming, works individually with members in need, and has just under 500 youth participating each year (Personal Interview, Mary Byrne).

Sample

The sample consists of 17 IYG members between the ages of 18 and 21. This age range was not chosen arbitrarily. Participants over the age of 18 do not require a parental consent prior to participation. The need for parental consent from minors who are not out to their guardians might have placed these participants into harmful situations, socially, psychologically, and possibly physically. Additionally, 21 years of age was the upper-age limit because it allowed for students who have aged-out within the last year to still participate, meaning that this study
worked with both current and former members. During recruitment, getting in touch with former members proved difficult due to outdated contact information. Thus, the majority of the sample are current members, or members who have recently exceeded the age limit, but are still involved in some aspect with the group.

IYG is located in Indianapolis, and the sample was largely constructed of participants with an urban background. A majority of the participants were white with 11 identifying in that category; 3 participants identified as Hispanic; 2 as Black, 1 as Asian. Two participants were seniors in high school, 6 had graduated high school and were currently employed full-time, and the remaining 9 were in college. In terms of their membership to IYG, the range spanned from not being a member, to having been a member for 7 years; 2 were not members, 3 were members for less than 1 year, 5 were members for 2 years, 2 were members for 4 years, 2 were members for 5 years, 1 was a member for 6 years, and 2 were members for 7 years. More than half of the participants identified as either transgender or genderfluid. For sexual orientation identities, participants identified as gay, pansexual, asexual, straight, queer, and bisexual.

*Procedure*

With an exempt IRB status, Interviews were used to collect data on a sample of individuals that have participated in IYG programming. IYG staff provided a contact list of individuals who have visited their center at least once in the past 2 years. Due to the broad criterion of the contact list, the range of participation varied immensely, capturing a more comprehensive picture of the many challenges facing LGBT youth.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data for this study. Interviews were conducted in two forms, with half over the phone, and the other half in-person.
The semi-structured interview guide helped facilitate the process, affectively keeping the interview to a manageable timeframe. Interviews were recorded using a tablet, and after each interview, I transcribed the session verbatim in order to assure its accuracy. For the recruitment of participants, I was provided a contact list of members and visitors to the center that met the age requirements. First, I contacted each person on the list using the listed phone number. If they did not answer, I left a voicemail and called again two days later. If the phone number was disconnected, or if the two previous voicemails did not illicit a return call, then I sent an email to the provided email address. Both the recruitment phone call script and the content of the recruitment email were approved by IRB. Once I made contact with a potential participant, we established a time and date for the interview.

The interview guide was designed to allow participants to define the concepts of the study. For instance, previous research has defined concepts such as anxiety, safe spaces, and empowerment relative to other studies conducted in their fields. I allowed respondents to freely define these concepts in their own words in order to provide me with a better understanding of their experiences. Thus, I included questions for the specific purpose of giving participants the ability to define these concepts before being asked questions about how these concepts play a role in their life. For instance, I asked, “How do you define anxiety?” or “What does anxiety mean to you?”

In the questions that followed, I would use the term “anxiety,” but become more specific to how anxiety affected the participant. For example, “How, if at all, do you experience anxiety in your daily life?” This process helped both me and the participant. For me, it removed the task of making assumptions about how the participant defines the term, and for the participant, it helped frame the follow-up questions, giving the opportunity for more clear and concise answers.
I continued this process throughout the interviews for the terms “anxiety” and “empowerment,” and for the phrase “safe spaces.”

In general, researchers strive to sample beyond theoretical saturation, which is common practice in qualitative research (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Theoretical saturation refers to the idea that any new data from additional participants would not alter or add new information to the body of knowledge obtained from the already gathered data (Charmez 2014:213). Due to the limited number of participants in my sample, it is difficult to say whether or not this study met theoretical saturation. However, using the coding process described below, the data gathered from my 17 participants met data sufficiency between the 14th and 15th interview, meaning that no new codes were being created by the end of the open-coding analysis. Although the sample is relatively small, having limited samples is an innate feature of both qualitative research and case studies in general.

