gender and sexualities in education

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Chapter 16

Heteronormative Harassment
Queer Bullying and Gender-Nonconforming Students

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Jamie Nabozny, a gay high school student, was subjected to relentless antigay verbal and physical abuse by fellow classmates at his public high school in Ashland, Wisconsin. Classmates urinated on him, feigned raping him, and—when they discovered him alone—kicked him in the stomach so brutally that he required surgery. When school authorities were notified of the taunts and injuries, school officials said that Nabozny should expect it by virtue of simply being homosexual. Nabozny internalized his suffering, and attempted suicide many times, dropped out of school, and ultimately ran away. His family later sued the school, but a trial court dismissed the lawsuit.

In 1996, Lambda Legal (n.d.), an LGBT legal-advocacy group, took the case, Nabozny v. Podlesny, to a federal appeals court, which—for the first time in U.S. history—ruled that public schools can be held accountable for ignoring, tolerating, and/or failing to prevent or stop the abuse of homosexuals. While the case marked the first time the Equal Protection Clause was applied to support an openly gay student, the ruling was decided on facts related to sex stereotyping and differential treatment of male and female students (the mock rape in particular) and not protections based on sexual orientation. When the case went back to trial, a jury found the school officials liable for the harm they caused to Nabozny. The case settled for close to US$1 million, and resulted in mandates that public schools, administrators, counselors, and teachers report antigay abuse or face liability for not doing so.

We live in a country that is as divided politically as it is geographically, racially, economically, religiously, culturally, and linguistically, and changes in policy do not guarantee compliance, nor do they generally change people’s minds. The Nabozny case highlights opportunities our society can pursue to enforce protections and create real cultural changes, for example those propagated by the federal government under its new Hate Crimes Legislation. Yet, we still face the challenge of making that change authentically trickle down into classrooms. The Nabozny ruling and other legal cases like it can only go so far.
Although the Nabozny ruling was a landmark victory and the first successful legal challenge to antigay violence in public schools, it does not guarantee that bullying behavior will stop, even when reported directly to a teacher or administrator. In the absence of a federal anti-bullying policy, some people will still believe that they can get away with bullying behavior, or with ignoring such behavior and even expecting it as a matter of common sense. In addition, due to the polarizing representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and gender variant (LGBTQV) issues in the media, some students often feel that they deserve to be vilified by bullies (Wallace, 2011, p. 754). A comprehensive anti-bullying policy at the state and/or national level could hold schools, teachers, administrators, parents, and students accountable, regardless of their beliefs about homosexuality. Such legislation could require them to intervene when an LGBTQV student is bullied, even in cases where the intervening authority did not agree with homosexuality as a socially acceptable identity.

We need zero tolerance for bullying against all students, and a comprehensive, federal anti-bullying policy that identifies bullying based upon sexual orientation and gender identity. Bullied students often take their own lives, and the longer we wait to implement such a policy, the more lives we will lose. What would our country look like if LGBTQV students were protected by federal law? What would our country begin to look like if this generation of youth enacted the belief that their mental, social, and emotional well-being mattered for everyone? While Nabozny v. Podlesny (1996) does provide a legal precedent to protect LGBTQV students from harassment in schools, a law or an act does not guarantee compliance, nor does it have the power or outright ability to fully change someone’s mind...or to cease bullying.

Possible Origins of Queer Bullying

Throughout history, homosexuality has often been considered deviant by different societies and cultures at different times. Although homosexual acts were sometimes tolerated or ignored by society, in the latter 12th century, hostility toward homosexuality began to develop throughout European religious and secular institutions. Homosexual behavior (and other nonprocreative sexual behavior) was viewed as “unnatural,” and—in some cases—was even punishable by death. Contemporary homophobia is affirmed by military groups, religious institutions, state and federal laws, psychiatry, and physical medical practices. We might, then, deduce that these beliefs were supported as the dominant narratives activating heteronormative and masculine images within our nation’s hegemonic culture—a conceptualization of heterosexuality as “common sense” that is supported by the recent history of heightened queer bullying.

