

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Features of Positive Developmental Leisure Settings for LGBTQ Youth

Theriault, D. S., & Witt, P. A. (2014). Features of positive developmental leisure settings for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 32(2), 83-97.

SUMMARY: There are several features of youth programs that support positive youth development. In this study, researchers utilized a participant-observer approach to examine those features in a program specifically targeted toward LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) youth. Thematic analysis of observational notes, interviews, and program documents revealed that support for efficacy and mattering and opportunities to belong were the most salient features in the program.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Adults and youth conveyed that components of support for efficacy and mattering and providing opportunities to belong were the most salient characteristics of the program.
- The adult staff members often identified safety as an important feature of the program, while the youth were much less likely to mention safety.
- Structure that allowed youth to self-select into activities and engage in the program at multiple levels provided support for efficacy and mattering.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Intentionally cultivate respect for all youth, including an openness to learning from the youth
- Encourage youth to engage in activities that support empowerment while affirming their identities (e.g., leadership, activism)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Consider how program expectations might support or demean LGBTQ youth
- Develop opportunities for multiple levels of youth engagement in order to provide appropriate structure for a wide range of youth

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration between programs for youth and community members in the effort to create inclusive environments
- Promote education for professionals who work with military-affiliated youth regarding the unique experiences of LGBTQ youth

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Researchers collected data at a program serving LGBTQ youth ages 12-19 years in the southern United States.
- Data came from three sources: the observational notes of a researcher who became a volunteer in the program; semi-structured interviews with youth, volunteers, and staff members; and program documents such as the volunteer manual.
- Themes throughout the three sources were identified in order to determine the features of the program most salient for LGBTQ youth engagement.

PARTICIPANTS

- Interviews were conducted with 13 individuals: 5 youth and 8 adults.
- Volunteers, staff members, board members, and the program director were the adult interviewees.
- No other information about the interviewed or observed participants was included.

LIMITATIONS

- The researchers did not evaluate the effect of support for efficacy and mattering and providing opportunities to belong on youth outcomes, so while these were identified by staff and participants as being important, it is unclear what role they actually play for LGBTQ youth with regard to outcomes.
- Program attendance was voluntary and thus youth often attended sporadically. The youth who chose to attend may differ from those who did not in ways that could affect results.
- Only five youth were explicitly interviewed for this study which may not be a large enough sample to capture the experience of all the youth involved in the program.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate the effect of characteristics of youth programs on the outcomes of LGBTQ youth
- Investigate similarities and differences between programs targeted to sexual minority youth and programs targeted to the mainstream population of youth
- Explore components or characteristics that can be augmented in mainstream youth programs in order to better support LGBTQ youth within those programs

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>