

Research and Practice in the Schools

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Article

Teaching Problem-Solving Skills to Individuals with Disabilities Through the Use of Matrix Training

Kellie McKee, Glen L. McCuller, and Ginger L. Kelso

Stephen F. Austin State University

The present study examines the efficiency of matrix training as a format to teach problem-solving skills to two children with intellectual disabilities. Also called recombinative generalization (Goldstein, 1983), matrix training provides a way to organize skills to train more efficiently. However, it has typically been used to promote language acquisition. A 4X4 matrix of materials related to preparing a meal and potential associated problems was designed. Participants were taught a subset of the skills using least-to-most prompting and errorless learning. A multiple baseline across participants design was used to assess the effects of training on generalized material and problem combinations. Following training on a subset of skills, both participants demonstrated untrained material/problem combinations. These findings support previous literature on the efficiency of matrix training as a method to promote generalization to untrained behaviors. In addition, these results add the functional skill of problem-solving to the matrix training literature.

Key words: Matrix training, intellectual disability, problem-solving, multiple baseline design

Introduction and Literature Review

The variety of skills required for independent living and employment for people with intellectual disabilities are almost infinite. Considering the variety of ways any one task can be adapted to various situations, methods to promote generalization are critical. For example, consider the task of making toast. Although a rather routine activity, much about this task may change from day to day: type of bread, the bread container, the toaster and its location, number of pieces to make, and topping are just a few examples. The ability to adapt performance based on the current context can be referred to as problem-solving. Hughes and Rusch (1989) defined problem-solving as generalizing performances across various situations, settings, and people that may be unfamiliar. However, the ability to engage in problem-solving is an area of deficit for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Problem-Solving

Hughes and Rusch (1989) confirmed that individuals with intellectual disabilities can be taught to solve problems as well as generalize performance within a work setting. They taught problem-solving skills to individuals with severe intellectual disabilities through the use of self-instruction and training of multiple examples of problems that occur within the work setting. Participants were required to perform various tasks involved in boxing and packaging soap, selecting and wearing correct garments, and checking to see the tasks for which they would be responsible for each day. Participants were taught to verbally state the problem, the correct response, and a consequence such as “good job!” Results showed that the participants successfully solved problems that had been trained and also generalized to untrained problems.

Martella, Agran, and Marchand-Martella (1992) also investigated problem-solving skills within the work setting. This study targeted safety skills to prevent work related injuries. Problem-

solving was measured through interviews and staged generalization assessments. Participants were trained to solve problems through the use of cue cards. These cards prompted the individual to verbalize four aspects of problem-solving: 1) How did the problem happen? 2) When could the problem be prevented? 3) Who could you talk to about the problem? and 4) What could be done or said in this situation? Following mastery of training, participants were required to continue using these steps to solve problems with corrective feedback, but without the support of cue cards. Results showed that participants improved their problem-solving abilities and generalized to similar and dissimilar situations.

Park and Gaylord-Ross (1989) focused on problem-solving for social skills in a work environment. They also used a four step problem-solving approach. The four steps were to decode the context of the social situation, decide on the correct behavior, perform the skill, and evaluate their performance. The researchers identified three target behaviors: lowering the occurrences of mumbling, initiation of social interactions, and expanding conversational skills. The four problem-solving steps were taught through role-playing. The participants were also taught seven rules to follow when attempting to solve problems. Results showed an increase in initiated conversations, decrease in mumbling, and increase in expansion across all three participants. This study resulted in generalization of social interaction but only had a lasting effect for one participant after training was implemented.

The previous articles promote various ways to teach problem-solving to individuals with disabilities. One theme found in Martella et. al (1992) and Park and Gaylord-Ross (1989) was that training for problem-solving occurred in multiple phases, which highlights the issue of efficiency. Implementing training that yields successful results is important. However, an equally important part of training for problem-solving is the issue of efficient methods to promote generalization to untrained problems. Another problem highlighted in the Park and Gaylord-Ross (1989) study was lasting effects of the training implemented. Also, in Hughes and Rusch (1989), training consisted of primarily teaching participants to verbalize problem-solving

tasks but did not have the participant physically problem-solve until training was withdrawn. Efficiency is an important concern in training problem-solving because the goal is not only to promote skills quickly but also to yield lasting results and generalized problem-solving.

