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ABSTRACT

Gay youth enter high school with the knowledge that they are different and with the belief that heterosexuality is normal and that homosexuality is not normal. Also, gay youth enter high school with the belief that honesty and integrity are important personal values. Additionally, the gay youth enter high school without family knowledge of their sexual orientation and with the fear of family hostility and/or rejection if their sexual orientation should become known to family members. Hence, gay youth largely enter and attend high school alone without support of their differences by adults in their families and with considerable fear and anxiety of denigration and rejection by family members. The organizational context of public high schools provides a highly sexualized environment for youth. The organizational context supports and rewards heterosexualized activities and affirms positive heterosexual beliefs of students. Simultaneously the organizational context denigrates and punishes homosexual activities and affirms negative homosexual beliefs of students. Within the social context of high school, gay youth experience high school as problematic in ways non-gay youth do not. Gay youth manage their public participation in high school by passing and manage their personal conflict by assuming deep guilt. Important among these is the continuous burden of personal shame and its self-destructive consequences. (Contains 29 references.) (ABL)

GAY YOUTH IN AMERICAN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS:

INVISIBLE DIVERSITY

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GAY YOUTH IN AMERICAN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS: INVISIBLE DIVERSITY*

Introduction

This paper is part of an in-progress qualitative study concerned with the experiences of gay youth in American public high schools. In this study, the term gay youth refers to high school males who have a homosexual orientation and who will likely enter and be a part of the gay American subculture (Goodwin, 1989).

The term diversity, with reference to American public schools, has typically been associated with people who are a part of various identifiable cultural and subcultural categories, for example, ethnic and gender groups. Notably absent from the typical diversity discussion is the consideration of gay youth. In contrast to other groups, this category's existence has largely been denied and has with few exceptions remained invisible. In a few isolated school districts, programs and schools have been established to accommodate gay youth, for example the PROJECT 10, an educational and counseling program for gay youth in high schools, and the Harvey Mike High School, a high school in the New York School District established for gay, lesbian, and bisexua youth (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). Gay youth have likely existed in American public high schools since their inception and will likely continue to exist. Additionally, this

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group has and will continue to cut across all other cultural and subcultural groups as well as through economic levels within cultural and subcultural groups. Therefore, a discussion of diversity in public education is incomplete if the subject of gay youth is not included.

It is estimated that high school youth with a male homosexual orientation account for up to 10% of the male population in public schools (Seattle Commission on Children and Youth, 1988; this figure is consistent with Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991). It is also estimated that 40% of the male youth who drop out of public education and become "street children" in urban areas are gay or bisexual youth (Seattle Commission on Children and Youth, 1988). Additionally, because gay men of all ages are not infrequently the object of very serious hate crimes committed by young males (Berrill, 1992), it is known with some certainty that gay youth continually experience a physically dangerous and emotional uncertain environment (Berrill, 1992). Hence, the numbers of gay youth and problems associated with gay youth in American public high schools are substantial, yet the numbers and problems of gay youth remain largely invisible to public educators. Not only does the group remain invisible, the existence of and problems associated with gay youth are largely denied by public school educators, particularly school administrators. Therefore, the inclusion of gay youth in discussions of diversity in American public high schools is warranted and absolutely necessary. As Pillard (1991) notes, "... gender-role flexibility might operate not as a deficit or

handicap, but ... as a way of increasing the diversity of temperaments and behaviors within our species" (p. 43).

Purpose

As noted above, this paper is part of a larger study. With respect to the larger study (Reed, 1992), there are two purposes, one narrow and the other broad. The narrow purpose is to investigate in detail the high school experiences, the management of these experiences, and the relationships of these experiences and their management with organizational and personal factors of a small, yet carefully selected sample of gay young men who attended public high schools in the state of Washington. And, the broad purpose is to develop the outlines of a grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) relating the experiences and the management of the experiences of gay youth in American public schools with organizational factors in the public high schools and with personal factors in the biographies of gay youth.

