Expanding Our Approach to Gender-Based Bullying

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Who Are We? Why Are We Here?
Session Agenda

• Discuss current climate for gender expansive youth in education;
• Share empirical research related to how gender is (not) understood in education and its effects on gender expansive youth;
• Engage in some interactive activities;
• Collaboratively identify promising practices for creating safer educational environments for gender expansive youth; and
• Have time for some Q&A.
Concepts for Understanding

**The Genderbread Person**

Identity

Attraction

Expression

Sex

Distinct Categories:

- Identity
- Expression
- Attraction
- Sex

For a bigger bite, read more at http://bit.ly/genderbread
Current Educational Climate
“The social regime in most schools is unforgiving: Youth who break these rules will be punished. Their peers enforce the rules through harassment, ostracism, and violence. School officials condone this cruel dynamic through inaction or in some cases because they, too, judge gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth to be undeserving of respect.”

~Hatred In The Hallways, Human Rights Watch (2001)
National Climate for Gender Expansive Youth

• (Some) trans* people are increasingly visible throughout the U.S. social imaginary. However, that increased visibility is…
  – situated alongside an increasing vulnerability, risk, and threat to trans* people, especially TPOC, TWOC, and trans* people with disabilities;
  – a narrative largely controlled by, and produced for, cisgender people (i.e., cisgender gaze); and
  – trained toward trans*-normative conceptualizations of self and community (e.g., race, class, dis/ability, biomedical transition).

• In schools…
  – Bathrooms, sports teams, and trans* panic; and
  – *Epistemological trans* oppression* (Nicolazzo, In review).
National Climate (con’d.)

• 25.5% of students reported hearing *school staff make negative remarks* related to students’ *gender expression*

• 22.0% of students heard negative remarks about gender expression *from other students* often or very often.

• In 2015, students were *less likely to report* that school staff intervened in homophobic remarks and sexist remarks than in 2005
School Anti-Bullying/Harassment Policies

Students attending school with an enumerated policy:

• Heard homophobic and racist remarks less often compared to students with no policy;
• Were less likely to feel unsafe in school compared to students in schools with generic or no policies; and
• Were less likely to perceive bullying as a problem at their school compared to students in schools with a generic policy or with no policy.
“The dominant narrative [of LGBTQ bullying] depends on an inaccurate premise: It assumes schools to be neutral sites where all students have an equal opportunity to succeed and that barriers to success appear when individuals’ injurious behavior or attitudes create a ‘negative’ school climate where student safety and belonging are threatened” (Payne & Smith, 2013, p. 2).
The gender binary is individually, institutionally, and systemically (re)enforced.

- A constellation of words, phrases, actions, rules (written and unwritten), and social realities that regulated “appropriate” gender identities, expressions, and embodiments on campus.
- Similar to Pascoe’s (2007) elucidation of a “fag discourse” in high schools.
- Participants were able to clearly articulate what rules about gender existed on campus as well as how these rules were enforced (both implicit and explicit).
LGBTQ Bullying Paradox

• Despite having a bevy of policies put in place to protect LGBTQ youth (e.g., non-discrimination policies)...

• And despite increased levels of LGBTQ visibility throughout the social sphere...

...Queer youth continue to experience increased rates of threat and harassment (GenderJUST, 2013).
But Why Does This Paradox Exist?

• Perhaps it is because we are actually paying attention now (which is an effect of/hangover from homo-, queer-, and trans*phobia)…
• Perhaps it is because there is an actual increase in LGBTQ-related bullying...
• And perhaps it is because we expect the policies we have implemented to save us...
  – “It’s caution tape.” ~Adem
  – Diversity as PR. (Ahmed, 2012)
  – Collegiate pinkwashing (Nicolazzo, Marine, & Wagner, In progress)

Regardless, our LGBTQ youth are experiencing educational environments as far from ideal.
And Despite the Barriers...

- What we know is largely deficit-based...
  - LGBTQ students continue to face harm, threat, and harassment.
  - LGBTQ students continue to face a lack of acceptance.
  - LGBTQ lives are not reflected or affirmed through school curricula.
  - LGBTQ students continue to not see themselves adequately reflected.
There Continue To Be Possibilities...

- And yet, there are narratives of resilience...
  - An increase and proliferation of gendered future selves.
    - 3-6 times as many youth under the age of 18 identifying as gender-expansive than as people over the age of 18.
  - Online kinship networks provide platforms to connect and explore gendered possibilities.
    - Megan and gaming.
    - Powerpuff Yourself.
So Where Does This Leave Us?
Initial Takeaways

• Non-discrimination policies are necessary and inclusion mandates are important, but insufficient in and of themselves.

• Educators must be diligent in the ongoing work of unlearning gender, specifically the how gender binary discourse structures our school environments.

• Educators need to remember LGBTQ students have agency to name their own lives, experiences, and identities.

• Educators need to seek and amplify counter-stories to LGBTQ deficit-based rhetoric/illogic.
Re-Evaluating Policy: Group discussions

• Who is this policy for (also, who is accountable)?
  – Communication to faculty/staff
  – Communication to students
  – Communication to parents

• What is important to name?
  – Benefits/challenges/opportunities in enumerated list

• Who is your communications team?
• Who is your implementation team
• Professional development resources?
Your Takeaways and Questions
Resources

- GLSEN’s *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate Revisited*
- GLSEN’s 2013 School Climate Survey: Illinois State Snapshot
- Illinois Combined Statute [ILCS 5/27-23.7](https://www.ilga.gov/laws/statutes/5-27-23.7) Bullying Prevention
  - [The Illinois Prevent Student Violence Act](https://www.ilga.gov/laws/statutes/96-0952), Public Act 096-0952, enumerated Bullying Prevention Statue
- [All Illinois Bullying Policies](https://www.doe.k12.il.us/programs/crime-violence-prevention/bullying-prevention), as of 2011