

July 2024 Webinar

**Making Relationship Programs More Inclusive for LGBTQ+ Youth:
Findings From the FRAMING Research Project**

Presenters:

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Mathematica

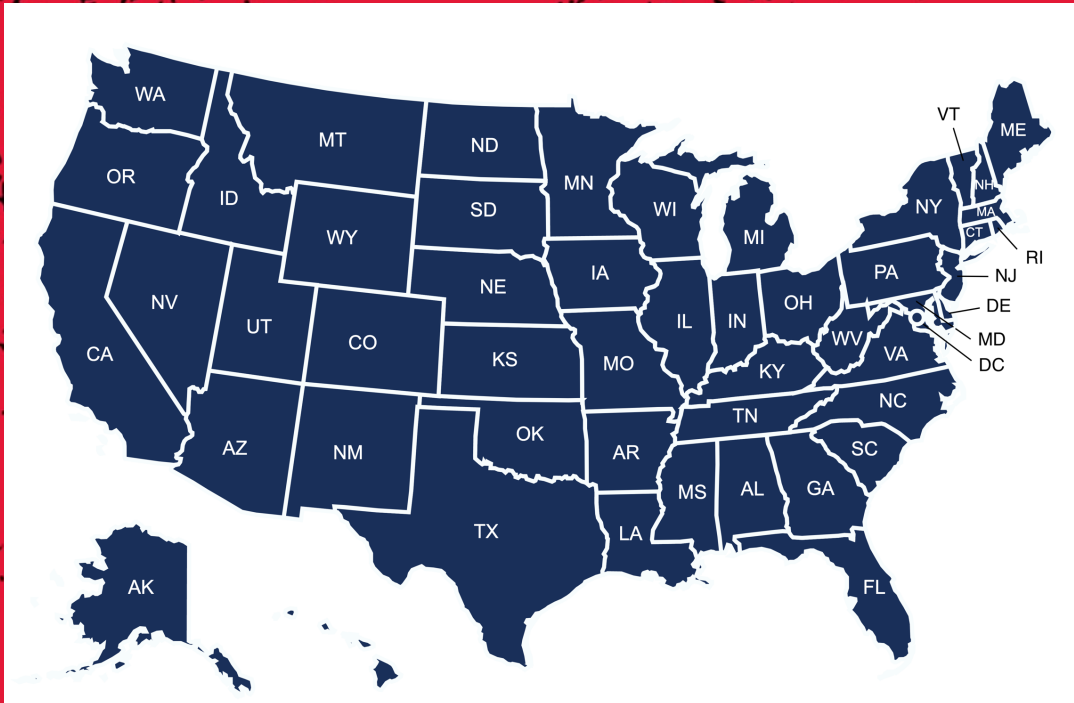
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serving over 126,000 youth



The Dibble Institute
is a national,
independent non-
profit organization.

Our Mission

Empowering teens and young adults with knowledge and research-based skills to successfully navigate their intimate relationships.



We believe in research.



We believe in stable, safe, and nurturing families.



We believe that relationship education is for everyone.





Making Relationship Programs More Inclusive for LGBTQ+ Youth: Findings from the FRAMING Research Project

Dibble Institute Webinar
July 10, 2024

Julia Alamillo, Lourdes Fernandez, and Lexi Ouellette



Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research)

- Funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from 2018-2023
 - The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) managed the project
- Conducted by Mathematica and Public Strategies
- Aim was to provide ACF with information to support the development of its learning agenda for healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) and responsible fatherhood (RF) programming

Presentation road map

- Background on HMRE programs and LGBTQ+ youth
- Research questions
- Data collection
- Key findings about challenges and strategies to enhance LGBTQ+ inclusivity in HMRE programs for youth
- Remaining gaps and considerations for future research and programming



Background on HMRE programs and LGBTQ+ youth

Federal funding for youth HMRE programs

- Since the mid-2000s, the federal government has authorized funding to support healthy marriage initiatives, including HMRE programs for youth
- Funded by OFA within ACF, HHS
- In 2020, OFA allocated separate funding to youth HMRE programs for the first time
- Awarded more than \$24 million to programs serving high-school-age youth and young adults between ages 18 and 24

What do youth HMRE programs cover?