**Analytic Strategy**

Qualitative, open-ended responses are useful in finding patterns and themes within the data. Through the iterative process of data analysis and theory reviewing, I worked to answer the research questions by finding themes related to the concepts of interest. In other words, I used modified grounding theory, such as open and axial coding to explore the concepts and research questions (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The open-coding techniques that I utilized in this analysis provided data that matched the defined concepts in the literature to the concepts that the respondents defined during the interviews.

To aid my efforts in the analysis, I used concept maps, tables, and coding sheets. This approach was necessary because participants would often answer a question and discuss several
of the concepts at once, meaning that that particular answer would have multiple codes. For example, one answer might convey the participant’s anxiety at home, in contrast to their anxiety in public and at IYG. This answer would have four codes: (a) definition of anxiety, (b) anxiety at home, (c) anxiety in public, and (d) anxiety at IYG. I used this process to analyze each answer from all of the interviews which left me with over 300 codes initially.

After rereading each interview and verifying that the codes that were used, I placed these codes into tables with related topic areas. I decided to create tables based on concepts and environments, meaning that my list of tables included anxiety, empowerment, safe spaces, adult interaction, IYG, and GSAs. Each of these tables had subcategories that helped me be more precise with the patterns. For example, IYG has subcategories for staff interaction, benefits of attendance, critiques for improvement, examples of being a safe space, etc. The tables for concepts contained subcategories that did not pertain to IYG or GSAs. The result was a much more useful list and led to a condensed coding sheet, going from 300 to 25 codes.

Once the tables were created, I read through each interview several more times reassigning new codes that matched categories on the tables. By utilizing the tables and the new codes, I was able to systematically uncover patterns in the data.

RESULTS

Previous research and the findings from this study show that social support, adult interaction, peer interaction, and safe spaces are the main factors that reduce social anxiety in LGBT youth. These concepts were gathered from prior research that helped explore how GSAs have been reducing the effects of social anxiety effectively. This study examined how LGBT youth describe larger LGBT organizations, and their views on how these organizations may
reduce anxiety and empower LGBT young adults. Additionally, I wanted to understand how these organizations compare to GSAs in helping reduce anxiety.

*How Participants Understand their Anxiety*

Participants were asked to describe what the term “anxiety” means to them, as well as how, if at all, anxiety has played a role in their life. The answers to these questions helped answer the research question: What role has stigmatization played in the social anxiety felt by LGBT youth? Their descriptions and examples of anxiety followed closely with stigma literature, focusing on how their social interactions make them feel in danger, and perhaps inferior to others. The analysis revealed that participants’ stigmatization could be attributed to: a lack of social support, unsupportive adults, difficulty making friends, and unsafe environments. Below, I focus on each idea separately and show the language that participants used to explain their experiences with stigma.

*Lack of Social Support.* In terms of social support, Hello Nouveau¹, a two-year member of IYG explained, “My anxiety comes from society standards in how I don't fit them. Like, I want to conform in order to feel comfortable, but then I don't feel comfortable because I'm not being myself.” James, a four year attendee of IYG, responded to the question about how they² define anxiety, “I think a lot of it is social… When I would go out before I got on hormones, I would wonder if I would be called the wrong pronouns that day, and when it did happen, that would mess me up and cause anxiety.” Another participant, Roy, described his anxiety this way: “I felt like everyone was staring at me saying 'this isn't right.'” These participants are describing

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¹ All names referenced in this paper have been changed to protect the participants’ identities. Unintentionally “outing” a participant could lead to irreparable social and physical harm.

² In order to remain true to the pronouns chosen by the participants, there may be some cases where the pronoun may seem misused. In this case, and in many others throughout the paper, using plural pronouns for their gender non-specificity is intentional, and is part of the growing gender neutral vocabulary.
the anxiety they feel when the culture they are in places a pressure upon them to conform to normative behavior. The pressures these participants are experiencing is evidence of the inferiority that people feel when they are juxtaposed to “normal” society through stigmatization (Goffman 1963:59).