Matrix Training

One approach to improve efficiency and promote generalization across skills is matrix training. Also called recombinative generalization (Goldstein, 1983), matrix training provides an organized approach to teach a subset of relations and promote generalization to other untrained relations. The relations are typically tabled, placed along x and y-axes, and cells are created to show which relations are trained and tested. For example, Figure 1 presents three nouns and three verbs, which combined can construct nine possible two-word sentences. By training the three cells on the diagonal labeled with a “T” the learner will have been exposed to all words. Subsequently, the untrained combinations may be demonstrated without additional training.

	Eat	Sleep	Jump
Dog	T		
Cat		T	
Rabbit			T

Figure 1. A simplified example of a matrix used to train two-word sentences.

Goldstein and Mousetis (1989) used matrix training to promote expressive language in children with intellectual disabilities using peer models. A 7 X 7 matrix was created for the three participants with words that described an object placed along the vertical axis. Location words were placed along a horizontal axis. Examples of two word combinations were “scale, desk” “comb, dresser” and “button, table”. Participants would be asked to

training had ceased due to the school year ending. It is important to note that after the study was completed, Rob's teacher informed the researcher of the fact that Rob was able and more willing to look for items in the kitchen if the class was performing the task of cooking. Given more time, future research could assess for maintenance of problem-solving by implementing maintenance probes after a longer period of time has passed. A final limitation to the present study is that it is unknown how well these skills would generalize across settings, materials, or other problem-solving situations. Further research could better assess generalization as it would be important to know if participants would demonstrate these learned skills in another kitchen, such as in a restaurant or home, using other examples of kitchen supplies, or with other tasks or situations in which problems may arise.

Matrix training promotes generalization through training enough examples of skills in order to promote generalization to other, nontrained skills (Stokes and Baer, 1977). This study suggests that matrix training has implications for organizing skills in order to efficiently teach problem-solving. For school psychologists, matrix training is a potentially useful tool for planning or teaching a variety of functional skills to individuals in need.

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Article

Masculine and Feminine Conformity in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Youth

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Conformity to feminine and masculine norms was examined in a group of heterosexual, gay/lesbian, and bisexual adolescents. Adolescents completed the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory or Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory. Overall, females conformed to a majority of feminine norms, with less conformity reported in regard to investment in appearance for lesbian youth and involvement with children for lesbian and bisexual youth. For gay and bisexual males, less conformity occurred in the areas of disdain for homosexuality, power over women, and violence. Overall, sexual minority youth reported conformity to a majority of gender norms. Implications for practitioners and future research are discussed.

Key words: Adolescents, gender conformity, lesbian, gay, bisexual

Masculine and Feminine Conformity in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth

Many disciplines such as psychology, health, and gender studies have supported that males' and females' gendered behavior is influenced by social environments (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdez, 2010; Bem, 1981). Societal assumptions tend to stereotype gender expression as equal to, and predictive of, gender identity and even sexual orientation. However, that may not fit many youth and their own sense of identity (Lehavot & Lambert, 2007; Saltzberg & Davis, 2010). Of more concern recently are the negative outcomes experienced by some youth who identify as gender nonconforming, especially in schools. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth may experience discrimination, harassment, and even assault due to their sexual orientation (both perceived and real), and/or gender expression, and/or gender identity. This can lead to greater risk for the development of posttraumatic stress disorder; increased suicidality; greater levels of depression and externalizing problems; and generally lower well-being (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Friedman, Koeske, Silvestre, Korr, & Sites, 2006; Friedman,

Marshal, Stall, Cheong, & Wright, 2008; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005).

Unfortunately, social science research also tends to conflate sexual orientation with gender identity and gender expression (Ivory, 2005; Poynter & Washington, 2005). Sexual orientation refers to sex of one's erotic/love/affectionate partner, with some common orientation identities being heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual (Diamond, 2002). Gender identity is recognition of the perceived social gender attributed to a person – one's self-perception of their gender (Diamond, 2002). Gender expression has been defined as the appearance, gender roles, behaviors, and emotional expression of an individual, with many individuals assuming a label as androgynous, feminine, or masculine (Eagly, 1987; Hoffman, 2001). As children begin to exhibit gender variance from the normative expectations for their assigned sex at birth, these cultural assumptions at times result in assigning minority sexual identities (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Gagne & Tewsbury, 1998; Saltzberg & Davis, 2010) rather than a complex analysis of sexual identity, gender identity, and gender expression.