As part of the larger study, the particular purpose of this paper is to develop a framework for the initial analysis of field and other data through the review and integration of relevant literature, limited analysis of field data, and the personal experiences of the author. The analytic framework which follows is consistent with the purposes of the larger study. In this paper, first personal and family contextual factors and second the organizational contextual factors which condition the way gay youth experience high school will be examined. Following the examination of personal and organizational contextual factors, the way gay youth experience high school will be considered. The

problematic situations confronted by gay youth in their high school experience will then be discussed. After examining the problematic situations experienced by gay youth in high schools, the way in which gay youth manage these problematic situations will be presented. The framework concludes with an examination of the consequences of the management techniques employed by gay youth in high school.

Limitations

Among the limitations cited in the larger study, it is important to note one of these limitations in this paper. This limitation is concerned with the focus of the study on gay male youth and not including lesbian or bisexual youth. Due to the constraints of resources, access, and the gender of the principal investigator, it was decided to limit this study to only gay male youth. Hence, the literature reviewed and the analytic framework developed are concerned primarily, however not exclusively, with gay male youth.

The Personal and Family Contexts

Gay youth at a very early age <u>know</u> they are <u>different</u>. These children know they are sexually attracted to members of the same sex and know they have positive bodily experiences associated with these attractions. Also, identical with their non-gay peers, gay youth grow up <u>believing</u> that homosexuality is bad. They have at an early age internalized normative family and societal expectation that heterosexuality is <u>natural</u>, hence good, and that homosexuality is unnatural, hence bad if not evil (Goffman, 1963). Additionally, they have internalized the belief

that homosexuals are not quite human, effeminate males, and their presence among heterosexuals, particularly males, produces tension and uneasiness (Goffman, 1963).

Gay youth feel they have no one to turn to in their family to help them to understand and reconcile their profound dilemma (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). They do not see themselves as very different from their peers, other than their same sex attraction. The do not see themselves as particularly effeminate, and they may not even consider themselves to be "homosexual," yet they still know they are different. Gay youth begin to hide and mask their situation. With the onset of pre-adolescence, the dilemma becomes more concerning and stressful. During adolescence, the situation becomes almost unbearable at times. Adding to the already stressful situation, gay youth recognizes that they are violating the societal norms of personal honesty and integrity. They develop the concept of "living a lie" which adds further stress to an already very stressful situation.

Gay youth do not know where to turn to for help. They believe that if they confide in a family member, they will likely be ridiculed and punished (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). Additionally, they are not old enough or experienced enough to be aware of other gay youths, the presence of a gay community, and various support organizations within and beyond the gay community. Hence, they enter high school alone.

The High School Organizational Context

The amount of time children and youth are compelled to attend school dominates their lives between the ages of five and

seventeen years. Therefore, their experience in school as an organization is important to consider. How students experience large public comprehensive high schools as organizations can be understood in terms of two analytically separate yet related aspects of social organizations (Blau & Scott, 1964). These aspects are (1) the structure of the high school and (2) the shared beliefs and orientations held by administrators, teachers, staff members, and students. In the following discussion, first the organizational structure of the high school with respect to students will be considered, and second certain shared beliefs concerning human sexuality in general and adolescent sexuality in particular held by both students and staff will be presented.

Organizational Structure

For purposes of this study, the organizational structure of the high school experienced by students can be considered in terms of two separate yet related analytic categories. These are (1) the scheduled organization of the high school and (2) the relationships students have with others in the high school. The scheduled organization of the high school can be viewed in terms of (1) the times of the scheduled curriculum, (2) the times of the scheduled extracurriculum, and (3) the times of the scheduled breaks within and between both the scheduled curriculum and extracurriculum (Gordon, 1957).

In general, the curriculum includes the courses offered by the school and taught by assigned certificated staff. In high schools, the concrete manifestation of the curriculum is the master schedule (Reed & Himmler, 1988). State statutes require

students to participate in the curriculum, and personnel contracts require teacher to participate in the curriculum. The extracurriculum, frequently referred to as student activities, includes athletic teams, student government, clubs, and social activities provided by the school and coached and/or sponsored by certificated staff, classified staff, parents, and other adult commurity members. In high schools, the everyday expression of the extracurriculum takes form in the activities calendar and the athletic schedule (Reed & Himmler, 1988). Neither students nor adults in high schools are required to participate in the extracurriculum. The scheduled breaks within and between curricula and extracurricular times are referred to by administrators, teachers, and students as before school, passing times, snack breaks, lunch periods, and after school. Although these times are not typically viewed by school personnel as formal organizational structures, in organizational terms they are structured. The daily bell schedule which signals and regulates the flow of events within the high school day establishes breaks as structures. Additionally, explicit school rules as well as school norms prescribe the parameters of student conduct when students are scheduled for breaks and are not under the supervision of teachers or under the close supervision other school officials. Within the rules and norms, where and with whom students participate during breaks is voluntary.