Unsupportive Adults. Adult role models are a crucial part of the development of youth, and that is no different for LGBT youth (Bohan et al. 2002). In the interviews, however, adults were mentioned by some participants as one of the main sources of their anxiety, not as positive influences. Alex, an infrequent visitor of IYG, commented on the impact that unsupportive adults around him had on his education, “My high school was not supportive at all. I actually dropped out of high school because the situation was so bad. The people who were around me were not supportive. And, when I went to the administration they weren't supportive at all. I just left and ended up graduating through an online program.” Another member, Hannah, described a situation that many LGBT youth face when coming-out to family members, “My parents kicked me out last spring. I was informed that I would have to leave; well, they almost kicked me out immediately, but then they told me I had a month.” Hannah’s parents gave her the extra time in order to find a job, which is not the case for many LGBT youth who are forced to leave home. The adults in these stories reacted to the needs of these participants through a stigmatized social lens, seeing their sexuality and gender differences as deviant. They demonstrated negative role modeling that added to the anxiety felt by these participants.

Difficulty Making Friends. Participants were asked about friendships and peers both inside and outside of IYG. Many participants noted a difference between school friends and IYG friends, saying that school friends did not truly understand their experiences, and sometimes dismissed them as being too complicated or dramatic. Other participants described some of the
difficult situations that coming-out to non-LGBT, cisgender\textsuperscript{3} friends entails. For instance, Alex mentioned that some of the anxiety comes from friends that think that coming-out means “coming-on,” or flirting; “[I]f I am being introduced to a friend of a friend who is straight, I want to be nice so that they like me, but not overly nice that they confuse it for flirting. It's not like ‘Oh my God, I hope they don't know that I'm gay,’ it's just like, I don't want them to see me as a terrible person in general.” Another IYG member, Zeke, mentioned that just because someone is your peer, does not make them you friend. For instance Zeke described a recent trip home from school, “A couple of weeks ago there was someone who would constantly drive by and yell ‘fag’ at me, and that's one of those things that puts me in my panicky, anxiety mode.” Navigating friendships and peer interaction for these participants proved difficult and anxiety-inducing on more than one occasion. For Alex and Zeke, the stigma attached to their sexual and gender identities are met with hostility by their peers. Their stories reiterate how detrimental negative peer interaction can be in relation to social anxiety (Bauermeister et al. 2010).

\textit{Unsafe Environments.} Feeling physically and mentally safe may have been the most difficult concept for the participants to discuss. Several participants came to tears discussing how they felt in unsafe spaces, and thereby showing great appreciation for the moments when they did, truly, feel safe. Elijah described the feeling of public spaces concisely as, “Just feeling like I have to act a certain way, or pretend to be someone I'm not.” Hannah added,

\begin{quote}
I'm trans, and it's not safe for me to go out in public. So I get super anxious about stuff like that. I have had in a recent count: 4 death threats. So, it's anxiety, but it's justified in a lot of ways. It's scary. I get racing heart rates, mind racing, and I just try to figure out everything that could possible happen and how I might deal with it.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{3} Non-gender variant; someone who identifies with the gender that matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
As a high school student, Kathy described her feelings towards attending high school, “It was always difficult to even get up in the morning realizing that I needed to go to a place that made me feel worthless.” Another student, Victor, recounted an experience, “I would have to say that a lot of my anxiety comes from my past experience in high school where I was assaulted, and the anxiety of that possibly happening again. It's a reality that I have to face.” These participants face environments where their stigmatized identities make those around them feel justified in threatening their lives. These descriptions add to a body of knowledge arguing that safe spaces would not simply improve one’s satisfaction with life, but could, in many cases, make the difference between life and death.

*Using Institutions to Help Relieve Social Anxiety*

This research provides insight into how LGBT social institutions work to relieve the anxieties that members identify. In other words, this study works to uncover whether or not participants feel that LGBT social institutions relieve the anxiety they describe.