The assumption within the broader cultural context that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth also violate norms via their gender expression contributes to this erroneous conflation of gender identity and sexuality. For example, a prototypically feminine young woman may be assumed heterosexual while her friend with short hair and clothing from the men's section of Old Navy may be assumed to be lesbian. Both assumptions grow directly from gender performance and the perceived levels of each woman's location on the continuum of conformity to nonconformity within prescribed gender systems. The current study aimed to examine these assumptions of LGB gender nonconformity by assessing gender characteristics for LGB and heterosexual youth and comparing their gender expression to national norms.

Gender Expression among LGB Youth

Given the gender performance and conformity expectations imposed culturally and socially, individuals perceived to violate gender systems face not only pressure to conform (Alfieri, Ruble, & Higgins, 1996; Vanderburgh & Forshée, 2003), but also experience marginalization, ridicule, teasing, harassment, abuse, judgment, stigma, and rejection (Burgess, 1999; Chutter, 2007; Horn, 2007; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Lobel, 1994; Lobel, Gewirtz, Pras, Shoeshine-Rokach, & Ginton, 1999). As Chutter (2007) noted, these pressures and stigmatizing conditions may lead to negative self-judgments. Some researchers suggested that victimization directed at LGB youth results from gender nonconformity rather than sexual orientation (Horn, 2007; Russel, 2003). D'Augelli and colleagues (2006) examined the impact of gender atypicality on mental health. Gender nonconformity (or atypicality) before the age of 13 (e.g., being called "sissy" or "tomboy," parental discouragement of cross-gender behaviors) predicted higher rates of victimization. In addition, these events before age 13 predicted greater mental health symptomology years later (between ages 15-21).

A few studies explored the distinctions between gender identity, gender conformity/nonconformity, and sexual orientation among adolescents. For example, Horn (2007) presented high school students vignettes describing teenagers with varying levels of gender conformity related to appearance

and activities. Horn's study found heterosexual boys exhibited less acceptance of a heterosexual peer for participating in an activity that violates gender norms such as ballet. They rated their acceptance of a heterosexual peer even lower if his appearance failed to conform to gender norms. Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, and Russell (2010) examined adolescent gender nonconformity, victimization in school settings, and psychosocial adjustment among LGBT adults ages 21-25. Along with their reflections on gender nonconformity during school, they also indicated levels of life satisfaction and depression in adulthood. Toomey and colleagues found LGBT status (actual or perceived by peers) mediated the relationship between gender nonconformity and psychosocial adjustment. Given that perceived LGBT status may be derived from gender nonconformity, gender expression may still play a role in the LGBT status variables mediator as analyzed by Toomey et al. (2010) and thus represent another example of conflation of sexual and gender identity.

Examining Assumptions of LGB Gender Nonconformity

Various studies have examined aspects of gender conformity/nonconformity for LGB individuals. Bailey and Zucker (1995) found that gay and lesbian individuals recalled more cross-sex-typed behavior (e.g., toy/activities, cross-dressing, athletics, careers/role models, social reputation for cross-gender behavior) than heterosexual individuals. Additionally, gender nonconforming behaviors, feelings, and interests were also documented for homosexual adults through childhood home videos (Rieger, Linsenmeier, Gygax, & Baily, 2008). While there are limited studies regarding the conformity (or nonconformity) of LGB individuals regarding gender expression, further empirical investigation of gender conformity and nonconformity among LGB youth is needed to determine those individuals' perceptions of conformance to gender norms and how these may or may not align with the perception of others (e.g., school personnel).

The purpose of the current study is to examine LGB and heterosexual school-aged youths' (age 14-21) current feminine and masculine gender characteristics and conformity. Two measures

validated among young adults, the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory (CFNI; Mahalik, Morray, Coonerty-Femiano, Ludlow, Slattery, & Smiler, 2005) and the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik, Locke, Ludlow, Diemer, Scott, Gottfried, & Freitas, 2003), provided a baseline for comparison to the gender characteristics of the general population based on an overall score and subscale scores for particular characteristics. This comparison to a national sample allows for testing of the common assumption of gender nonconformity among LGB and heterosexual youth and young adults.

