Understanding and Supporting LGBTQ Youth:
The Stories & Numbers Project
& Be You!

**Presentation for the
Texas School Social Workers
Conference
February 28, 2020**

**Stephen T. Russell
University of Texas at Austin**

**Sarah Kapostasy
Out Youth**

TEXAS
The University of Texas at Austin

Out Youth

STORIESANDNUMBERS.ORG

Homophobia & transphobia at school
& LGBTQ+ student well-being

- Among LGBTQ youth: **89%** victimized; **67%** victimized because of their sexual orientation, **60%** because of their gender expression. YRBS data

- Compared to general harassment, bias-based harassment is more strongly associated with:

  - Risk behaviors (alcohol-tobacco-drug use; suicide attempts);

  - Mental health problems (depression; suicidal ideation);

  - Compromised academic success;

  - Perception of school climate as unsafe.

Policy and practice strategies
associated with LGBTQ+ student well-being

STRATEGY 1

Inclusive, **Enumerated Policies**

STRATEGY 2

School Personnel **Support and Training**

STRATEGY 3

Student-Led **Clubs (GSAs)**

STRATEGY 4

Access to LGBTQ-Related **Resources and Curricula**

LGBTQ+ safe school strategies: **Inclusive, Enumerated Policies**

- Enumerated policies are policies that list characteristics or traits of students that may be the basis of bullying or discrimination at school.

- Strong consistent evidence that enumerated policies make a difference:
  - **Students** who report inclusive policies say they are safer and have higher achievement
  - Fewer suicide behaviors among LGBT students in **schools** with inclusive anti-bullying policies
  - Less harassment and fewer bias remarks reported by students in **states** with enumerated laws

LGBTQ+ safe school strategies: **Inclusive, Enumerated Policies**

- **Policy-makers** at the state and school district levels should enact inclusive and enumerated laws and policies.

- **School personnel** should establish local policies in school districts, schools, and classrooms.

- **School personnel, parents, and students** should learn about policies in their local school and school district.

- Using research evidence combined with personal stories about why it is important, **school personnel, parents, and students** should:
  - Raise awareness of the need for inclusive and enumerated policies; and
  - Advocate for local and state policy change.

LGBTQ+ safe school strategies:
Professional Development

- Evidence from **Students**:
  - A supportive school teacher is one of the strongest protective factors for LGBTQ students' academic success and mental health
  - Students feel safer and do better in school when teachers intervene in harassment

- Evidence from **Teachers**:
  - Teachers take bias-based bullying more seriously – and are more likely to intervene – when they feel school administrators take it seriously
  - A national sample of teachers found that LGBTQ+ professional development was linked to support for LGBTQ+ students

LGBTQ+ safe school strategies:
Professional Development

- **Schools of education** should integrate education about LGBTQ issues into teacher education.

- **Professional education associations** (e.g., the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, or the Texas Association of School Administrators) should offer continuing education about LGBTQ issues.

- **School personnel** should:
  - intervene in discriminatory bullying,
  - seek out resources and training to understand and support LGBTQ students.

- **Parents** should support LGBTQ-focused professional development.

- **Students** can advocate for, and participate in, LGBTQ-focused professional development for their teachers and other school personnel.

LGBTQ+ safe school strategies: Student-Led Clubs (GSAs)

- In 2014, **37% of U.S. high schools** had GSAs

- Under federal law, a school that permits non-curricular student-led clubs may not prohibit students from forming a GSA

- Benefits for **Students**:
  - GSA participation is linked to academic performance (higher grade point average), more school belonging, and feeling safe at school
  - GSAs have a stronger impact on their members when students participate more, GSA advisors have more experience, and students and advisors feel support from the school
  - Simply having a GSA at school is linked to benefits for LGBTQ+ as well as heterosexual students: they report less bullying and more belonging

LGBTQ+ safe school strategies:
Student-Led Clubs (GSAs)

- **Professional education associations** (e.g., the Teachers Associations, or Associations of School Administrators) should raise awareness of GSAs, and provide training to school personnel.

- **School personnel** should:
  - Identify and eliminate barriers to the formation and operation of GSAs, and treat them like any other student organization or club,
  - Collaborate with CBOs with expertise in supporting LGBTQ+ youth,
  - Provide resources and support to GSAs and other student organizations.

- **Students** can advocate for, start, and participate in GSAs in their schools.

LGBTQ+ safe school strategies:
LGBTQ-Related Resources

- Access to **LGBTQ+ resources** (libraries; safe zone; visible images) and **inclusive curriculum**

- **LGBTQ+ Resources**:
  - When students know where to access information and support, they feel their schools are safer – both for themselves, and for LGBTQ+ students

- **LGBTQ+ Inclusive Curriculum**:
  - Links to **school safety**: Students who say they have learned about LGBTQ+ issues at school report less bullying and more safety
  - Links to student **health**: A statewide study showed that teacher sensitivity to LGB issues in HIV education was linked to lower sexual risk-taking for LGB youth

STRATEGY 4

LGBTQ-Related Resources

- **Policymakers and school administrators** should work to ensure that LGBTQ people and history are included in school curricula through state laws, educational guidelines and district policies, and professional development.