*Providing Social Support.* Social support has been cited as one of the most meaningful areas of study when it comes to empowering LGBT youth. This support refers to the interactions among people with shared experiences and the common goal of supporting the fellow members of that group (Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz 2009). Allen, an infrequent visitor of IYG, mentioned that social support was about “face-to-face interactions.” During his interview he discussed what it was like searching for answers to questions about his sexuality online, and how it could not compare to the experience of having a real person to talk to. Allen described why IYG was his social support, “It was having access to real-life support and conversations. It made a difference for me.” James, a four year active member of IYG, added, “[It’s] more of a sense of community, I guess. That’s the biggest thing; just community and support…It’s like walking into a room
with a bunch of people you don't know, but knowing that they are all there to help you.” To these participants, finding social support helped them feel more comfortable with themselves.

On the other hand, many participants noted that social support was much bigger to them than simply feeling comfortable. More specifically, participants attributed their life to the feelings of support they receive from LGBT institutions. For instance, Hannah noted, “[the support] has contributed to my lack of suicidality. I was incredibly at risk when my parents kicked me out of the house.” Hannah identifies as transgender and pansexual, and after coming-out to her parents she was in need of a new home and plenty of other resources to help with the continuation of her transition. She discussed how IYG has helped her since: “They gave me a lot of resources like houses, social workers, medical people, counselors, therapists, PsyDs, and things like that.” Hannah is just one of several participants that have struggled with suicidality in the past. Kathy, a two year member of IYG, recalled many occasions when they would find staff members holding crying youth and telling them that everything would be okay. “It gives family to people whose family hates them…I can tell you that IYG saves lives every day that it’s open…I can tell you that without IYG, I would be dead.”

**Positive Adult Role Models.** Research shows that adults are important facilitators of empowerment. They function as guides that help share knowledge, and the more relatable they are to the youth, the more affective they tend to be (Bohan et al. 2002). It quickly became evident how crucial these role models are, because all 17 participants, in some way, praised the work of the IYG staff. The staff was frequently described as “family,” “genuine,” and “awesome.” For some members, the staff interaction was what they looked forward to the most in their weekly visits to the center. Kathy noted, “I have never met a more accepting and kinder
group of people than the staff at IYG… [And] I have never had a single moment with the staff that I didn’t walk away from feeling more appreciated and loved.”

Besides being friendly, participants noted that the staff play a critical role as facilitators of empowerment. Roy, a two year member who identifies as transgender, told me about one of his first realizations upon meeting a staff member who also identifies as transgender. He described the realization by saying he was surprised that the staff member was transgender because he had only known of one other transgender person, and they died at the age of 18. Before that moment, Roy struggled with the idea of how long he was expected to live. He said, “I liked going there and feeling like I had that assurance.” Roy is not alone in this; many of the other participants expressed a need to see adults who represent a life that the youth can aspire to. That aspiration can transpire in many different ways. One participant noted, “They help me take care of myself…I have realized that it is so important to take care of myself, and to be a healthier person emotionally.”

**Positive Peer Interaction.** LGBT youth can find empowerment by creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with friends and romantic partners (Bauermeister et al. 2010). Many of the participants in this study described how their relationships with friends changed as they became more involved with IYG. Similar to the role models, some youth feel empowered by simply knowing that others with similar identities and struggles exist. For some, a change in peers helps to change one’s outlook on the world. Hannah described this idea, “I was told that I was doing something wrong, breaking rules, hurting other people, being selfish, you know, all of the self-centered manipulations people use against each other. IYG was the first place I went to where all of [those] messages were wrong.” For the first time, Hannah was getting notions of acceptance and inclusion from her peers, instead of intolerance and isolation.
In other cases, participants noted how IYG not only helped them make new friends from within the group, but also helped with friends outside of IYG. Nathan, a FTM\textsuperscript{4} transgender identified individual, described the problems that he has faced in the past. In addition to being kicked out of his home, he also lost many friends who could not understand what he was going through. Attending IYG has surrounded Nathan with many youth who understand him, and by finding the support he needs from the IYG peers, he says that he is able to place less pressure on his non-IYG friends. Furthermore, he has learned new ways to share information and educate his non-IYG peers. Some participants, like Zeke, noted that IYG has taught them how to identify and defend themselves against potentially negative relationships, and in turn, how to build trust and communication, creating positive relationships.