The curriculum is largely rooted in and regulated by state laws and is the translation of these laws (Reed & Himmler, 1988). The set and sequences of required and elective classes students

take during their four years of high school provide regularity to their high school life. Students directly experience the curriculum during any given semester in terms of the classes they take and the teachers assigned to these classes. The extracurricular largely springs from and reflects community values. Some values reflect community desires for the school to provide certain traditional activities and events. Athletic teams, student government, interest clubs, and annual social gatherings typically are among these. Other community values reflect desires regarding the character of participation of students in traditional activities. The appropriate public roles of boys as young men and girls as young women reflect community values regarding the character of student involvement in student activities. Students experience the extracurriculum in terms of the types of activities in which they choose to participate and the coaches and sponsors who oversee these activities. Passing times, lunch periods, and other similar times are structured out of necessity, the necessity of providing breaks for students and teachers in a tightly scheduled day to change locations, rest, and/or obtain nourishment. Student experience passing times, lunch, and other types of breaks in terms of what students they are with and where they are located during unscheduled class or activity times (Cusick, 1972).

Orthogonal to the scheduled organization of the high school are the sets of relationships student establish and maintain with adults and peers in the high school. These relationships are manifested during the scheduled curriculum and extracurriculum,

as well and during scheduled breaks. Within the scheduled organization of the high school, the character of the relationships students have with adults and peers many be considered to be formally structured or informally structured The formally structured relationships students experience can be considered an aspect of the formal organization (Charters, 1964) of the high school, and the informally structured relationships students experience can be considered an aspect of the informal organization of the high school (Blau & Scott, 1964; Iannaccone, 1964).

Formally structured relationships in a organization are considered to be those patterned relationships which are legally and contractually prescribed by the organization. For students in high schools, these occur primarily, but not exclusively, in classrooms where the teacher holds the official position of teacher and students hold the official position of student. The role of the teacher in the classroom with respect to students is intendedly affectively neutral.

Informally structured relationships in an organization are considered to be the voluntary patterned relationships which exist within and along side of the formally structured relationships. For students in a high school, the informally structure relationships are visible in terms of small groups and their connections with each other. High school students experience the informally structured relationships in the high school in two important ways. One is through affective relationships with adults in the school, primarily with teachers.

These typically are private dyadic relationships which exist between individual teachers and individual students. The other w students experience the informally structured relationships is with other students in the school. These relationships are visible in stable cliques or small friendship groups, for example boys' athletic groups, music and drama groups, and activity oriented girls' groups. In contrast to formally structured relationships, these relationships have a very strong affective character.

In the formal and informal relationships between student and adults, and students and peers during the scheduled curriculum, extracurriculum, and breaks, the balance of formal and informal relationships is not equal. Student relationships with teachers during the scheduled curriculum tend to be very frequent and almost exclusively formally structured. In contrast, student relationship with peers during schedule breaks tend to be very frequent and almost exclusively informally structured. Student relationships with peers during the scheduled curriculum tends to be moderately frequent and primarily informally structured. In contrast, student relationships with adults during scheduled breaks tends to be not very frequent but informally structured. During the scheduled extracurriculum, student relationship with both adults and peers tends to be moderately frequent and both formally and informally structured. Figure 1 presents the character and intensity of student relationships in terms of the scheduled organization of the high school. The diagonal line cutting through the figure divides those relationships during

Figure 1

The Intensity and Character of Organizational Structures in the High School with Respect to Students in the Scheduled Organization and Students' Relationships

		Student Relationships in the High School	
		With Adults	With Peers
The Scheduled Organization of the High School	The Breaks	Not Very Frequent and Informally Structured	Very Frequent and Almost Exclusively Informally Structured
	The Extra-Curriculum	**FORMALLY STRUCTURED** Frequent and Formally And Informally Structured	Frequent and Formally And Informally Structured
	The Curriculum	Very Frequent and Almost Exclusively Formally Structured	**INFORMALLY STRUCTURED** Moderately Frequent and Primarily Informally Structured

scheduled times which tend to be formally structured and those which tend to be informally structured (Gordon, 1957).

