

Difficulties LGBTQ Face in American High Schools

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Abstract. LGBTQ students in American high schools encounter a number of challenges that can significantly impact their sense of belonging, mental health, and academic ability. Despite progress in the field of LGBTQ rights, many children continue to face discriminatory regulations and homophobic and transphobic statements in the classroom. This research tries to examine the complexities of the issues that LGBTQ youth face, emphasizing the importance of targeted interventions to promote inclusive learning environments. This study intends to shed light on the factors that influence both unfriendly and supportive school settings for LGBTQ children by looking into typical negative attitudes and actions in schools, as well as protective methods and advocacy efforts. The analysis will focus on the efficacy of current initiatives for reducing prejudice and increasing school inclusion, adding to broader discussions about LGBTQ rights, education reform, and social justice. This study emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive methods to protecting LGBTQ students and creating conditions in which all students can thrive. This study seeks to inform targeted interventions and legislative reforms that promote fairness, acceptance, and safety for LGBTQ children in American high schools by investigating the complicated dynamics that exist within educational environments.

Keywords: LGBTQ; High School; Student.

1. Introduction

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community primarily differs from mainstream society's traditional standards in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Despite some progress in LGBTQ rights over the past few decades, LGBTQ students still frequently face challenges, particularly in the realm of education, especially within American high schools. The journey of LGBTQ students in American high schools is often fraught with adversity. From encountering homophobic and transphobic speech to dealing with discriminatory policies and practices, these students face numerous obstacles that can potentially affect their academic success, mental health, and overall sense of belonging. Therefore, understanding the complexities of their experiences is crucial for devising targeted interventions and fostering inclusive educational environments. In this context, the author will explore the multifaceted difficulties faced by LGBTQ students in American high schools and contribute to ongoing dialogues surrounding LGBTQ rights, education, and social justice by examining the prevalence of negative attitudes and behaviors, as well as protective and advocacy practices implemented to support LGBTQ youth. The author will delve into the impact of these challenges and opportunities in creating safer, more inclusive spaces for LGBTQ students in American high schools. These areas support LGBTQ kids' emotional and psychological well-being in addition to their physical safety, since they frequently live in constant fear of harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Schools may lessen the negative impacts of discrimination and establish settings where LGBTQ students feel respected, valued, and free to pursue their academic goals by addressing the underlying causes of prejudice and building a culture of inclusion and support.

2. Challenge

2.1. Examining Violence and Suicide Risk

In recent years, the experiences of LGBTQ students in American high schools have received increasing attention. Research conducted by Abreu et al. has revealed the challenges and adversities faced by these students, emphasizing the prevalence of negativity and hostility in their school environments. “Research demonstrates that LGBTQ youth are exposed to more negative experiences in school compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, including bullying and harassment [1]. For example, according to Kosciw et al., approximately 95% of LGBTQ students have heard homophobic remarks and approximately 92% have heard negative comments about gender expression in schools within the past year [2]. Also, according to Kann et al., about 40% of LGB students consider suicide and about 30% have attempted suicide in the last year [3]. In addition, transgender and gender-diverse students are exposed to more negative school experiences compared to their cisgender heterosexual and cisgender sexual minority counterparts. In a study of 398 transgender youth, found that transgender youth were more likely to experience victimization and bullying, and to report a more negative school climate [3]. Additionally, compared to their heterosexual peers, LGBTQ adolescents in American high schools still face disproportionately higher rates of violence victimization and suicide risk. Michelle M. Johns et al.'s study utilized data from the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) cycles of 2015, 2017, and 2019 to examine national trends in violence victimization and suicide risk among high school students, focusing on self-reported sexual identity (LGB or heterosexual) and studying gender and racial/ethnic differences among LGB students. Logistic regression models were employed to assess linear trends while controlling for demographic factors. Survey findings revealed persistent disparities, with rates of violence victimization and suicide risk consistently higher among homosexual students compared to heterosexual students. Analysis of the survey results indicated that LGB students, including homosexual, bisexual, and transgender youth, experienced higher rates of violence victimization and reported more suicidal behaviors compared to heterosexual adolescents. Additionally, linear regression analyses based on race showed: “In models stratified by race/ethnicity, black and Hispanic LGB students were more likely to feel unsafe and were more likely to be threatened or injured with a weapon than white LGB students. This finding might highlight black and Hispanic LGB students being at greater risk for forms of victimization that directly compromise physical safety. Conversely, white LGB students were more likely to report school and electronic bullying, indicating they might be at greater risk for verbal and social victimization” [2]. Therefore, the proportion of violence victimization and suicidal behaviors reported among LGB adolescents varies by gender and race/ethnicity. However, during the study period from 2015 to 2019, these outcomes for lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students showed almost no observed linear trends. These research findings underscore the ongoing need for comprehensive intervention strategies within schools and communities with the explicit goal of reducing violence victimization and preventing suicide risk behaviors among homosexual, bisexual, and transgender students. Implementing evidence-based programs that address the root causes of discrimination and promote acceptance and inclusion can help create safer and more supportive environments for LGBTQ youth, ultimately reducing the disparities in violence victimization and suicidal behaviors observed in this population.