Method

Participants

Adolescent participants were recruited from a convenience sample of community organizations that provide support to LGBT youth. Organizations serving LGBT youth were emailed by the principal investigator and invited to participate in the project. In total, 33 organizations from 20 states agreed to make the survey available to youth. Ultimately, participants were recruited from 12 states, with a majority of students from Oklahoma (31%), Indiana (16%), and Connecticut (14%). Survey materials were available in paper format in English. This project was reviewed and approved by the principal investigator's university's Institutional Review Board. Youth were informed of their right not to participate and right to withdraw at any time. In order to protect participants from possible breaches of confidentiality, all surveys were completed anonymously upon approval via each agency's staff representative. No names were collected to ensure 100% anonymity. Those youth under the age of 18 provided assent, and agency staff were allowed to provide consent for the youth's participation in the study in the interest of protecting the youth's sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression.

In all, 144 youth aged 14-21 participated in the project. Those individuals who identified as transgender ($n = 8$) were excluded from the final analysis of gender conformity as the focus of the study was examination of gender conformity within heterosexual and LGB youth. Ultimately, 100 youth completed the measures fully to be included in the study. The mean age of the sample was 16.88

years ($SD = 1.49$). Overall, 55% of youth identified their biological sex as female, and 45% identified as male. In terms of ethnicity, the majority of participants identified as Caucasian (58%), 12% as Hispanic, 7% as Native American/Native Alaskan, 2% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% as African American, and 18% as Other. Two individuals did not provide their ethnicity. Participants self-identified their sexual orientation: 18% heterosexual, 49% gay/lesbian, and 33% bisexual/other. All youth included in the data analysis identified as cisgender (i.e., not transgender). Data regarding sexual orientation, sex, and gender were collected in multiple-choice format, though youth were also given the option to self-identify as well.

Measures: Conformity to Masculine and Feminine Norms.

Two scales were utilized to measure conformity to gender norms: the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory (CFNI; Mahalik et al., 2005) and the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik et al., 2003). The CFNI contains 84 items, while the CMNI contains 94 items. Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree*). The average of the norm sample for the CFNI was 18-19 years of age (Mahalik et al., 2005); the average age of the norm sample for the CMNI was approximately 20 years old (Mahalik et al., 2003).

These scales provided an overall broad score of Total Conformity to masculine or feminine norms (yielding a z -score), but also recognized various subscales of masculinity and femininity that may provide a deeper understanding of the variety of behaviors, feelings, and thoughts (raw scores for each subscale). From the CFNI, eight subscales are provided: 1) Nice in Relationships, 2) Thinness, 3) Modesty, 4) Domestic, 5) Care for Children, 6) Romantic Relationship, 7) Sexual Fidelity, and 8) Invest in Appearance. Internal consistency (coefficient alphas based on the standardization samples) for the CMNI's and CFNI's Total Conformity score are .94 and .88, respectively. Within the CMNI, the following 11 subscales are provided: 1) Winning, 2) Emotional Control, 3) Risk-Taking, 4) Violence, 5) Power Over Women, 6) Dominance, 7) Playboy, 8) Self-Reliance, 9) Primacy of Work, 10) Disdain for Homosexuals,

and 11) Pursuit of Status. The CFNI and CMNI were initially validated with a primarily heterosexual sample (97% for the CFNI [Mahalik et al., 2005]; 96% for the CMNI [Mahalik et al., 2003]). Internal consistencies ranged from .77 to .92 on the CFNI and from .72 to .91 for the subscales on the CMNI.

Measures were completed individually by youth in paper and pencil format. Staff leaders at the various agencies serving LGB youth announced the availability of the study at their site.

Results

Overview of Analysis

Initially, means and standard deviations of scores from the CMNI and CFNI were calculated. For females who completed the CFNI, scores were calculated for those who identified as heterosexual ($n = 11$), lesbian ($n = 22$), and bisexual/other ($n = 22$). For males who completed the CMNI, scores were calculated in the same manner: heterosexual ($n = 7$), gay ($n = 27$), and bisexual/other ($n = 11$).