Given the various aspects of the structural context of the traditional American high school, students experience the various aspects differentially. Although the official purposes of the high school are embodied in the curriculum, students largely experience the high school in terms of the extracurriculum and the breaks within and between the curriculum and extracurriculum. Within these two time structures, it is the informally structure relationships which students experience most vividly (Coleman, 1961; Cusick, 1973; Gordon, 1957). Students experience high school largely in terms of highly positive and negative affective interpersonal relationships with other students, this is to say with their peers. For the most part, students experience very few informally structured relationships with adults (Waller, 1932).

Organizational Beliefs

Organizational beliefs are not the sum of the individual beliefs held by individual organizational members. Organizational beliefs are a collective phenomena and in many important ways are considered to give different organizations their particular character. Organizational beliefs are the common value orientations held collectively by organizational members regarding what is right and good with respect to the organization and their relationship to the organization (Blau & Scott, 1962). A comprehensive analysis of the organizational beliefs typical of the American public high school would be a

lengthy discussion and is beyond the scope of this presentation. Because this paper is concerned with the experiences of gay youth in high school, only those organizational beliefs concerning adolescence and human sexuality will be considered. (For a discussion of bureaucracy and sexuality, see Greenberg, 1988.)

Organizational Beliefs Regarding Human Sexuality

With respect to how gay youth experience high school as an organization, the organizational beliefs held more-or-less collectively by administrators, teachers, and other staff members are important to consider. The organizational beliefs have two aspects, one concerned with heterosexuality and the other concerned with homosexuality. The official belief of high schools regarding heterosexuality in general, albeit implicit, is that heterosexuality is <u>normal</u> (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). Hence, heterosexuality is good and desirable, and children exhibiting heterosexual conduct should be encouraged and rewarded. The general embodiment of the heterosexual belief is the image of "a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports" (Goffman, 1963, p. 128). And, the specific high school embodiment of the belief is the younger version of the general image. Typically, it is the image of the well proportioned high school male with good athletic ability and well developed social skills (Coleman, 1961).

The unofficial organizational belief regarding homosexuality is that homosexuality is <u>abnormal</u>. The term <u>unofficial</u> is used

here because the this belief is typically not formalized, although it is nonetheless pervasive. Hence, homosexuality is bad, and deviant, and children exhibiting homosexual conduct should be punished. The embodiment of this belief is the image of an effeminate, vain male who talks too much (Goffman, 1963, p. 39).

With respect to adolescent sexuality, educators believe that sexual orientation of pre-adolescents is largely undifferentiated and that during adolescence rapid cognitive and physical changes take place (Opotow, 1992; Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). It is during these changes that sexual orientation becomes differentiated and fixed into appropriate gender sex role orientations (Waller, 1932). Educators believe that the differentiation and fixing of appropriate sex orientations is context dependent. Hence, the school environment is exceedingly important in establishing the appropriate heterosexual identities of children. An appropriately heterosexual curriculum linked with an appropriate heterosexual extracurriculum and staffed by carefully screened heterosexual personnel is essential. Furthermore, the organizational support of appropriate adult and student norms regarding the personal, group, and organizational incentives and rewards for heterosexual conduct and disincentives and punishments for homosexual conduct is important. In essence, the official and unofficial organizational belief is that heterosexuality is the normal course of child development, but that its course can be disrupted or changed in a contaminated environment. One important potential source of contamination is

the presence of homosexuality in the curriculum, extracurriculum, and break times, in organizational and group norms, and in personally held values, as well as the presence of students and adults who represent themselves or are represented as homosexual. There is the strong and pervasive belief that homosexuality is a contagious disease and, hence, must not be allowed to contaminate the high school as an organization. Any hint of homosexuality must be eradicated. The emergence of AIDS has provided further support for this belief. In part, the belief that homosexuality is contagious is what is meant by the term homophobia (Sears, 1992) and what stands behind what is referred to as "school-sanctioned homophobia" (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992, p. 18).