2.2. Strategies for Inclusive Education and Advocacy in American High Schools

LGBTQ students in American high schools often face social stigma and discrimination from peers, teachers, and school administrators. They may encounter derogatory language, exclusionary behavior based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and even physical violence. Bullying and harassment are widespread issues among LGBTQ students in American high schools. Studies indicate that a significant portion of LGBTQ youth report verbal or physical harassment from peers, leading to feelings of fear, isolation, and insecurity [2]. The author believe that hostile school environments often detrimentally impact the mental health of LGBTQ students, resulting in higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to heterosexual and cisgender students. The long-

term stress and anxiety caused by discrimination and harassment may also affect LGBTQ students' academic performance and educational attainment. Due to these challenges, they are more likely to skip school, drop out, or perform poorly academically. Therefore, practices aimed at protecting and advocating for LGBTQ students, as mentioned by Abreu et al. in their article, are essential [1]. Specific measures include: "According to research, schools must implement school-wide approaches designed to protect LGBTQ students, including but not limited to inclusive policies, LGBTQ-affirming curricula, and LGBTQ-specific professional development and training opportunities for teachers and school staff" [1]. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of negative attitudes and the educational climate is crucial for devising effective prevention and intervention strategies. It is vital for schools to emphasize the implementation of comprehensive anti-bullying policies and inclusive curricula to promote acceptance and respect for LGBTQ individuals. Additionally, targeted interventions aimed at educating students, teachers, and school staff about LGBTQ issues and fostering empathy and understanding can help create a more supportive and inclusive school environment. Schools can not only educate and protect LGBTQ individuals through teaching methods but also foster a better understanding of LGBTQ through activities involving both students and teachers. Therefore, based on the research conducted by Palkki, J., and others, which investigated the challenges faced by transgender students in American high school choral music programs, narratives, and ethnographic methods were employed to explore the experiences of three transgender students [3]. Each student explored their gender identity within the context of high school choral programs. The relationship between voice and gender identity varied among participants and was influenced by policies at the district, school, choral program, and state music organization levels. Mentors, including teachers, played a crucial role in supporting transgender students on their gender journeys. The results of this study reveal the various ways in which transgender students navigate their gender identities in high school choral environments, with their experiences shaped by school policies, teacher support, and peer interactions. Mentors, including teachers and other significant adults, play a vital role in providing support and guidance for transgender students. "Trans people face multiple layers of oppression and/or intersectionality—our intersecting layers of identity including gender, race, immigration status, and socioeconomic status" [4]. However, schools and choral groups must adjust their practices to create more welcoming conditions for transgender youngsters. Choral music educators must also raise awareness and provide training on (trans)gender issues in order to successfully serve their students. Schools and choral organizations can create environments in which transgender adolescents feel valued, respected, and included by enacting policies that accept and affirm all students' gender identities, as well as equipping educators with the appropriate tools and expertise.