- Programs aim to help youth improve their relationship skills, attitudes, and behaviors in order to form healthy relationships in adolescence and adulthood
- Most feature a structured curriculum, such as those distributed by the Dibble Institute (e.g., *Relationship Smarts PLUS*, *Love Notes*)
- Address topics such as personal values, how to recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships, dating violence prevention, and socioemotional and communication skills
- Many programs also address college/career readiness and sexual health/pregnancy prevention

How are youth HMRE programs delivered?

- Most programs are delivered in high schools in a class during the regular school day (e.g., health, consumer sciences)
- Some programs are delivered after school, in other community settings, or online
- Can be delivered by outside facilitators or classroom teachers
- Programs typically consist of 10-15 lessons, each lasting 60-90 minutes

LGBTQ+ youth in the United States

- Recent data suggests that 26% of high schoolers in the U.S. identify as LGBTQ+ (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2023)
 - This is up from 11% in 2015 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015)
- LGBTQ+ youth face different relationship issues than their cisgender, heterosexual peers
- LGBTQ+ youth are also more at risk of adverse mental health outcomes, including suicide

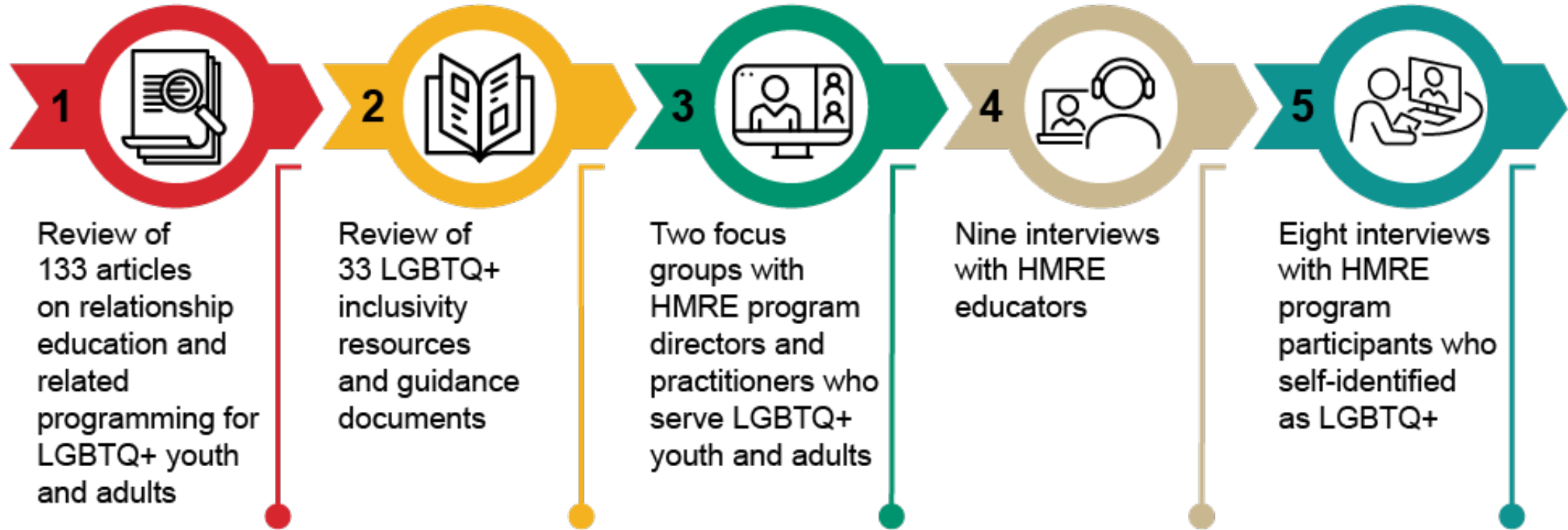
Research questions

The present study aimed to understand...