During the late 19th century, medical and psychiatric discourses around homosexuality shifted from the domain of religious sin to legal crime to psychological and medical pathology (e.g., Chauncey, 1982–1983; D’Emilio & Freedman, 1988; Duberman, Vicinus, & Chauncey, 1989). In 1952, homosexuality was officially pathologized in the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I). Fortunately, in the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud (1905) and Havelock Ellis (1901) adopted tolerant stances toward homosexuality, which resulted in significant strides toward de-pathologiz-
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successful legal challenge to bullying behavior would involve a federal court, away with bullying matters. The issue of sexual orientation, bisexuality, transgender, and sexuality as a social construct...comprehensive, federal, and gender identity. It is wait to implement...like if LGBTQGV...n to look like if this notion of well-being is a legal precedent to be act does not guar-...y different societies times tolerated or ign...tly began to develop behavior (and other cases) — was even...ry groups, religious...ives activating heterosex— a conceptu...e recent history of around homosexuality...logical and medical...hman, Vicinus, in the first edition...Fortunately, in the...) adopted tolerant and de-pathologiz-

ing it as a mental illness. Ellis (1901) argued that homosexuality was inborn and therefore not immoral, asserted that it was not a disease, and demonstrated that many homosexuals made outstanding, positive contributions to society. Freud believed that all human beings were innately bisexual, and only became heterosexual or homosexual as a result of their experiences with parents and others via nurturing and environmental conditions. While their claims were contested by other psychoanalysts over the next several decades, Kinsey's work in the 1950s ultimately supported the hypothesis that homosexuality, same-gender sexual behavior, and same-sex fantasy were far more prominent in society than many people otherwise wished to believe, and Hooker's research during the same time period suggested that homosexuality was not associated with psychopathology. Freedman's (1971) research with lesbians in the early 1970s corroborated Kinsey's and Hooker's findings. Due to the overwhelming empirical evidence, and changing social opinions about homosexuality that emerged over the course of the 20th century, psychiatrists and psychologists have radically altered their views. In 1973, their research led to the removal of homosexuality from the DSM-II, which meant that it was no longer considered a mental illness.

In 1980, transgender people who had undertaken genital reassignment surgery, otherwise known as transsexuals, were first pathologized as mentally ill in the DSM-III. Those who were transsexual were considered to have "Gender Identity Disorder" (GID), which is described in the DSM-III. In 1994, the DSM-IV entry for people who identified as transgender changed officially from "Transsexualism" to "Gender Identity Disorder," thus assigning a set of pathologies to those who did not identify with their biological sex.

Since 2006, debates have persisted about de-pathologizing GID as a mental illness altogether. Some transgender people benefit from the diagnosis, because it qualifies them for some mental health-care benefits; leaving GID in the DSM-IV, however, is also damaging, because it perpetuates the stigma that transgender people are mentally ill. A decision is still pending, and the new manual is due out May 2013 (for more information, see www gidereform.org). The history of queer people and their institutionalization as mentally deviant and even "sick" can be easily linked to bullying such people in schools and society even today.

Gender Norms and Bullying

Other ways to understand queer bullying can be seen in Young and Sweeting's (2004) research; their findings suggested "an association between masculinity or 'maleness' and bullying behavior" (p. 527), and they argued that "boys are subject to stronger 'gender policing' than girls are" (p. 534). In addition, they reasoned that "the presumed association between gender-atypical behavior and sexual orientation may be particularly sensitive at a developmental stage when boys are keen to reinforce their masculinity and likely to shun less masculine peers for fear of being stigmatized themselves" (p. 527). C. J. Pascoe (2007) found that "Heterosexist and homophobic discourses about masculinity permeated the educational process" at the high school where she conducted research (p. 39), and asserted that "homophobia is indeed a central mechanism in the making of contemporary American adolescent masculinity" (p. 53):
A boy could get called a fag for exhibiting any sort of behavior defined as unmasculine... being stupid or incompetent, dancing, caring too much about clothing, being too emotional, or expressing interest (sexual or platonic) in other guys.... These nonsexual meanings didn’t replace sexual meanings but rather existed alongside them. (p. 55)

Therefore, for some adolescents, the concept of fag or queer (in pejorative terms) becomes conflated with a lack of masculinity—or gender nonconformity. Queer bullying, then, constitutes a form of adolescent enforcement of heteronormativity fueled by heterosexism, “a systematic process of privileging heterosexuality relative to homosexuality, based on the assumption that heterosexuality and heterosexual power and privilege are normal and ideal (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009, p. 964).