- **School personnel** should:
  - Be a resource for LGBTQ youth,
  - Ensure that libraries have resources for LGBTQ youth,
  - Request and attend safe zone trainings,
  - Promote visibility and inclusion through visual materials and in classroom curricula.

- **Students and parents** can request that LGBTQ resources be made available at school.

INTRODUCTIONS

Be YOU Style

Why Be YOU?
Young, Outspoken, Unbreakable

- School-based empowerment program for LGBTQ+ youth

- Developed collaboratively

- Increases accessibility

- Empirically-informed and LGBTQ+ specific

- Positive feedback from participating students

The LGBTQ+ Umbrella

Identities and Stressors

Be
YOU

Nerdy Origins

Hatzenbuehler, M. L. (2009).

How does sexual minority stigma "get under the skin"? A psychological mediation framework.

Psychological Bulletin, 135(5), 707–730.

Personal Stressors and Finding the Middle Path

Naming Minority Stress and Seeking Balance

Be YOU Pilot Program

- Offered to 60 youth in 9 middle and high schools in Central Texas during the 2017-2018 school year

- 20 sessions delivered over the course of two semesters by counseling professionals and graduate student interns to groups of 5-10 students

- Feedback from students gathered at the beginning, middle, and end of the intervention

Negative Thoughts and Alternatives

Avoiding rumination through cognitive reappraisal
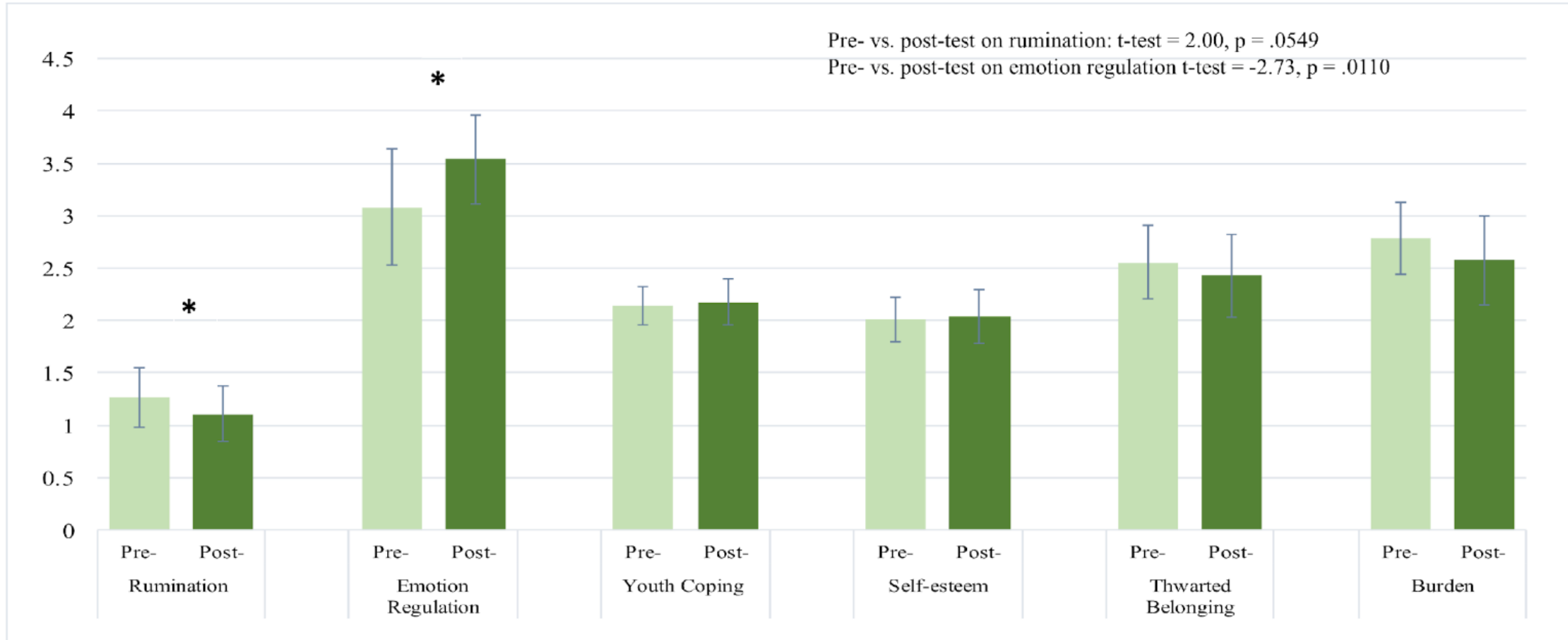
Was Be YOU Effective?

Figure 1. Pre- and Post-Program Mental Health and Well-Being

Stories & Numbers

storiesnumbers@gmail.com
storiesandnumbers.org

sarah.kapostasy@outyouth.org
www.outyouth.org
beyouinsideout.org

STORIESANDNUMBERS.ORG