1. What challenges do HMRE programs face related to serving LGBTQ+ youth?
2. What promising practices or approaches exist for making HMRE programs more inclusive for LGBTQ+ youth?
3. What gaps remain in our understanding of how to make HMRE programs more inclusive for LGBTQ+ youth?

Data collection

Data sources for the study



Key findings

Considerations for recruitment, outreach, and initial engagement depend on program setting

- Programs that operate outside of schools often engage in a variety of outreach activities
 - Hanging flyers in public locations like libraries, community centers, universities, cafes
 - Advertising online or on social media
 - Meeting potential participants at community events
- Programs that operate in schools are often delivered as part of the regular school day and don't engage in these types of recruitment activities

Challenges related to recruitment, outreach, and initial engagement

- Programs sometimes don't know where to reach LGBTQ+ youth
- Outreach and initial program materials can lack affirming imagery and language

"[The program appeared] very...heteronormative...[it] didn't mention trans people, didn't mention aromantic people, didn't mention polyamorous people...didn't mention asexual people. There's so many people in...the LGBTQ+ and same gender loving community who the programming never mentioned and really promoted."

- LGBTQ+ youth program participant

Strategies related to recruitment, outreach, and initial engagement

- Recruit in settings that are welcoming to and frequented by LGBTQ+ young people
- Make sure people's first impression of the program is one of LGBTQ+ inclusivity
- Partner with or employ members of the LGBTQ+ community to strengthen outreach and initial engagement

"We go out to the LGBT Center. Like, we network with them there. And then in the [program materials], when it says he or she, we try to change it up and say, whichever your partner's label, however you and your partner label yourselves."

- Youth program educator

Challenges related to program content and delivery

- Program materials often lack images of LGBTQ+ youth
- Program materials often include heteronormative examples of relationships that may or may not reflect LGBTQ+ youth experiences
- Programs rarely address experiences or issues that are specific to LGBTQ+ youth relationships

Challenges related to program content and delivery

- When programs address LGBTQ+ relationships, they tend to focus on same-sex couples
- Programs tend to use a deficit-based approach when discussing LGBTQ+ people and their relationships
- Programs often face external constraints when modifying content

“The rhetoric...it’s just becoming more inflamed. So, in that sense, people are paying more attention to these things in a negative way. Like looking for something to almost make an issue of.”

- Youth program educator

Strategies related to program content and delivery

- Update program language, images, and examples to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ people and relationships
- Address topics and issues that are relevant to LGBTQ+ people and relationships

Inclusive topics for youth programs

- Impact of gendered social norms and language on LGBTQ+ youth
- Normalizing acceptance of LGBTQ+ relationships
- Talking to family and peers about sexuality and gender identity
- Marriage, pregnancy, and parenting in the context of LGBTQ+ relationships

Strategies related to program content and delivery

- Present information about LGBTQ+ people's experiences using a strengths-based approach
- Consider alternative delivery formats for LGBTQ+ inclusive programming, such as GSAs, health clinics, text messages, or online platforms

Challenges related to staff hiring and training

- A lack of LGBTQ+ staff can make it difficult for LGBTQ+ youth to connect and engage with the program
- Educators often need more training on best practices for serving LGBTQ+ youth
- Educators often need more understanding of the school context and social dynamics

“I do feel it’s harder to create that connection [with LGBTQ+ youth] because I was raised in a time when this wasn’t a common thing. One of the areas I struggle with is just knowing what to say...I don’t know what I don’t know.”

