

GLBTQ Bullying: Short Story and Policy Statement

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My final Women's and Gender Studies project is a culmination of some of my various activisms as well as my passions. I am in my senior year, second semester with plans to graduate, study abroad, and then go to graduate school for Counseling Education. I am an active president of Sexual Orientations United for Liberation (SOUL) and treasurer of the Women's and Gender Studies Organization (WGSO). Through my activism, I have utilized the resources from both organizations to bring light to the issues of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) bullying in schools and through The College at Brockport. This contribution is a montage of short fiction and a self created policy statement where feminist theory and activism apply.

Theorists that have helped inform this work include Judith Butler (1997), Michel Foucault (1980), and Rubin, Hollibaugh & English (1982). These thinkers provide a framework in the implementation of both the short story and policy statement. For example, according to Butler (1997) gender is fluid and defined as a performative work in which one is undone (pp. 496-504). Additionally, inscriptions of gender and sexuality on the body are problematic and oppressive to gay men in that they are seen as more feminine and acting outside of normal gender roles assigned to binary genders. Secondly, Foucault's (1980) piece on the power of language and sexuality helps define some of my work in that he writes about oppression on sexuality through the use of language and power. Lastly, Rubin et al define sexuality upon a hierarchical pyramid where heterosexual and married procreative sex is seen as the least taboo pleasure. All of these works relate to supposed standards of sexuality in western culture, specifically in the United States where sexuality is seen as taboo by the church, but also within social constructions that constrict deviations from the norm.

I wrote the short story below to create a picture of a bullying event, in particular, with someone who identifies as a gay man. This story is both personal and informational. This story will shine light on a discrimination issue that I passionately advocate against. I hope the story brings hope to anyone facing discrimination in the form of bullying.

Heard Silence: A Short Story

He remembered the days when the bullying first occurred during his late middle school years up until now while he sits in his advanced science class. He thought that sitting with the smarter kids in science class would help alleviate some of the hatred and slander from fellow classmates. There was still the occasional slur of “fag” or “sissy” from the kids in the room but he still managed to stay somewhat strong. Each slur, even though minor, was like a small paper cut in his skin, but he thought it’s better than the few slaps to his head or spit balls from the kids in the other non-advanced classes.

Gym was always difficult. Teachers told him that he should always participate. That’s the only way to get a decent grade in the class. *Constant participation*. Gym teachers never really understood Justin’s decision not to play in many of the games. At first, Justin thought he just wasn’t good enough to play. Some of the other kids had decent skills, not too great. Maybe he could catch up to them. It seemed easy but it wasn’t. His mannerisms were just different, and anytime he would throw a basketball through a hoop it was comparable to the way some of the girls in the class had played. There were inscriptions of sexuality on his body. He was marked by the other kids in his class as gay even without openly expressing himself, just by his performance and perceived gender expression.

He wanted to be better, more masculine, maybe then his sexual orientation wouldn’t be so obvious to the others in the classroom. Maybe then his orientation wouldn’t be something to

be harassed about. He never thought it was something he wanted to change overnight, but he wanted to be normal. He wanted to not be looked at as taboo as he never personally felt that way, even though most of his life had to be lived in secret. Who said that sex had to be for procreative purposes only, when most people used it for pleasure?

There were times when Justin would complain to the Principal and multiple teachers about his harassment. The occasional answer would be, “Boys will be boys...” Sure thing: “Boys will be boys.” That was a complete copout from actually doing anything on the teacher’s part. Boys aren’t inclined to act upon homophobic attitudes in order to make one feel better nor is it plausible to call it human nature to ridicule and harass an oppressed sexuality.

Sex isn’t something biological anymore, nor shall the essentialist perspective be taken into consideration to even construct sexuality. Teachers and principals had already diagnosed Justin within the social exonerations of homosexuality. Justin was seen as taboo even to the principals. If only he could construct their views into something that was a little less daunting and a little more inclusive. If only people could understand that his and others sexualities as well are written under social inscriptions that once told people to only behave sexually under procreative notions. Not all the heterosexuals in the school had sex to get pregnant. That in itself was kind of taboo at his school and he knew that most of his friends, and past friends, behaved sexually to gain pleasure.