T-scores were calculated based on each subgroup's mean compared to the norms of the respective instrument's standardization sample (see Tables 1 & 2). Initially, differences were calculated for the CFNI and CMNI Total score to determine if there were differences based on a broad measure of gender conformity. Ultimately, t -tests were also conducted for each subscale, as the subscales provide a richer context of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the participating youth. A Bonferroni correction was applied to account for the multiple comparisons made among the scales to determine meaningful differences. Differences were considered significant at the level of $p < .00185$ or less for comparisons with the CFNI measure and $p < .00138$ for comparisons with the CMNI measure.

Findings

Females. A t -test was performed comparing the means of the Total CFNI score for each of the three groups (e.g., heterosexual, lesbian, and bisexual/other) to the standardization sample. When examining the Total CFNI score, females identifying as heterosexual indicated less

conformity to feminine norms ($M = -.80$) than the standardization sample, ($M = 0$), $t(742) = 2.59$, $p = .0097$, $d = .62$. Female youth in the current study identifying as heterosexual also differed significantly from the standardization sample in two subscales. Heterosexual females indicated lower scores on the subscale Involvement with Children ($M = 19.82$) than the standardization sample ($M = 26.51$), $t(742) = 3.54$, $p = .0004$, $d = 1.15$, and on the Domestic subscale, ($M = 10.64$ v. $M = 14.64$), $t(742) = 3.63$, $p = .0003$, $d = .83$. No other differences were noted in subscales between the heterosexual youth in the current sample and the standardization sample.

Table 1

Overview of Mean (SD) CFNI Scores for Females Identifying as Heterosexual, Lesbian, and Bisexual/Other

	Heterosexual ($n=11$)	Lesbian ($n=22$)	Bisexual/ Other ($n=22$)
CFNI Total Score	-.80 (1.54)	-.31 (.96)	-.38 (.90)
Having Nice Relationships	38.36 (3.80)	40.16 (6.11)	37.86 (5.10)
Involvement with Children	19.82*** ^L (5.36)	19.41**** ^L (8.47)	22.07*** ^L (4.99)
Thinness	19.36 (7.47)	19.47 (7.95)	20.70 (6.67)
Sexual Fidelity	18.00 (2.24)	21.31 (4.92)	19.05 (5.53)
Modesty	12.82 (3.68)	13.09 (4.60)	14.59 (2.75)
Involvement in Romantic Relationships	13.91 (3.08)	17.28 (4.25)	14.00 (4.87)
Domestic	10.64*** ^L (5.03)	15.67 (4.97)	14.95 (5.13)
Investment in Appearance	12.18 (4.31)	8.75*** ^L (3.53)	11.66 (5.14)

Note: CFNI Total Score is a z score. Subscales are raw scores. ^H = Higher than CFNI norm group; ^L = Lower than CFNI norm group. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; **** $p < .0001$

Table 2
Overview of Mean (SD) CMNI Scores for Males Identifying as Heterosexual, Gay, and Bisexual/Other

	Heterosexual (n=7)	Gay (n=27)	Bisexual/ Other (n=11)
CMNI Total Score	-.46 (.89)	-1.10**** L (1.19)	-1.18**** L (1.35)
Winning	14.43 (5.77)	13.85 (5.45)	13.73 (7.77)
Emotional Control	15.29 (3.64)	13.22 (9.88)	12.82 (6.90)
Risk Taking	17.14 (2.55)	16.36 (6.19)	14.27 (4.54)
Violence	12.86 (5.18)	10.33 (6.34)	7.00**** L (6.16)
Power Over Women	6.86 (4.53)	5.70**** L (4.97)	4.82**** L (3.97)
Dominance	5.29 (1.80)	5.37 (2.39)	5.82 (3.22)
Playboy	10.71 (3.55)	8.68 (6.61)	10.00 (7.84)
Self-Reliance	6.43 (3.41)	7.89 ^H (4.58)	5.91 (4.44)
Primacy of Work	10.71 (2.87)	10.13 (4.32)	9.18 (4.45)
Disdain for Homosexuality	13.14 (4.01)	4.33**** L (4.80)	10.64*** L (7.39)
Pursuit of Status	10.57 (.54)	11.47 (2.58)	11.09 (3.86)