It is important to note that for LGBT individuals, having supportive peers is sometimes critical to the empowerment that they need. One participant described the interconnected role that IYG, friends, and empowerment all play in their wellness:

It absolutely reduced my anxiety, and it made me feel like I belonged. And, when I was at school and I was struggling with my identity, I would just remember that I had IYG that night, I can go see my friends. It made things easier and then when it felt like there wasn't a reason to live, IYG gave me a reason to keep trying.

This participant is only one of several who noted the importance of having peers to affirm, support, and understand their struggles.

_Protecting Safe Spaces._ Safe spaces are the areas that are designed to be open and affirming of sexual orientation, gender, and all of the multifaceted combinations among them. These spaces provide the environment in which participants feel physically and mentally safe

\textsuperscript{4} FTM is a commonly used abbreviation of the phrase “female to male” referring to a transgender person who was born with female primary sex characteristics, but identifies as male.
In terms of the physical safety, participants mentioned a wide variety of topics from drug and alcohol policies to the name-tags that list people’s preferred pronouns. Anthony, a five year member, mentioned that the age-range was one of the topics in the safety conversation at IYG. He explained, “For me, a safe space is, first of all, a space like IYG. It's a space that can work with all the different ages together; like a 20 year old can still be themselves, but a 12 year old still feels comfortable.”

For mental safety, participants regularly mentioned the ability to “be oneself.” Kathy explained that at IYG, this idea is called “trying on hats.” This imagery points to the idea that members are able to change their identity, trying on new identities for fit, comfort, and style in order to find what works best. The environment at IYG is understanding and supportive of members consistently working with new gender expressions, names, and pronouns. Raven, who recently joined IYG, placed this idea into context:

It has been one of the safest places for me to express myself in whatever way I wanted to. I could come here in completely masculine clothing, and if I asked, I could still be referred to as a female. I can be referred to as anything I wanted to. Most of the youth here respect preferred pronouns and preferred name.

And, according to data from other participants, Raven would be correct; most of the youth are respectful of the “trying on hats” mentality. In fact, out of all of the interviews, only one participant said they witnessed an incident where a member was being disrespectful to another youth, and even then, the participant reported that the staff quickly resolved the conflict.

Closely related to the mentally safe aspect of the safe spaces concept is the idea that IYG is safe enough to be considered a home to some members. And, similar to the other concepts, a few participants report that feeling safe at IYG helped save their lives. Max, a five year member of IYG, added to this idea:
I think that people need to understand the extent to which IYG has helped people. It's not just a safe space, friends, and comfort; it saves lives. It has been a second home for some, and a first home for others. It really helps people to find who they are, and embrace who they are. It helps them be more supportive of their friends. It's so much more than a little house. It's a home. It's a family.

For each of the concepts, members were quick to note that the empowerment they felt helped save lives. Safe spaces were no different in its ability to combat the rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide by reducing the anxiety felt by LGBT individuals.

In short, this research suggests that LGBT institutions help relieve participants’ anxiety by providing social support, adult role models, positive peer interaction, and safe spaces. Importantly, these benefits directly correlate to the sources of anxiety discussed previously. These relationships are depicted in Figure 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions of Anxiety:</th>
<th>IYG and GSA Benefits:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Social Support</td>
<td>Social Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsupportive Adults</td>
<td>Positive Role Models</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty making friends</td>
<td>Positive Peer Interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsafe Environments</td>
<td>Safe Spaces</td>
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*Figure 1: Based on coded analysis of participants' answers showing categories of RQ1 on the left, and categories of RQ2 on the right.*

*Comparing Types of Institutions*

For this study, there are two different types of institutions that the participants were likely to discuss in during their interviews. One type is IYG, which is grant-funded, has a full-time and
part-time staff, and is open to a large age-range several days per week. The other type are GSAs, which are organized as a student group in some high schools, run by teachers or school staff, and are unlikely to have any sort of funding. Going into this study, I knew that these groups share very few structural similarities, but I did not know how these differences may affect LGBT youth in terms of reducing anxiety and empowering them.