His parents, who once tried to disown him, came to the school with multiple complaints about the appearance of their son. Justin had come home from school many times with bruises and scrapes. He always wore his emotions on his face and usually came home diminished, worn out, and exhausted. After hearing stories on the news of recent teen suicides, Justin’s parents knew they had to do something. They wanted to help Justin build personal empowerment, but

they soon wrote their complaints to the school itself in letter form. It was a huge step for the parents to do something because they had not come to terms with their son's sexuality until recently. He hadn't come out to them until after a year of identity reconciliation. The school was apprehensive of the letter at first, thinking that the bullying was not a problem. The principal thought teen suicides could never happen at the school; the students were just overreacting.

Justin's parents helped him overcome some of the anxiety by allowing him some sense of agency within his high school. Issues of teen suicides were discussed in his household. Even though the parents were not completely supportive of his sexuality, they loved their son and were willing to save his life.

The letter didn't really do as much as planned, however it happened that some students revolted and found sanctuary among other students that were part of the same community and grew with acceptance. Justin confided in his high school chorus teacher, asking him to sponsor a group for people of various sexualities and gender identities. The high school's first Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) group soon provided LGBT students a place to go to voice their concerns and find sanctuary. The group began with five members, students who accepted different genders and sexual identities. It first became a place of community, then grew into activism as students fundraised in support of trips to conferences to learn safer school tactics and LGBT leadership. These leadership activities were similar to those of a safe school's summit.

Policy Statement

The following policy statement demonstrates there is a need to implement change and create a safe atmosphere for students everywhere. Homophobic bullying is a problem that can cause post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma to a student in general, and internalized homophobia

wherein an LGBT community member has negative perceptions of the self (Rivers, 2004). In addition, the policy statement seeks to empower youths through the implementation of a gay-straight alliance (GSA) on high school grounds. GSAs can promote diversity and acceptance across communities, bringing together minority cultures (Craig, Tucker & Wagner, 2008). Although very general, this statement can work in almost any institution that lacks inclusion within LGBT communities.

To End the Bullying Epidemic

To Whom It May Concern:

After looking through your school's policy regarding bullying, we have noticed a few flaws which are problematic to the safety of your students. Additionally, we have noticed discrimination based on sexual orientation throughout your school's academic structure.

First, it is important that your school have an open advisor willing to help students start a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) at your school. We feel that GSAs help bring together members of the GLBT community as they give all students a space with a sense of belonging. A GSA can help bring awareness to the issues faced by the LGBT community and increase awareness among heterosexual allies and others. GSAs increase diversity and bring people together. We feel that more inclusive policies in the school would also help it build a more inclusive environment to diverse people.

Secondly, it is important to look at your school's policy surrounding bullying and LGBT bullying more specifically. Any bullying set on students under the premise that a student might be different than others is morally wrong. Everyone at this school deserves a safe place where one doesn't have to worry about emotional, verbal, and physical violence. We've noticed that your school has taken many strides to advocate against drug use, obscenities, child abuse, and many other problems kids are faced with. Why should bullying be any different?

We are taking a stand to act against discrimination and violence in schools. We hope to advocate for equal opportunities for all students to get an education and experience school positively. If your school does not make an anti-bullying policy, you are putting the students at risk for drug abuse, violence, discrimination, stress, academic failure, and even suicide.

Signed,

Conclusion

The short story, policy statement, and personal analysis capture the culmination of my work in Women and Gender Studies, SOUL, and WGSO. Additionally, the theories I turned to when writing both the policy statement and the short story above have aided the creation of my activism and advocacy against LGBT bullying. These theories represent my views on sex and gender as they play out in western culture where sex and gender are so rigidly criticized through narrow perspectives. These theories play out in concept and application as they resonate personally as well as globally. As I move forward to consider graduate studies in Counseling Education, I will continue to use these works to direct my studies and create an inclusive workplace. It is true that sexuality is socially constructed and constantly scrutinized. As Rubin et al state,

Sex is always political. But there are also historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overtly politicized. In such periods, the domain of erotic life is, in effect, renegotiated (p.50).

References

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