Note: CMNI Total Score is a z score. Subscales are raw scores. ^H= Higher than CMNI norm group; ^L= Lower than CMNI norm group. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; **** $p < .0001$

No significant differences were found for females identifying lesbian and bisexual/other with regard to the Total CFNI score. However, investigation of the subscales revealed more specific differences with regard to feminine norms. Females identifying as lesbian received lower scores on the Involvement with Children subscale ($M = 19.41$) than the standardization sample ($M = 26.51$), $t(750) = 4.85$, $p = .0001$, $d = .95$. Females identifying as lesbian also received lower scores on

the Investment in Appearance subscale ($M = 8.75$) compared to the standardization sample ($M = 12.01$), $t(749) = 3.65$, $p = .0003$, $d = .89$. Female youth identifying as bisexual/other received lower scores on the subscale Involvement with Children ($M = 22.07$) compared to the standardization sample ($M = 26.51$), $t(753) = 3.31$, $p = .001$, $d = .78$. All other subscales comparing youth identifying as lesbian or bisexual/other to the CFNI standardization sample were nonsignificant.

Males. A t -test was performed comparing the means of the Total CMNI score for each of the three groups (e.g., heterosexual, gay, and bisexual/other) to the standardization sample. Youth identifying as heterosexual had no significant differences in the Total CMNI score or subscale scores when compared to the standardization sample of the CMNI. Youth identifying as gay received a lower Total CMNI score ($M = -1.10$) compared to the standardization sample ($M = 0$), $t(777) = 5.59$, $p = .0001$, $d = 1.05$. Additionally, youth identifying as bisexual/other received a lower total CMNI score ($M = -1.18$) compared to the standardization sample, $t(761) = 3.88$, $p = .0001$, $d = .99$.

Males identifying as gay also reported less adherence to certain areas of masculinity as measured by the CMNI. Youth identifying as gay received a lower score on the Winning subscale ($M = 13.85$) compared to the standardization sample ($M = 16.91$), $t(777) = 3.06$, $p = .0023$, $d = .58$. Additionally, gay males reported lower scores compared to the standardization samples on the subscales Power Over Women ($M = 5.7$ v. $M = 10.59$; $t(777) = 5.58$, $p = .0001$, $d = 1.04$), Playboy ($M = 8.68$ v. $M = 12.06$; $t(777) = 5.58$, $p = .0046$, $d = .53$), and Disdain for Homosexuality ($M = 4.33$ v. $M = 17.74$; $t(777) = 10.38$, $p = .0001$, $d = 2.31$).

In examining males identifying as bisexual or other, these youth received lower scores related to Violence ($M = 7.00$) compared to the national sample ($M = 12.38$), $t(761) = 4.43$, $p = .0001$, $d = 1.04$. Lower scores for bisexual/other youth were also reported with regard to Power Over Women ($M = 4.82$ v. $M = 10.59$), $t(761) = 4.27$, $p = .0001$, $d = 1.36$, as well as Disdain for Homosexuality ($M = 10.64$ v. $M = 17.74$), $t(761) = 3.51$, $p = .0005$, $d = 1.01$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine LGB and heterosexual school-aged youths' perceptions of their own conformity (or nonconformity) to masculine and feminine gender norms as compared to a normative sample. Overall, LGB males and females reported similar behaviors, feelings, and thoughts as a majority heterosexual sample regarding conformity to masculine and feminine norms. Previous investigations have emphasized some of the departures of LGB youth from stereotypical masculine and feminine norms (i.e., Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Rieger et al., 2008); however, research has not fully captured the extent to which LGB youth may embody masculinity and femininity.

Female LGB and Heterosexual Youth

For female participants, only three gender subscales differed from the national sample. All female youth (lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual) in the current sample reported less conformity than the national norm sample for the subscale Involvement with Children (e.g., I would baby-sit for fun). However, the mean difference was more pronounced for females identifying as lesbian than those identifying as heterosexual or bisexual/other. The current sample's somewhat younger age in comparison to the standardization sample may explain the lower levels of involvement with children reported here. In general, females identifying as lesbian indicated less conformity than the national norm sample in attitudes, behaviors, and thoughts regarding the Investment in Appearance subscale (e.g., I never wear makeup [reverse]; It is important to look physically attractive in public). Female youth identifying as heterosexual indicated less conformity than the national norm sample with regard to the Domestic subscale (e.g., I enjoy spending time making my living space look nice; It is important to keep your living space clean).