The Sexualized Organizational Context

As noted above, the curriculum is an interpretation of state statues and, for the most part, is intendedly sexually neutral. Most courses in the high school curriculum are explicitly concerned with subject matter other than human sexuality. Notable exceptions include sex education units and courses, health classes, family living courses, and similar curricular offerings. Community controversy in school districts is legendary regarding these courses and their course content. Although the subject of human sexuality is in most cases not explicitly part of the formal state mandated curriculum, implicitly the formal curriculum has strong heterosexual and anti-homosexual themes.

The design of the curriculum and assignment of students to classes is along gender lines with the expectation that gender

will follow a heterosexual orientation. A normative symbolic representation of heterosexuality frequently occurs in curricular materials, texts, pictures, posters, music, plays, and student publications. Similar to the curriculum, the design of certain parts of the high school facility is along gender lines with the expectation that the sexual orientations of students will be heterosexual are commonplace; rest rooms and gymnasium locker rooms are examples. Hence, although the school curriculum is intendedly sexually neutral in most instances, the curriculum is implicitly heterosexual.

The implicit anti-homosexual theme in the curriculum is manifest through teacher certification and counselor training. Penalties can be mete out to teachers who represent themselves or are represented as homosexuals (Harbeck, 1992). Therefore, homosexual teachers disguise and hide any aspect of their homosexuality (Woods & Harbeck, 1992; Romonovsky, 1992). School counselors and teachers may regard adolescent homosexuality as a temporary adolescent condition and a treatable disease. The implicit anti-homosexual theme in the formal curriculum is also manifest in its absence in the curriculum, typically even in those classes where sexuality is a legitimate topic of presentation and discussion. Except in very specific and rare places, the presentation of homosexuality as a reality is absent. If presented in the curriculum, homosexuality is presented in the context of a mild social problem yet a very serious personal problem. Hence, it can be concluded that the curriculum of the high school is implicitly yet strongly sexualized. In general,

the curriculum is simultaneously and implicitly heterosexual and anti-homosexual.

Whereas student activity in the formal curriculum is structured to be primarily passive (Cusick, 1973), student activity in the extracurriculum is structured to be active. In extracurricular activities, students are trained and coached to perform traditional adult roles, and these roles have a highly public and visible character. Athletic competitions, musical and drama productions, school newspaper and annual production, various team academic competitions, and a host of sanctioned social activities are examples of extracurricular activities in which students are expected to perform publicly and display adult or adult-like roles.

Consistent with typical community values, the formal extracurriculum, in contrast to the formal curriculum, is explicitly heterosexual. Yet similar to the formal curriculum, the extracurriculum is implicitly anti-homosexual. In extra-curricular activities, boys are expected to display the appropriate heterosexual roles of men, and girls are expected to play the appropriate heterosexual roles of women. A sense of embarrassment arises in community members, parents, adminis-trators, teachers, and other students when these roles are played out publicly by students as mere children. The implicit anti-homosexual theme becomes apparent when boys play out these roles in ways which boys are interpreted to be sissies, wousses, candy asses, fairies, fags, or other common terms associated with gay men. If this should occur, public humiliation is likely to

follow. Public humiliation typically comes from peers, particularly male athletes, "the jocks" as they are known in high schools. When public humiliation occurs, typically professional school personnel do not engage in this activity; yet when they are aware of such activity, they do not halt the activity. However, male high school athletic coaches have a reputations for engaging in harassment when boys, in their estimation, publicly engage in behavior stereotypically associated with male homosexuals.

The formal aspect of breaks are implicitly heterosexual and implicitly anti-sexual. Although student conduct during breaks is less rigidly controlled than during curricular and extracurricular times, the limits of student conduct during breaks are codified in what are known as school rules. These relatively simple and few rules prescribe the normative relationships of students to the school as an organization and the relationships of students to each other (Bidwell, 1970). It is high school vice principals who typically supervise scheduled breaks and enforce school rules.

Some of these rule are explicitly heterosexual in character. For example, a rule which allows students to hold hands but not to kiss each other in school corridors both presumes and prescribes heterosexual relationships among students. Although there are typically not explicit anti-homosexual rules, student activities which may be construed by break supervisors as minimally symbolizing homosexuality is immediately negatively sanctioned. In the 1960's, the long hair of high school boys

angered school administrators because in their eyes long hair on boys symbolized femininity and hinted at homosexuality. Numerous court cases followed the school's attempt to enforce hair codes for high school boys (Flygare, 1978). And in the 1980's when some high school boys began to wear a single earring, this also angered school administrators for the same reasons. For example, a high school administrator during a break approached a boy with and earring. Clutching the earring between his thumb and forefinger, the administrator said to the boy, "You fag, you fag, you fag!"