I asked each participant if they had any experience with GSAs, and 12 out of the 17 had either been members or helped run a local GSA in the past. For those who had experiences with GSAs, I asked them questions about how they liked or disliked their experiences, how they felt GSAs compared to IYG, and if they had any general comments they would like to share. Their responses helped me formulate the answer to my third research question: How do the characteristics of larger LGBT youth centers compare to GSAs and how do these differences play a role in LGBT youth experiences?

*Understanding IYG.* Through all of the positive endorsements IYG received, many participants noted distinct differences in the services provided at IYG and those provided at GSAs. One of the most commonly mentioned differences between IYG and GSAs is that IYG has more resources available to members. Participants mentioned items such as lists of LGBT-friendly doctors, realtors, scholarships, and a knowledgeable staff. Alex, an infrequent member of IYG, said that the focus of the center is more about helping the members through life struggles; “It’s about helping people on an individual level.” Moreover, James added that he sees IYG as the place to go if you’re experiencing any sort of “insecurity” and just need someone to talk to. Other common differences include availability, specifically the hours of operation and the number of days that it is open. Students are able to attend IYG on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays for a large majority of the afternoon and evening hours. One member, Hello
Nouveau, gave up entirely on the comparison and simply said, “I don’t know, it’s just better!”

Overall, IYG is characterized by its programs that provide a multitude of resources, as well as their focus on the overall well-being of its members.

Large Organizations and GSAs. Participants generally preferred IYG over the smaller GSAs. However, there were a few instances in which participants noticed some unique strengths of GSAs. For instance, Hello Nouveau explained, “I think GSAs are the doorway to exploring being LGBT or being an ally. I think it's just about building a community in a school, and they don't go beyond that, which isn't bad.” In this instance, the role of the GSA is to bridge the gap between the LGBT population and straight students, creating a space for allyship. Other participants noted that GSAs function similarly to IYG, but instead of focusing on the individual, it focuses on the school social climate. Additionally, participants explained that in some cases, GSAs may be the preferred institution for students depending on what they were dealing with. For example, if the student had issues with a school bully, or perhaps a policy, then the school’s GSA is likely to be a more direct and effective route to a solution than would IYG. And finally, Kathy described an idea that several participants thought of, “It’s easier for some people to get to a GSA without their parents knowing than it is to get to IYG.” Since IYG is not at the urban center of the city, most members rely on rides from family members to get to and from the center. Whereas for GSAs, students can simply stay after school, and tell their parents they were attending some club other than the GSA. This makes it easier for members who are not ‘out’ to their parents. Ultimately, it seems that participants recognize that GSAs and organizations like IYG have a common goal: empower LGBT youth.
DISCUSSION

This research is a preliminary step in understanding LGBT-related social anxiety and empowerment. Participants were asked to describe which issues impacted their anxiety the most, and four concepts arose: lack of social support, unsupportive adults, difficulty making friends, and unsafe environments. Second, I examined how participants’ membership and involvement in LGBT institutions helped empower them, reducing their anxiety. Their responses followed the previous literature on GSAs and focused on four ideas: social support, positive adult role models, positive peer interaction, and safe spaces. And finally, participants were asked to share thoughts about the similarities and differences between IYG and GSAs. The results show that larger organizations tend to provide more resources, while GSAs are able to provide more secrecy for members who are not ‘out’ to their families and friends.

Implications

My goal for this research was to provide an introductory look at how sources of anxiety for LGBT youth, and in turn, how that anxiety is alleviated by LGBT supportive institutions. Participants were asked to define and provide examples of anxiety in their daily lives. In turn, participants were also asked to describe their involvement with supportive LGBT institutions, and whether or not these institutions alleviated their anxiety. My hope is that these testimonies can be used in future research in an effort to increase our understanding of empowerment, and the work that LGBT organizations do to reduce anxiety in LGBT youth.

Another implication of this research is it could be used to justify increased funding for LGBT institutions. As mentioned previously, the larger LGBT organizations such as IYG are funded through grants, endowments, and other non-profit financial means. GSAs are typically
student clubs found in high schools, and therefore have little to no budget. Even though the two types of institutions defined here have the same goal of helping LGBT youth, budget seems to play a role. For instance, many of the participants suggested that IYG seemed to be better equipped to reduce anxiety for its members due to the substantial amount of resources it has to offer, along with a financially supported staff who are professionals in the field. In other words, participants feel that financial aid significantly helps LGBT centers provide their services.