Swearcr, Turner, Givens, and Pollack (2008) theorized that “attitudes toward gender nonconformity, particularly for boys, becomes a foundation for bullying and, ultimately, in some tragic cases, for lethal school violence” (p. 162). These researchers also identified consent implied by adult inaction or adult silence as factors that encourage such behavior:

The lack of adult sanctions for homophobic name-calling may serve to support and maintain these behaviors. This tacit support on the part of adults may be an important factor in the development of attitudes that children have toward the acceptability of bullying behaviors. (pp. 162–163)

Swearcr et al. (2008) characterized queer bullying as “A culturally proscribed socialization process of restrictive masculinity” (p. 170). Similarly, Tharinger (2008) linked the cultural power of hegemonic masculinity to homophobia: “Homophobia works to make sure that both heterosexual and homosexual boys who do not conform to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity always have the potential to be subordinated within the social organization of masculinity” (p. 225).

The social climate today in schools is hardly free of the cultural power exerted by hegemonic notions of masculinity and their concomitant gender-policing. As Graham (2011) explained, when bullying occurs in school settings, it is usually a communal event:

Bullying incidents are often public events that have eyewitnesses. Studies... have found that in most bullying incidents, at least four other peers were present as either bystanders, assistants to bullies, reinforcers, or defenders of victims. Assistants take part in ridiculing or intimidating a schoolmate, and reinforcers encourage the bully by showing their approval. (p. 15)

Media as Mirror and Window to Queer Bullying

Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig (2009) considered the identity development of queer students as a factor that exacerbates or magnifies the effects of a nonsupportive school environment:

The stress of having to come to terms with their own sexuality in early adolescence while simultaneously negotiating their school environment’s heterosexism and homophobia may place many LGB and questioning students at-risk for depression, suicidality, drug use, and school problems. (pp. 989–990)
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Antigay comments and compulsory, heteronormative, and hegemonic discourses and expectations are (consciously and unconsciously) ubiquitously reinforced, woven into the fabric of society, and disseminated by multiple media forms. Television, film, video games, the Internet, music lyrics, sermons, political speeches, and classrooms continue to exacerbate negative attitudes against queer people and an impressionable younger generation who are vulnerable to internalizing discriminatory messages. When negative and inhumane attitudes toward queer people are not challenged, or are condoned by non-queer adults, such messages suggest that queer bullying against these populations is not just tolerated—it is normalized.

The media, however, also help reframe, represent, and disseminate positive strides made on behalf of the queer community and those who identify themselves as members. For instance, increased attention on same-sex marriage; domestic partnerships; President Obama’s 2012 endorsement of marriage equality; political races with openly queer politicians who win their electoral races; TV and movies positively depicting nonstereotypical queer characters; and the growing numbers of out actors, musicians, athletes, politicians, and chefs all help provide positive images of the increasing acceptance and recognition of queer people as a highly diverse group unto itself in our country. Such “outness” provides positive examples of queer individuals as normal people living productive lives in ways our society has never been given the chance to see or consider before. It also increases the likelihood that children in the next generation will experience such positive queer representations as a normal part of their own worlds as they grow into the adult members and leaders of our society.

Why turn to the media to examine the proliferation of bullying against queer students? Consider a typical adolescent. Consider a young adult tuning in to multiple media outlets, and experiencing a popular culture that offers nothing but heteronormatively prejudicial beliefs that are validated in those media by celebrities, public officials, and other people in powerful positions. Now consider the impact those ubiquitous representations can have on a young person, and how they might play out in a queer child’s life in school. Now consider how that child’s apparent violation of popular norms is likely to be met with discomfort, fear, confusion, and even (too often) hatred, anger, and resentment.