It is within the formal structure of the breaks, that the school becomes explicitly heterosexual and explicitly anti-homosexual. During the breaks students have very few relationships with adults and have almost exclusively informally structured relationship with other students. It is during the breaks when the "adolescent society" (Coleman, 1961) becomes most apparent and explicit.

The adolescent society has it own norms which are largely not under the control of school officials. These norms prescribe student social conduct within and between groups and between individual students. Many of these norms involve the appropriate gender roles and the application of the norms under various circumstances for boys or girls. Examples include gender appropriate grooming, dress, personal posture and carriage, sitting and relaxing positions, mannerisms, and ways to carry various articles and items. Personal sexuality and its display as well as sexual relationships between students both in and out

of the high school are also important social norms held by students. Typically, these norms assume and prescribe appropriate heterosexual relationships between and among students. Two examples include who can approach whom, and under what conditions, to initiate intimate relationships, i.e. dates, and the appropriate forms and public displays of bodily contact between boys and girls, e.g. holding hands, embraces, and kissing. Students who conform with these types of norms are rewarded with social status by the students themselves.

Also among the norms concerned with sexuality, are norms against homosexual conduct particularly that which might be exhibited by boys. Boys who are perceived to exhibit the slightest hint of any stereotypical homosexual behavior are dismissed by their peers as sissies, wousses, and candy asses. Boys who may display what might be interpreted as stronger signs of stereotypical homosexual behavior are regarded by their peers as fairies, queers, and fags. Any high school boy perceived to exhibit any stereotypical behavior associate with homosexual males is subject to verbal assaults by other boys which may also be accompanied by physical assaults. Typically these assaults are done out of view of school officials, but when they are in view, school officials neither stop the assaults nor punish the offenders.

For gay youth it is the schedule breaks which are the most troublesome because they are the center of the school experience for students, and it is during breaks where the school is most emphatically and explicitly anti-homosexualized.

The high school as an organization presents a highly sexualized environment (Shakeshaft, 1992) for students. The character of the sexualized environment is presented in Figure 2. Although most students and staff experience this environment as naturally given and nonproblematic to the extent that the high school's environment is not experienced as sexualized in any particular way, gay youth do not experienced the high school in this same way. Gay youth learn from direct experience, "taunts, teasing, ostracism, and fights," that the high school is most certainly anti-homosexual (Goffman, 1963, p. 33).

The High School Experience

Almost all high school students experience the high school organization as social, rather than academic (Coleman, 1961; Cusick, 1973; Gordon, 1957). The students experience the social organization with respect to their peers rather than adults, including administrators, teachers, and other staff members. It is primarily through the informally structured relationships during breaks, extracurricular activities, and even during the scheduled curriculum that students experience the social, rather than the academic, organization of the high school (Cusick, 1973). The social organization is experienced primarily through membership in small friendship and interest related groups and participating in the activities of these groups.

With respect to the sexualized character of the organization as noted earlier, students do not experience it as particularly sexualized. The strongly heterosexualized context of the high school is not experienced by most students as anything

Figure 2
The Sexualized Organizational Context of the High School which Conditions the School Experience of Gay Youth

		Student Relationships in the High School	
		With Adults	With Peers
The Scheduled Organization of the High School	The Breaks	Explicitly Heterosexual Implicitly Anti-Homosexual	Explicitly Heterosexual Explicitly Anti-Homosexual
	The Extra-Curriculum	**FORMALLY STRUCTURED** Explicitly Heterosexual Implicitly Anti-Homosexual	Explicitly Heterosexual Explicitly Anti-Homosexual
	The Curriculum	Implicitly Heterosexual Implicitly Anti-Homosexual	**INFORMALLY STRUCTURED** Explicitly Heterosexual Implicitly Anti-Homosexual

particularly significant because it is consistent and harmonious with their personal backgrounds and the larger community context of the high school. The heterosexualized character of the school is experienced as given and nonproblematic.