Similarities to the national sample appeared more often than differences among sexual minority female youth for gender subscale scores. Females identifying as lesbian or bisexual/other reported conforming for a majority of subscales on the CFNI. This finding might seem unexpected and run

counter to typical cultural assumptions about gender expression among lesbian and bisexual women. Lesbian participants' self-reports were similar to the national norm sample on the following CFNI subscales: Having Nice Relationships, Thinness, Sexual Fidelity, Modesty, Involvement in Romantic Relationships, Domestic. Bisexual female participants' responses were similar to established national norms on the following subscales: Having Nice Relationships, Thinness, Sexual Fidelity, Modesty, Involvement in Romantic Relationships, Domestic, and Investment in Appearance.

Male LGB and Heterosexual Youth

Overall, male youth identifying as gay or bisexual/other were less conforming to masculine gender norms than male youth identifying as heterosexual. Across male participants, several gender subscales differed in comparison to the national sample. Males identifying as gay reported less conformity with masculine norms, compared to the national norm sample, with regard to the following scales: Winning (e.g., I will do anything to win; Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing; The best feeling in the world comes from winning), Power Over Women (e.g., Women should be subservient to men; I will only be satisfied when women are equal to men [reverse]); Playboy (e.g., Emotional involvement should be avoided when having sex; Long term relationships are better than casual sex [reverse]); and Disdain for Homosexuality (e.g., I try to avoid being perceived as gay; I would be furious if someone thought I was gay). Males identifying as bisexual/other in the current sample reported less conformity than the national norm sample with regard to the following subscales: Violence (e.g., I am willing to get into a physical fight if necessary; No matter what the situation, I would never act violently [reverse]); Power Over Women; and Disdain for Homosexuality.

In comparison to the national sample, gay and bisexual male youth responded similarly on several masculinity subscales. Gay male participants' self-reports were similar to the national norm sample on the following CMNI subscales: Emotional Control, Risk Taking, Violence, Dominance, Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, Pursuit of Status. Bisexual male participants' responses were similar to established

national norms on the following subscales: Winning, Emotional Control, Risk Taking, Dominance, Playboy, Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, Pursuit of Status.

Males identifying as heterosexual did not differ significantly from the comparison national sample. Given that the sample was recruited via organizations that support LGB youth, heterosexual male reports of conformity to Disdain for Homosexuality were somewhat surprising. Social desirability concerns might predict that heterosexual male youth involved in LGB organizations would avoid anti-gay type responses. However, this particular social context might also trigger fears of being labeled as gay and therefore lead to higher rates of masculine conformity to anti-gay responses.

Limitations and Future Directions

The small sample size for each individual category (e.g., 11 bisexual/other males) represents one limitation for the CFNI and CMNI comparisons studied above, preventing generalizations to all LGB and heterosexual youth; however, it should be noted that it is sometimes difficult to recruit LGB youth for studies given concerns regarding issues of confidentiality, consent, and access in general to this population.

Current participants completed gender subscales for their culturally assigned gender. In other words, females did not respond to masculinity subscales and male participants did not complete the femininity subscales. Future studies might present both feminine and masculine measures to all participants for a broader comparison across the gender spectrum. Considering the findings of many gender similarities among LGB participants and the national sample, future studies focusing on youth may contribute to challenging assumptions of gender nonconformity among sexual minority youth. It should be noted that the measures used in the current study do adhere to a feminine-masculine gender binary, which may not adequately describe all youth who participated in the current study.

The heterosexual youth involved in LGB organizations represent the under-studied “allies” of the sample. Additional studies on heterosexual youth acting as allies to their LGB peers may develop understanding of the connections among ally attitudes, behaviors, and gender conformity or

nonconformity. The current finding that heterosexual males acting as allies still reported disdain for homosexuality needs further exploration as well.