Queer people are mostly forced to operate in a social context wherein they may often see, hear, and/or experience nothing but heteronormative messages about who they ought to be, how they should look, act, feel, think, talk, move, etc. That alone leads members of this group to operate out of fear and defense for their feelings and identities. But at the same time, we are seeing a shift (at least a slight one, but in many ways dramatic, given the 2012 elections, for example), wherein media outlets are representing queer people in new ways—often very positive ways, and even in ways that make their identity a secondary, tertiary, or even non-issue. But because gender typing and heteronormativity are still dominant, members of this group face huge threats to their ways of thinking, feeling, and being in the world; while nonmembers, who do not access the positive media representations (or who reject and are taught to reject those representations), are going to school with them. That leaves queer students extremely vulnerable and likely to feel under siege much of the time, and it also leaves the door open for others to bully them because they are different.
This ever-present and pervasive media split between representations of heteronormativity and positive portrayals of queer people leaves little wonder why we lack consensus about endorsing federal, anti-queer legislation that censures bullying.

The Distressing Realities About Queer-Related Bullying

Although queer bullying is one of the more prevalent sources of distress among queer youth, “bullying with content based on gender nonconformity is not exclusively targeted at youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender[ed][sic]” (Swearengin, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008, p. 162). Many victims of bullying are often targeted because of “non-normative gender behavior” (Conoley, 2008, p. 217).

While most non-queer students experience some type of bullying, it is often less persistent, invasive, and damaging compared to the daily bullying endured by queer and/or gender-nonconforming youth. We use the terms, gender-variant and gender nonconforming, to refer to students who express their gender in ways that may appear incongruous with the general style and/or dress, attitudes, social mores, and expected norms often associated with the traditional binary of male and female.

Findings from GLSEN highlighted the most comprehensive statistics related to queer bullying (see, for example, Greytak, Koscw, & Diaz, 2005; Koscw & Diaz, 2006; Koscw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2008). Viewed together, Shared Differences: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students of Color in Our Nation’s Schools (Diaz & Koscw, 2007); Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation’s Schools (Greytak, Koscw, & Diaz, 2009); and The 2009 National School Climate Survey (Koscw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartikiewicz, 2010) reveal that queer students are two to five times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual students. In addition, a spate of recent research studies—all quantitative—has ascertained numerous factors that contribute to the elevated risk of violence and suicide for queer youth:

GLBT youth are nearly three times as likely as their heterosexual peers to have been assaulted or involved in at least one physical fight in school, are three times as likely to have been threatened or injured with a weapon at school, and are nearly four times as likely to have skipped school because they felt unsafe. (Swearengin et al., 2008, p. 161)

Mark Hatzenbuehler (2011) characterized research aimed at preventing the high incidence of suicide among queer youth as “a critical area for public health” (p. 897); he found that “living in environments that are less supportive of gays and lesbians is associated with greater suicide attempts among LGB youth” (p. 900). Citing recent research conducted in Austria, Plöderl and Fartacek (2009) mentioned that “all measures of previous suicidality (suicide ideation, serious suicide ideation, aborted suicide attempts, suicide attempts) were elevated for LGB compared to heterosexual participants. The same applied for current suicide ideation and a summary measure of current suicidality” (p. 408). Chessir-Teran and Hughes (2009) found that, for many students, “personal experiences of victimization were related to the perceived prevalence and tolerance of anti-LGBQ harassment in schools” (p. 971). They also noted that the culture of the school, as measured by the “Perceived inclu-
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giveness of programs (but not perceptions of non-discrimination and harassment policies) influenced victimization rates both indirectly (via perceived harassment) and directly (even after controlling for perceived harassment)” (p. 971). As Hatzenbuehler did, Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, and Sanchez (2011) contextualized their research on school bullying as a widespread public health problem” (p. 227). They acknowledged that “school victimization of LGBT students and those who are perceived to be gay or gender nonconforming has been reported for decades” (p. 227), and they concluded that “students who identify or are perceived to be LGB are at dramatically higher risk for a wide range of health and mental health concerns, including sexual health risk, substance abuse, and suicide, compared with their heterosexual peers” (p. 228).

Statistics also reveal that nearly nine out of every ten queer students experience harassment during school. Of LGBGV students, 84.6% reported being verbally harassed, 40.1% reported being physically harassed, and 18.8% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation. Transgender students specifically reported an even higher rate of verbal harassment than did LGBGV students, with almost 100% experiencing harassment, and over 50% reporting being physically harassed, while 25% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation or gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2010). Transgender students absorbed more bullying than any other population of students overall.