Gay youth in most ways experience the high school organization in much the same way as non-gay youth. This is to say that gay youth experience the school as a social organization through their affiliation with small groups and individual friendships and through participating in activities associated with these relationships. Similar to other students, gay youth do not experience the high school as a particular heterosexualized environment. However, gay youth experience the pervasive anti-homosexual character of the high school as an important and powerful (Mitchell & Spady, 1983) aspect of their high school experience. This organizational power is translated into experiencing the high school as uncertain and unpredictable. Much of the time gay youth experience high school as being alone in a hostile environment.

Problematic Situations

For gay youth, the high school experience provides two important problematic situations (Becker, 1970). First, consistent with societal norms and reinforced by the social organization of the high school, gay youth believe that heterosexuality is normal and should be rewarded and that homosexuality is not normal and should be punished. However, they know they are different because they have same sex attractions, and they know they do not want to be punished

because they are different. And, second, consistent with societal norms, gay youth have internalized the belief in personal honesty and integrity. However, in order to avoid the punishments in which they themselves believe regarding homosexuality, they are not honest about their homosexuality. Dealing and coping with this double pronged problematic situation makes high school life difficult at best for most gay youth.

Managing the High School Experience

Regarding the first problematic situation, gay youth learn and employ "techniques of information control" (Goffman, 1963, p. 91) to order to simultaneously conceal and hide (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992) their feelings of same sex attraction and any hint of stereotypical behavior associated with male homosexuals. The technique by which they control information about themselves is learning to "pass" (Goffman, 1963). Passing is "the management of undisclosed discrediting information about self" (Goffman, 1963, p. 43). Speaking in general of people who can be seriously discredited in social situation, Goffman (1963, p. 74) notes that, "Because of the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so on some occasion by intent." In the case of gay youth, passing provides rewards for being considered normal and also provides a means for avoiding punishments for being considered seriously abnormal, this is to say being regarded as deviant (Becker, 1963). Passing, however, does not protect gay youth against the personal psychological effects of continuous lying.

There are at least four ways in which gay youth pass or attempt to pass in high school. First, they "conceal or obliterate signs" (Goffman, 1963, p. 92) that have come to be associated with stereotypical male homosexual behavior. For example, gay youth make continued efforts to avoid posture, movements, and mannerisms associated with homosexual mem. Along with concealment, gay youth employ "disidentifiers" (Goffman, 1963, p. 93). Gay youth may deliberately engage in acceptable hetersexual behavior, for example having a steady girl friend, to disidentify themselves as homosexual. A second way in which gay youth pass is by disguising their sexual orientation by interpreting and presenting it in terms of a more socially acceptable orientation. For example, gay youth may avoid athletics because of fear of uncontrollable body responses in shower rooms, but explain their nonparticipation in terms of lack of interest and talent. Third, gay youth manage their social distance with other students and adults in the school very carefully. Close intimate relationships require reciprocal self-disclosures. And finally, gay youth manage their physical distance with peers carefully so as not to be seen and/or encountered by particular students or groups of students during the school day. Gay youth know when, where, and by whom they will likely be harrassed. Hence, they deliberately plan their school day in order to avoid potentially threatening encounters.

Regarding information control and passing, Goffman (1963) notes, "A key concept here is the daily round, for it is the daily round that links the individual to his several social

situations" (p. 91). In his daily rounds, the gay youth must be highly sensitive to the contingencies he faces during the high school day in managing information about himself. This means that the gay youth must be constantly vigilant and carefully control his spontaneity during the school day.

Regarding the second problematic situation, gay youth, in their terms, "live a lie." This situation produces guilt and anxiety. They attempt to manage this situation in four ways. First, gay youth learn to live, albeit stressful, with a continuous sense of guilt and a feeling of anxiety. Secondly, they manage their social distance with peers and adults carefully so as not to develop relationships which require them to explicitly lie. A third way in which gay youth attempt to manage guilt and anxiety is by identifying and befriending other gay youths in the school. In these occasional friendships, trust can be established and disclosure can be accomplished. This personal disclosure provides a small sense of relief from the perennial guilt and anxiety. However, these intimate relationships can lead to blackmail and betrayal. And a forth way in which gay youth attempt to manage guilt and anxiety is by seeking and finding the support of an adult in the high school. On seemingly rare occasions, gay youth are able to make these connections and develop such relationships.