3. Social Support

In the study, the author found that research and empirical understanding have been conducted on the spread of biases and prejudices towards the LGBTQ community throughout modern history. Additionally, Bullard et al. emphasized that school social workers have an obligation to safeguard and assist kids from marginalized groups as mental health liaisons between the school and the family. [5]. The report emphasizes the significant research and factual understanding that has been undertaken on the growth of biases and prejudices against the LGBTQ community throughout contemporary history. Research indicates that providing specific support for young LGBTQ children is a priority, as they often report feeling unsafe or unsupported in educational environments, leading to a decrease in overall well-being. Acting as mental health liaisons between the school and the family, these professionals play a vital role in providing support, advocacy, and resources to LGBTQ students who may face unique challenges and vulnerabilities. By recognizing the importance of addressing the mental health needs of LGBTQ youth within the school context, school social workers can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment where all students can thrive. Bullard grounded in critical race theory as well as normative theory and democracy, involved qualitative semi-structured interviews with six elementary and middle school social workers working in school districts in southeastern Louisiana, to identify perceived barriers that may hinder their ability to serve young

LGBTQ students. Furthermore, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) play a crucial role in promoting positive youth development among LGBTQ students. They provide a platform for these students to form positive identity constructs and receive tailored social support, fostering a sense of safety, belongingness, self-esteem, and self-identity. Additionally, based on Bullard et al.'s research, eight main barriers were discussed: (a) time; (b) lack of LGBTQ-specific education; (c) integrating heterosexuality into school systems; (d) administrative, teacher, and parental barriers; (e) children's understanding and ability to express themselves; (f) policies and procedures; (g) geographic barriers; (h) religious beliefs and political barriers, among others [5]. Research indicates that challenges persist for LGBTQ high school students in the United States, but GSAs have proven to have significant benefits for LGBTQ students. However, their minimal presence in middle schools emphasizes the importance of giving additional support to young LGBTQ people during these critical years. Middle school can be especially difficult for LGBTQ adolescents because they must navigate their identities while also dealing with growing peer pressure and social expectations. By introducing focused interventions and support programs in middle schools, educators can contribute to a more inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBTQ kids, setting the framework for positive experiences in high school and beyond. Furthermore, urban schools, with their diverse student populations, have the potential to serve as change agents by providing inclusive and accepting settings for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. By embracing diversity and promoting acceptance, urban schools can lead the way in fostering inclusive educational environments that empower LGBTQ youth to thrive.

4. Conclusion

In addition to stressing the critical role that school social workers and Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) play in creating inclusive environments, this study highlights the persistent difficulties LGBTQ students encounter in American educational institutions. These collaborations serve as essential centers for peer support and the formation of positive identities, empowering LGBTQ children to cultivate a good sense of self and belonging. Notwithstanding the favorable effects of those endeavors, obstacles continue to exist in establishing educational settings that are genuinely inclusive. While GSAs and supportive professionals like school social workers provide invaluable resources and advocacy for LGBTQ students, their efforts can be hindered by systemic challenges within the education system, including insufficient funding for LGBTQ support programs and inadequate training for educators on LGBTQ issues. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive federal protections for LGBTQ students leaves them vulnerable to discrimination and harassment in schools, further exacerbating their marginalization and exclusion. As a result, addressing the complex and deeply ingrained barriers encountered by LGBTQ kids necessitates a collaborative effort from legislators, educators, and community partners to build safer and more inclusive environments in which all students can thrive. This collaborative approach should include developing and implementing comprehensive policies to protect LGBTQ students from discrimination and harassment, as well as providing educators with resources and training to successfully serve LGBTQ adolescents. Additionally, community participation and advocacy initiatives are critical in promoting acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ identities and experiences, as well as establishing an inclusive and respectful culture in schools and society as a whole.

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