- Youth program educator

Strategies related to staff hiring and training

- Hire staff—including educators, case managers, co-educators or peer mentors—who are LGBTQ+ or who have lived experience as an ally or advocate
- Hire staff who are open-minded and accepting of LGBTQ+ people and relationships
- Train staff on how to serve and support LGBTQ+ participants

Potential training topics for staff

- Information on LGBTQ+ history, culture, and terminology, particularly related to youth experiences
- Information on the diverse identities of LGBTQ+ people, including experiences of nonbinary, trans and bisexual youth
- Cultural humility and responding to participants in a non-defensive manner
- Exploring one's own biases and misconceptions
- Techniques for managing sensitive interactions in workshops
- Guidance on district, state, and federal laws and policies related to LGBTQ+ issues
- Supportive resources for LGBTQ+ participants

Remaining gaps and considerations for future research and programming

Gaps that future research and programming should address

- Programs often lack data on participants' sexual orientation and gender identity
- Little is known about the relationship experiences of bisexual, trans, and nonbinary youth
- School-based settings can create additional constraints for program outreach, content, and delivery
- State policies and the political environment can create additional constraints for programs

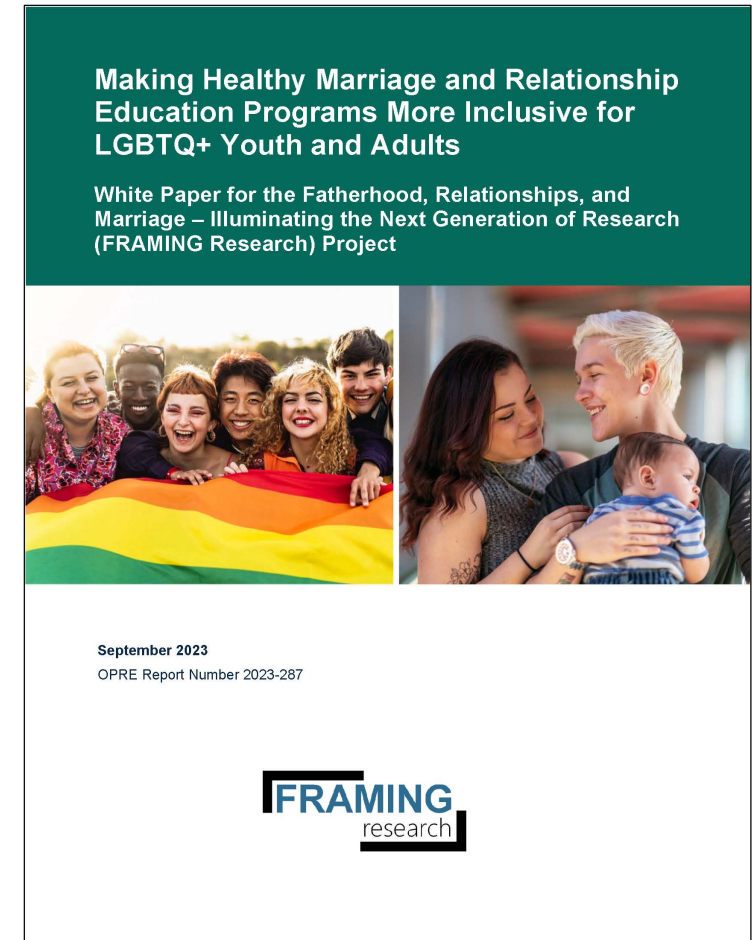
Despite challenges and unanswered questions, enhancing LGBTQ+ inclusivity in HMRE programs is critical

“ It ultimately comes down to doing no harm... And if we’re not offering programs in inclusive ways, we’re doing harm, whether we mean to or not. It’s not just leaving people out. It’s causing some emotional and mental discomfort and potentially distress. And I think we have to avoid that at all costs.”

- Program evaluator and practitioner

For more information

- [OPRE's FRAMING Research project website](#)
- [White paper on making HMRE programs more inclusive for LGBTQ+ youth and adults](#)
- [Practice brief on strategies to promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity in HMRE programs for youth](#)
- [Practice brief on strategies to promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity in HMRE programs for adults](#)



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Thank you for providing us feedback by completing this survey.

Webinar will be available in 3 days:

<http://www.dibbleinstitute.org/webinar-archives/>

Questions? RelationshipSkills@Dibbleinstitute.org

Second Wednesday Webinar

Love Notes Study

Results from a recent investigation into the effectiveness of two formats of Love Notes: Does it impact general relationship perceptions and attitudes?

J. Scott Crapo, PhD

Utah State University
Human Development and Family Studies