


Chapter 1

Delayed Victories: Returning the Early Homosexual Rights Movement to Campus

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ABSTRACT

While many campuses seek to find ways to engage, support, and retain LGBTQIA+ students, there is often a lack of material in the curriculum and student-facing supports, such as libraries, multicultural centers, etc., that show the value and realities of the historical connection between academics and the pursuit of gender liberation. More historical elements, better representation, and connection could benefit all students. This chapter proposes one such history to aid that purpose: the early “Gay Liberation Movement” that saw interaction between research universities, various fields, and organizations seeking to increase opportunities and legal protections for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. By providing this history and encouraging campuses to embrace building it into their curriculum and campuses as evidence of how academia has supported the pursuit of equity, it can provide a meaningful, engaging, and significant presence to benefit all students in understanding the history of the pursuit of rights and the power of higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Author’s note: The following chapter makes use of primary and secondary sources originally written from the late nineteenth century through modernity. As such, in the process of quoting these sources, it is crucial to recognize that language and its acceptable usage has evolved, and certain terms used in historic quotes may be considered dated, inaccurate, or offensive by contemporary standards.¹

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The true Past departs not, nothing that was worthy in the Past departs; no Truth or Goodness realized by man ever dies, or can die; but is all still here, and, recognized or not, lives and works through endless changes. (Carlyle, 1886, p. 379)

In attempting to capture the overall passage of history, generalized histories are often written in a manner that is not inclusive in the broader context of what it means to learn and belong in a schooling environment for groups that are minoritized or marginalized. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that issues of modern import, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) student belonging and its myriad impact on student success and retention, can be furthered with the application and acknowledgment of the early research universities and their intersection of research scholars, medical experts, and legal advocates which drove an early “Gay Rights Movement.” While largely understudied in modern educational history, it could be used to undo some of the existing damage done by a curriculum and campus environment that has not engaged in such consideration. For instance, education has a long history of shaping and reproducing society based on the perceived needs of those who structured the curriculum. With the influx of immigrants in the late 19th century, there was a decided need to ensure that U.S. schools would create in students respect and patriotism that followed the social expectations that education played a role in “assimilating the youth, both immigrant and white native-born” (Graham, 2005, p. 23). Tied to this need for Americanized assimilation was the rejection of existing otherness, backed by both religious and educational fervor that sought to remove anything that would not lead to a productive and reproductive American family unit, demonstrated through how colonization removed gender identities inclusive of third genders and others outside of heterosexual, patriarchally minded identities (Pérez 2003; Smith 2010). The fact that such removal occurred in such a way that schooling and society in the United States often celebrated it as an opportunity for advancement and betterment of the social order is telling in its own right as this form of assimilation, too, was one of Americanization. Throughout history, rigid enforcement of “proper” gender identities and expressions has been part of that removal, from the placement of men and women defined in the binary into appropriate spheres to the complete ignoring of gender beyond the binary; this system of inequities and challenges means that much of the LGBTQIA+ history and education has been broadly removed from historical consideration in a way that could impact modern practice.

The fact that many of the inequities and challenges that have lingered over LGBTQIA+ communities have historic precursors that should be acknowledged and included as a presence in the curriculum, the campus, and in many different fields of study is supported by notable research. An American Historical Association publication echoes the vitality of inclusive history in human understanding, stating:

History’s most basic task is to help us explore the astonishing breadth of human experience. It teaches empathy for people we will never meet and links their stories to our own, while at the same time, reminding us that the differences between past and present matter profoundly. (Potter, 2018, p. 19)

Moreover, historical acknowledgment and engagement are key to creating environments that encourage belonging and involvement. In a study of the import of historical analysis, the nature of how key it can be to the work of creating belonging and involvement is summed up thusly: “Learning history also encourages our sense of belonging. . . . We become better caretakers of our communities, even when that requires using historical knowledge to criticize the present” (Neem, 2018, pp. 24-25). The key elements of how historical representation can increase belonging and allow people to be better engaged in

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