Relational bullying statistics highlight that 88.2% of LGBGV students felt deliberately excluded or “left out” by other students at least sometimes, because of their identities, and 46.0% experienced such exclusion often or frequently. Eighty-four percent had their reputations smeared by rumors or lies told about them during school, and 40.3% experienced this often or frequently (Kosciw et al., 2010). Consonant with the findings that transgender students experience higher percentages of both physical and verbal levels of harassment, they also experienced higher percentages of relational bullying. Nine in ten transgender students experienced some sort of relational aggression, 89% reported being the target of rumors or lies, and 92% felt deliberately excluded or “left out” by other students. Transgender students also experienced a higher degree of material bullying, with 67% reporting their property (e.g., car, clothing, or books) was stolen or deliberately damaged at school, compared to 49.7% of LGBGV students. Sixty-two percent of transgender students reported they experienced some sort of cyber–digital bullying, compared to 52.9% of LGBGV who reported experiencing a form of cyber–digital bullying (Kosciw et al., 2010).

When we specifically examine the lived experiences of transgender students in school, the statistics remain equally alarming. Sixty-nine percent of transgender students, or roughly 7 in 10, felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and 65% because of how they expressed their gender. Fifty-four percent of transgender students who were victimized in school did not report the events to school authorities. Among those who did, few students (33%) believed that staff addressed the situation effectively (Kosciw et al., 2010). Sixty-one percent reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and reported avoiding places like school bathrooms and locker rooms because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable in those spaces. Across all ethnic groups, sexual orientation and gender
expression were the most common reasons queer students of color reported feeling unsafe in school.

For both groups, school safety was directly related to high rates of absenteeism and lower grade point averages (GPAs), as well as future plans to attend college or continue their educations beyond high school. For transgender students, almost half (47%) reported skipping a class at least once in the past month, and 46% reported missing at least one day because they felt threatened. Transgender students who experienced high levels of harassment were more likely than other transgender students to miss school for safety reasons (Kosciw et al., 2010). For LGB students, 29.1% reported missing a class at least once, and 30.0% missed at least one day of school in the past month because of safety concerns. Transgender students who missed school due to harassment had significantly lower GPAs than those who experienced lower levels of harassment. Students who experienced verbal harassment based on sexual orientation earned GPAs at an average of .8 lower than their non-bullied peers (nearly a full letter grade), while those harassed for gender expression averaged a loss of .5 (or half a letter grade). The reported overall GPAs of students who were more frequently harassed dropped when they reported severe or frequent harassment based on sexual orientation and/or race/ethnicity. Students experiencing severe or frequent harassment also reported missing school more often.

Teachers' responses to bullying—whether active ignorance, complicity, tolerance, or active participation—significantly contributed to queer students' sense of school safety. Fifty-nine percent of transgender students heard teachers or other staff make negative comments about a student's gender expression; 33% heard school staff make homophobic, sexist, or otherwise negative remarks about someone's gender expression either sometimes, often, or frequently in the past year. In fact, less than a fifth (16%) of transgender students said that school staff intervened either most of the time or always after witnessing abuse of a student's gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2010). Sadly, 47% of the time, teachers and other school staff did not intervene at all, ever. Among other student identity groups, 60.4% reported hearing homophobic remarks from teachers or other school staff, and 41.4% of the time, teachers and staff did not intervene when witnessing bullying of students based on sexuality or gender presentation.

GLSEN's studies also reported that public-school students are more likely than private- or parochial-school students to report frequent harassment based on sexual orientation (34% versus 18%). However, private-school students are much less likely to know a student in their school who identifies as LGBTQ+ (36% versus 57%). Private and parochial students were also less likely to have a close friend who is queer (10% versus 20%), or to identify as LGBTQ+ themselves (2% versus 6%) (Kosciw et al., 2010). It is possible that these differences are related to the open-admissions nature of public schools versus more restrictive, selective, or exclusive admissions criteria used by private schools.