It should be noted that the majority of lesbian youth surveyed in this study reported an identity consistent with a conformity view of femininity. The CFNI Total score for adolescent lesbians was similar to that of the standardization sample of the CFNI. There were no differences related to these youths’ perceptions of their relationships with others, thinness, sexual fidelity, involvement in romantic relationships, or domesticity. While there may be a stereotype from society that lesbians may be more gender nonconforming, this was not found in the current sample. Similar to the findings for lesbian youth, gay male adolescents overall reported conforming to a majority of masculine norms more than what may be perceived by society at large. Within this sample, gay males reported conformity on nine out of 11 dimensions of masculinity. Longitudinal research with LGB youth exploring gender conformity and sexual orientation from adolescence to early adulthood/adulthood is warranted to examine any developmental changes associated with gender conformity and sexual orientation. Perhaps as adolescents mature, they become more likely to explore and endorse gender nonconformance.

The gender identities of these youth are likely more complex than common stereotypes suggest and deserve further investigation. This type of research is necessary for understanding the intricate link between sexual orientation and gender expression – especially as it may pertain to LGB youths’ experience of victimization within schools and communities. These findings would also be useful to educators, practitioners, and clinicians providing services to LGB youth. If school personnel assume an adolescent is heterosexual or homosexual based on gender conformity/nonconformity, they may unwittingly enact microaggressions on clients by asking questions that imply a certain sexual orientation.

As suggested by Horn (2007) and Russel (2003), harassment and victimization directed at LGB youth may result from gender nonconformity rather than sexual orientation; however, not all nonconformance may be equal when considering

the various dimensions of femininity and masculinity. Further research may wish to explore (through direct measurement or possibly through experimental manipulation of gender conformity vignettes) attitudes and behaviors of youth of varying levels of conformity/nonconformity on specific domains. Perhaps a female who violates the feminine dimension of Investment in Appearance (expressing her gender more as male) would be more likely to be victimized than if she exhibited less conformity to Domestic traits. This may also be hypothesized perhaps if LGB youth were to be more conforming to characteristics of the opposite sex – such as a lesbian female who is perceived as having masculine characteristics of Dominance and Playboy (from the CMNI) or a gay male who is perceived as having feminine characteristics of Investment in Appearance and Having Nice Relationships (from the CFNI). In other words, nonconformity to certain stereotypical masculine or feminine characteristics may lead to harsher victimization. Further research would provide support needed to explore this hypothesis.

Implications for Educators

As noted before, LGB youth are often at risk for a multitude of negative mental health outcomes (e.g., D’Augelli et al., 2006; Friedman et al., 2006; Friedman et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2005). As affirmed by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), all youth, including those who are sexual or gender minority children and adolescents, have the right to equal opportunity and a safe environment within all public educational institutions (APA & NASP, 2015). We recommend that school personnel receive training regarding socialization of gender roles and the importance of addressing gender bias when working with students. We also recommend incorporating these complex distinctions among sexuality and gender expression within graduate training programs for school psychologists, teachers, and administrators in education. School personnel would benefit from further considering their own expectations of behavior related to gender conformity and sexual orientation. School psychologists should be aware of and address stereotyped beliefs held by educators (and their own beliefs) when discussing child and

adolescent development. Educators who do not provide a safe, supportive environment, or continually rely on detrimental stereotypes, miss the opportunity to recognize the commonalities of sexual and/or gender minority youth with their peers and celebrate diverse viewpoints. The stigma associated with these negative beliefs contributes to poorer mental health outcomes for LGB youth (Meyer, 2003; Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008).

Conclusions

While there may be hypotheses about LGB receiving harassment, discrimination, and bullying by not conforming to gender norms, these data indicate that by and large LGB youth self-report to conform to a majority of gender-conforming behaviors. Adolescence is a major time of identity development, where sex and gender roles are developing. However, these roles may be fluid to some extent over time and are continually refined (Deutsch, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As always, professionals consulting with families and providing direct services to adolescents (including school personnel, health service providers, etc.) should carefully examine their own preconceptions of sexual orientation and gender conformity/nonconformity as there is a need to provide affirming practices for gender nonconforming youth when considering health and mental healthcare (Case & Meier, 2014; Edwards-Leeper, Leibowitz, & Sangganjanavanich, 2016; Hidalgo et al., 2013). Educators, practitioners, and clinicians are uniquely situated to behave as adult allies to gender creative and gender expansive identities and expressions among LGB youth. A more nuanced understanding of sexual orientation and gender nonconformity should lead to more sensitivity to the needs of LGB youth and increased effectiveness of services.

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