

Chapter 5

A Special Kind of Brave: LGBTQIA+ People in Schools Facing Hostility to Create Safer Spaces and Futures

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ABSTRACT

Schools in the United States have long supported cisgender heterosexuality as the only healthy moral option for adult life. LGBTQIA+ adults, even some cis-het allies, are weathering the terrifying hostility and increasingly facing the experience of being doxxed for supporting LGBTQIA+ youth. Some are even losing their jobs. LGBTQIA+ professional educators face discrimination, marginalization, and silencing, especially for supporting gender-diverse youth. Students need models of healthy LGBTQIA+ adult life and healthy gender-diverse adults. They need to see cisgender heterosexual adults warmly including their gender-diverse colleagues, to model the expectations of modern healthy workplace relationships. Happy, healthy LGBTQIA+ adults are an antidote to LGBTQIA+ young people's despair. By seeing people like themselves living happy, well-integrated adult lives in their communities, LGBTQIA+ youth clearly understand that adulthood is possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other non-cisgender, non-heterosexual (LGBTQIA⁺) teachers and students exist now and have always existed in communities and schools. Two Spirit, transgender, intersex, non-binary, and gender nonconforming (2STING) people have existed in many cultures as long as there have been people (Stryker, 2017). From laws against crossdressing in Massachusetts colony in the 1690s to women enlisted in the Revolutionary Army as men, transgender people have existed as long as the United States (Stryker, 2017). Before colonization, many Indigenous North American cultures had multiple gender roles and honored people outside of what we call cisgender today. These gender-diverse people had treasured places in their societies, ontologies, and epistemologies (Fertig, 2007; Frameline, 2011; Jolivéte, 2016). Genocide and time have stolen most of what we know about pre-colonial Native and Indigenous cultures. In the 1990s, Two Spirit was coined as a pan-indigenous umbrella term for people who feel outside the Western norms of cisgender heterosexuality (Wilson, 2011).

Schools in the United States have long supported cisgender heterosexuality as the only healthy moral option for adult life (Bauer-Phipps, 2017). This chapter will examine the current climate for LGBTQIA⁺ people in education in the United States in the rapidly changing cultural and legal context of an unprecedented wave of anti-LGBTQIA⁺, particularly anti-transgender legislation. LGBTQIA⁺ adults, even some cis-het allies, are weathering the terrifying hostility and increasingly facing the experience of being doxed for supporting LGBTQIA⁺ youth. Some are even losing their jobs. LGBTQIA⁺ professional educators face discrimination, marginalization, and silencing, especially for supporting gender-diverse youth. Students need models of healthy LGBTQIA⁺ adult life and healthy gender-diverse adults. They need to see cisgender heterosexual adults warmly including their gender-diverse colleagues, to model the expectations of modern healthy workplace relationships (Ferfolja, 2009). Happy, healthy LGBTQIA⁺ adults are the antidote to LGBTQIA⁺ young people's despair. By seeing people like themselves living happy, well-integrated adult lives in their communities, LGBTQIA⁺ youth clearly understand that adulthood is possible.

This chapter will include seven sections. The first section will include some anecdotes from my sixteen years of experience as a classroom teacher. The second section will briefly summarize Minority Stress Theory, which I used to quantify the stressful experiences of trans and non-binary teachers in K–12 education in my dissertation. The third section will summarize the anti-LGBTQIA⁺ and anti-trans legislation in progress in early 2023. The fourth section will summarize some research about the impact of anti-LGBTQIA⁺ and anti-trans bias on people. The fifth section will summarize the research on suicide risk in LGBTQIA⁺ and gender-diverse youth and adults while section six will include a brief discussion of the ethical dilemma

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