Microaggressions as Bullying

Many of these microaggressions relating to queer students stem from the structural environment that surrounds and supports a heteronormative and cisgendered school climate (Miller, 2012). Microaggressions are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental
reported feeling unsafe of absenteeism and college or continue: half (47%) reported using at least one day high levels of harassment for safety reasons are at least once, and levels of safety concerns significantly lower GPAs experienced verbal abuse at least once, and 8.9% lower than their gender expression. As students who frequent harassment are severe or frequent identity, tolerance, or academic safety. Fifty-negative comments mohobic, sexist, or sometimes, often, gender students said witnessing abuse of a teachers and other y students, 60.4% report, and 41.4% of the students on likely than private- sexual orientation to know a student private and parochial (versus 20%), or to ). It is possible that schools versus more tools.

sights, snubs or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (Sue, 2010, p. 3). These microaggressions are symptomatic of how the patterned absences or gaps in information expressed via school policies, curriculum, discourse, and lack of social services for queer students occur as a normative aspect of the social fabric and social processes that comprise school environments. In fact, these unnamed and/or unidentified or unrecognized norms constitute a hidden curriculum that teaches and positions both students and professionals to behave in ways that, at least implicitly, enable bullying. Such norms and policies that neglect inclusivity enable microaggressions to sustain homophobic and heteronormative practices.

Queer students who enter normalized school environments where they are automatically marked as abnormal are forced into a learned detachment and toleration of microaggressions specific to their lived experiences. Here, we distinguish the T and GV from the LGB, because some microaggressions apply to only one of the two groups. LGB microaggressions include:

- Being called derogatory terms such as “gay,” “fag,” “dyke,” or “queer,” whether for conscious or nonconscious reasons.
- Being harassed, mocked, or publicly humiliated for holding hands or showing affection with a same-sex partner at school.
- Hearing “that’s so gay” in a classroom or on school grounds without intervention by authority figures, even when authority figures clearly witnessed and recognized the behavior.
- Exclusion of stories about or written by LGB people from classroom curricula, and/or failure to discuss LGB people in positive ways (or only in negative ways and even, in some cases, not at all).
- Absence of informational displays, resources, and representations related to LGB people and identities, or an imbalanced abundance of these such materials about heterosexual people and identities.
- Asking an LGB student to speak on behalf of all LGB students or people.
- Absence of a Gay-Straight Alliance organization in the school.
- Self-advocacy as the only viable option for LGB students to gain support, safety, equality, or recourse.
- Lack of systematically inclusive discourses about student identities in all school-level materials and communications.
- Explicit statements against LGB identities and lifestyles, and/or sanctions for students who exhibit such identities and behaviors.

Microaggressions specifically experienced by transgender and gender-variant youth:

- Being stared at.
- Being asked intrusive questions about their identities, behaviors, and/or practices.
- Being referred to using inappropriate pronouns or names.
- Lack of gender-neutral facilities such as bathrooms and locker rooms.
• Being medicalized or pathologized by school personnel and/or other students.
• Being sexually objectified by peers.
• Being treated as strange, marginal, or awkward by peers and school personnel.
• Being singled out based on physical characteristics.
• Being treated as "invisible" or aberrant by peers and personnel who divert their eyes.
• Failure to discuss transgender people in positive ways as part of school curricula, or only in negative ways (or not at all).
• Absence of informational displays, resources, and representations related to transgender people and identities, or an imbalanced abundance of such materials about cisgendered people.
• Deployment of outdated information, misuse of pronouns, or dissemination of inaccurate information about transgender people by school personnel, whether intentional or not.
• Self-advocacy as the only viable option for transgender students to gain support, safety, equality, or recourse.
• Lack of peer understanding or knowledge about what to call transgender students.
• Being asked to speak on behalf of all transgender students or people during school.
• Lack of systematically inclusive discourses about student identities in all school-level materials and communications.

Due to microaggressions like those noted above, queer students are far more likely than their peers to struggle emotionally (Hochschild, 1983; Nordmarken, 2012; Sue, 2010) or to placate others by representing themselves in incomplete or false ways that they believe will be seen as socially acceptable and simply allow them to survive a school day. Such false fronts or defensive strategies are emotionally and cognitively exhausting and difficult. The emotional labor required to sustain learned or detached tolerance and buffer one’s self against the countless microaggressions experienced throughout a typical school day imprints students with emotional and sometimes physical scars that can last a lifetime. A school climate that supports and privileges the normalization of heterosexist and cisgendered beliefs—even unconsciously—forces students who fall outside of those dominant identifiers to focus on simple survival in rather than success and fulfillment in school.