Therefore, this research, including the testimonies of the members of IYG, may provide some evidence that would help LGBT centers argue their case for continued or additional financial help.

And finally, this research along with subsequent studies may be used as evidence for the need to increase the number of LGBT youth centers. Results from this study show that IYG participants report a reduction in their levels of anxiety, suicidality is reduced, and for some, they find a home in situations where they lost theirs. These findings are great for the LGBT youth who have been able to find IYG, but what about the youth who do not live close enough to attend regularly? IYG is located in the urban setting of Indianapolis. Outside of universities, it is only one of two LGBT centers in all of Indiana, the other located 140 miles away in South Bend. For LGBT youth who do not live in or near one of these two cities, their experiences would likely look similar to the reports of anxiety given by the participants, without the empowerment and help that participants received from IYG. In other words, these youth likely have the same stories of being kicked out of their home, kicked out of school, and being called names on their way home from the bus stop. The only difference is that these youth are without some place like IYG to find refuge and support. Thus, to the extent that this research suggests that LGBT youth
centers provide significant benefits to LGBT youth, communities need to find ways to create these kinds of centers in their areas.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this research tend to revolve around the sample. First, the sample consists of LGBT young adults ages 18 to 21. As I’ve already mentioned, using participants under the age of 18 would, in most cases, require the approval of parents or guardians. For a study about gender identity and sexuality, having such a policy may have incidentally outed a participant to a family member while trying to gain approval. This research touched on a few issues that ‘out’ youth have with their family members, and it seemed that the risk was too high for this study. Having a younger sample would probably not change the results extensively, however, without the larger age range, that is just speculation.

Another limitation of the sample entails the comparison of IYG to GSAs. Since all of the participants were found through their connection with IYG, along with many of them being members who participate regularly, it is difficult to say whether or not their descriptions of a GSA were entirely accurate. Again, 12 of the 17 participants were members of GSAs in addition to IYG, but the comparison between the two types of institutions may have been skewed due to the overrepresentation of IYG members. Future research should increase the number of participants, as well as include a sample of members collected through their involvement with a GSA within close proximity to the LGBT center.

This project utilizes a case study of one LGBT organization, IYG. Focusing on this organization sheds light on sources of LGBT youth stressors and how IYG helps them to feel empowered. However, this study is limited to one organization in one Midwestern city.
Different areas of the United States accept the LGBT community to different degrees. Laws in different states vary. In some states, legislation provides legal protections for LGBT citizens, while in others, laws impede upon the LGBT citizens’ rights. Certainly, the levels of anxiety, and therefore the need for empowerment, varies across these regional and state lines. This research provides a foundation on which future research can be conducted to look at the levels of anxiety and the need for empowerment in these other areas.

And finally, one topic that arose unexpectedly while going into this research was the idea of “aging-out” of the support group. However, after a few participants mentioned the idea when probed about anxiety, I started to see that there is a potential problem here that should be further researched. Aging-out refers the time when members of LGBT youth centers reach an age (usually 21) when they are no longer considered youth members. There are two reasons members eventually must age-out. First, it allows the organization to continue focusing on the youth population without having adult members taking up the center’s time and space. Second, at this age members should be self-sustaining enough to not need to rely on LGBT youth programs.

During the interviews, participants described what aging-out means to them. Hello Nouveau, a member nearly at the aging-out milestone says, “I don't know if there is going to be another place like this where people can explore who they are, their gender, their sexuality, their names; I don't think people can do that anywhere else.” Another member, Nathan, who has two years before he reaches the aging-out age says, “I can't imagine what 2 years will be like. I like to think more about that than thinking about losing everyone.” He continues, “The whole reason people age out at 21 is because you can go to bars and drink, and meet people there. I don't like that because I don't drink.” Sam, a member who recently aged-out said,
I think that they need to have a program, maybe Monday or Tuesday, and maybe have like one group a week for the aged-out youth. I feel like people, as soon as they aged out, they found addictions because the only place to find people like them are in a bar. It would benefit them. Maybe not even an aged-out group, but a gap group for 21 through 25 to come and hang out without having to go to the bar. I've also met people who are 20 and say that they just found out about it, but they are 20 and about to age-out, so they feel like there is no point to it.