Consequences of the High School Experience

The way gay youth experience high school coupled with needs to tightly control personal information about themselves have at least four important consequences for their lives. First, the

uncertainty and sometimes hostile conditions of the high school and family coupled with the needs for continual passing and lying, produce in gay youth a chronic sense of personal shame (Mitchell & Spady, 1983). Concerning a person who feels the continual need to pass, Goffman (1963, p. 87) notes, "... it is assumed that he must necessarily pay a great psychological price, a very high level of anxiety, in living a life that can be collapsed at any moment." Goffman's observations holds true for gay youth.

Second, as gay youth participate in and manage their high school experience, they are continually torn between alienation from the high school and alienation of self. In this regard, Goffman (1963, p. 87) states, "... it is often assumed, and with evidence, that the passer will be torn between two attachments. He will feel some alienation from his new 'group,' for he is unlikely to be able to identify fully with their attitude to what he knows he can be shown to be. And presumably he will suffer feelings of disloyalty and self-contempt when he cannot take action against 'offensive' remarks made by members of the category he is passing into against the category he is passing out of--especially when he himself finds it dangerous to refrain from joining in this vilification." Gay youth frequently find themselves in situations where gay men are the brunt of jokes, held up as objects of ridicule, and are otherwise characterized in exceedingly unfavorable ways. Being a party to these conversations makes gay youth implicitly a part of these groups, yet in these groups gay youth cannot attain full membership;

however, gay youth at the same time cannot explicitly exclude themselves because of fear of being ostracized.

Third, gay youth cannot participate in high school as spontaneously as most other students. They must self-consciously and continually monitor and manage their conduct as well as continually monitor the conduct of others around them. In this regard, Goffman (1963, p. 88) remarks, "... it seems to be assumed, and apparently correctly, that he who passes will have to be alive to aspects of the social situation which others treat as uncalculated and unattended. What are unthinking routines for normals can become management problems for the discreditable."

Participation in high school without spontaneity occurs when gay youth disqualify themselves from certain situations and activities in which participation is desired and from which considerable could be learned, for example boys' athletics. In these situations, gay youth disqualify themselves because they fear that they will not be able to pass satisfactorily and/or they fear that they will self-disclose if they participate spontaneously and uninhibitedly. In these instances gay youth do not gain the experience others gain and are publicly awkward when they attempt to participate. Their awkwardness in such activities give further testimony to themselves, and they believe to others, that they might be or are gay.

A forth consequence of the way gay youth experience high school and their need to tightly control personal information about themselves is concerned with gay youth being easy victims of "wise" (Goffman, 1963) gay adult males. Because the high

school largely withholds knowledge of homosexuality from all students, gay youth have neither much information regarding homosexuality nor have authentic adult role models with whom they can relate to become knowledgeable of the mature adult gay community. Hence, gay youth can be victims of predatory gay men who are sophisticated in intercepting passing activities of gay youth.

A final possible consequence of the high school experience and other life experiences of gay youth is their engagement in self-destructive behavior. These behaviors include engaging in unsafe sexual practice, excessively using alcohol and other drugs, and committing suicide (Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991; Uribe & Harbeck, 1992).

Summary

The following summarizes the salient arguments in the framework presented above. Gay youth enter the high school with the knowledge that they are different and with the belief that heterosexuality is normal and that homosexuality is not normal. Also, gay youth enter high school with the belief that honesty and integrity are important personal values. Additionally, the gay youth enter high school without family knowledge of their sexual orientation and fear of family hostility and/or rejection if this their sexual orientation should become known to family members. Hence, gay youth largely enter and attend high school alone without support of their difference by adults in their families and with considerable fear and anxiety of denigration and rejection by adult family members.

The organizational context of public high schools provides a highly sexualized environment for youth. The organizational context supports and rewards heterosexualized activities and affirms positive heterosexual beliefs of students. And, simultaneously, the organizational context denigrates and punishes homosexual activities and affirms negative homosexual beliefs of students.

Within the social context of the high school, gay youth experience high school as problematic in ways non-gay youth do not. There is the public problematic situations of always having to appear non-gay when one is not. And, there is the personal problematic situation of having to lie when one does not condone this conduct.

Gay youth manage their public participation in high school by passing and manage their personal conflict by assuming deep guilt. Passing and the assumption of guilt have important consequences for gay youth. Important among these is the continuous burden of personal shame and its self-destructive consequences.

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