Conclusion: Queer Bullying and School Environments

School environments may well breed, enable, perpetuate, or even encourage bullying behaviors targeted at queer students, due to the fact that they are historically and institutionally designed to socialize and normalize children for life in what is assumed to be a universal society in which all citizens share common identities, goals, beliefs, values, and so on. However, the statistics on queer school experiences belie the assumption that those identities, goals, beliefs, and values are, in fact, universal; they also highlight the fact that when students deviate from those presumed norms during school, they face serious psychological and potentially physical consequences that include bullying, harassment, assault, rumor-mongering, slander, exclusion, and the withdrawal of support from school authorities. Consequently, such students are much more likely to feel disconnected and alienated from
life in school, to avoid attending school, and to achieve at lower levels. They further become more likely to exhibit low self-esteem, higher rates of anxiety and depression, increased risk of suicide, and avoidance of plans to continue their educations beyond minimum legal requirements. These implications are staggering, and would likely create a firestorm of action if they were associated with nearly any other identity group than queer children.

Queer bullying must be stopped. Teachers, staff, and school personnel must be made aware, trained to intervene when they witness or identify bullying behaviors, and held accountable when they do not, regardless of their personal belief systems. The protection and support of all children is among their professional duties and is often explicitly stated as such in state-level teacher ethics codes.

One of the saving graces for queer students is that being “out” in school may have some positive consequences—96% of students who were open about their identities and orientations also enjoyed higher levels of psychological well-being (Kosciw et al., 2010). These latter findings suggest that if administrators, teachers, students, and even support staff are equipped with anti-bullying strategies, and trained to support LGBTQV students in their pursuit of school success and social equality, then perhaps bullying would occur less frequently, if not disappear entirely.

Because of repeated exposure to traumatic life events that have caused emotional, psychological, and even physical suffering, bullying can manifest as C-PTSD (Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) for the rest of an individual’s life. Symptoms of post-traumatic bullying can be triggered by entering locales of past abuse, seeing other individuals bullied, or reliving the trauma vicariously via nightmares, flashbacks, or grief and sadness during unanticipated or even random moments. If untreated, the quality of life for victims of bullying can be dramatically diminished. Until we have a comprehensive, federal anti-bullying policy, professional educators—as the moral custodians for all students in their classrooms—must prevent bullying of any form. Despite the array of curricular and professional responsibilities teachers must manage and negotiate daily, stopping queer bullying must become a priority.

One reminder (perhaps the most troubling one of all) that queer bullying is a problem of endemic proportions: people, including children, become desensitized to bullying as they grow older when such bullying is treated as normal, tolerable, or just an unavoidable fact of life. Conoley (2008) found that students tend to tolerate and even become more approving of bullying as they progress from elementary school to high school. This increased tolerance and its expansion over time implies that “both the behaviors associated with bullying and the effects of being bullied on young people are not merely the products of individual histories”; they are also the results of cultural, heteronormative enforcement within educational institutions (p. 218).

While the ruling in Naborzny v. Podlenny (1996) has made a significant impact on the treatment and inclusivity of queer students’ issues in schools, and possibly influenced President Obama’s endorsement on October 28, 2009 of the federal Hate Crimes law, the general public has learned what every lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer person has known all their lives—growing up in the US as a queer child and/or adolescent is often an inhumane and unnecessarily terrifying experience, fraught with the synergistic terrors of
self-doubt, peer bullying, and adult indifference. The trauma of growing up queer can lead to grave—and sometimes fatal—consequences.

Notes
1. See the documentary, *Bullied* (Brummel, Cohen, & Sharp, 2010), for the full story.
2. While President Obama successfully repealed Don't Ask Don't Tell, and many people agreed with this decision, serving as an "out" homosexual in the military has been a long-standing and divisive issue for our country.
3. The DSM-II was published in 1968.
4. Not all transgender people have sexual reassignment surgery. Those who opt to are both transgender and transsexual.
5. We recognize that intersexed students are left out of the continuum of statistics, but that they are also bullied.
6. Cisgender refers to people whose biological sex is in accordance with their assigned gender, their bodies, and their personal identity. It is a signifier that marks the unmarked or unnamed category that emerged out of transgender theories (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

References
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Nabozny v. Podlesny, 92 F.3d 446 (7th Cir. 1996).