So, there seems to be issues with participants not being able to find healthy, new support groups outside of IYG that can continually help with empowerment. And, not only does 21 seem to be an issue for members who are asked to find new support groups, but it seems to be troubling some potential members who would rather not get involved if they have to leave within a year’s time. Future research might revisit this topic to determine what types of programming might be beneficial to these youth in transition to their young adult lives.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult not to be concerned for the wellness of LGBT youth. In general, we know that their suicide rates are disproportionally high compared to non-LGBT youth. We know that LGBT youth face more counts of bullying of all types including physical, mental, and cyber-bullying. We know that the lives of “out” LGBT youth are riddled with anxiety and depression, and we can only make assumptions about the experiences of closeted LGBT youth. However, what we often forget is that these patterns are not the problem, they are indicators of the level to which LGBT youth have fallen victim to social anxiety. Through processes of labelling, deviance, and stigmatization, LGBT youth face a world that is telling them they are different and inferior to their non-LGBT peers.
This research shows that LGBT youth organizations are at the front-lines in this fight to empower these young members of our society. Organizations like IYG provide the support, the staff, the friends, and the environment that helps LGBT youth understand that the messages of inferiority are simply value statements based on stigmas, and it gives them the resources to change their lives. In some cases, it becomes a home to LGBT youth who are looking for a family to love and support them. GSAs provided resources at school that allow students without supportive faculty and friends to find solidarity among like-minded and supportive allies. More importantly, this research shows that with the right resources, adults who are good role models, a strong group of friends, and a safe environment, lives can be improved, and sometimes saved altogether.
REFERENCES


LGBT Youth. 2014. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).


Personal Interview with Mary Byrne, Executive Director of Indiana Youth Group, November, 24, 2015.


Interview Guide

Demographics
1. What is your age?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
3. How long have you been a part of IYG?
4. What grade/year in college are you in?
5. What is your gender identity?
6. What is your sexual orientation?

Questionnaire
1. Please describe when you first became aware of your sexual orientation/gender identity?
2. Regarding your sexual orientation/gender identity, please describe how supportive your home life was while growing up.
3. Regarding your sexual orientation/gender identity, please describe how supportive your experiences at school were while growing up.
4. Some people describe having a social support group while growing up, while others do not. Do you feel that you had a social support group?
   a. If so, please describe what it was like.
5. Please describe what anxiety means to you.
   a. Do you experience anxiety regarding your sexual orientation/gender identity?
   b. What contributes to that anxiety?
   c. How do you deal with it?
6. What benefits, if any, do you get from IYG?
7. How would you define a ‘safe space’?
   a. Do you consider IYG to be a safe space?
8. Has your involvement in IYG influenced your relationship with your family? If so, how?
   a. What about your friends? If so, how?
9. Some people say that their involvement with an LGBT youth group like IYG helps them by reducing their anxiety while others do not. What effect, if any, does IYG have on reducing your anxiety?
   a. What else can IYG do to help reduce any anxiety you feel regarding your sexual orientation/gender identity?

10. Have you developed any friendships with peers in the program? If so, please describe them.
   a. What about mentoring relationships or friendships with the IYG staff? If so, please describe them.
   b. What kind of interactions do you have with the staff? Have those interactions affected your life outside of IYG?

11. IYG provides some programming that covers the topics of dating and relationships. Have you attended any of these programs? If so, please describe what you took away from them.
   a. Has IYG had any influence on your romantic relationships?

12. What IYG programs have you been involved with the most?
   a. How have these programs affected your life outside of IYG?
   b. What programs, if any, do you feel that IYG is missing?

13. Please define what empowerment means to you.

14. Some people feel that participation in programs like IYG is empowering while others do not. Do you feel that your participation has empowered you?
   a. Is there anything else IYG can do to help you feel empowered?

15. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about your experiences with IYG?