

LGBTQ PERCEPTIONS

A Retrospective Examination of LGBTQ Students' Perceptions of Physical Education

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Abstract

Approximately twice as many self-identified LGBTQ high school students report being bullied on school property than their heterosexual peers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Unfortunately, students who experience peer harassment are at an increased risk of depression and anxiety. Given that physical education is a context in which students should feel safe to explore health-enhancing behaviors, it is important to examine how LGBTQ students perceive this unique environment. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to qualitatively explore LGBTQ college students' perceptions of high school physical education. Six undergraduate students identifying as LGBTQ consented to participate in the IRB-approved study. Participants were formally interviewed for 30 to 60 minutes using a semi-structured interview guide grounded in a social-ecological framework (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Results indicate that participants remembered high school physical education as a toxic setting in which peer harassment was the norm. Participants also described that physical education teachers were ill equipped to address homophobic bullying, often ignoring its occurrence in both the gym and the locker room. The results of this investigation will hopefully illuminate the

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unique social-ecological reality that LGBTQ students face in the physical education setting.

Introduction

Scholars have a good understanding of homophobic bullying within general school contexts (Crothers et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2020; Pollitt et al., 2018). Unfortunately, LGBTQ students experience more harassment than their heterosexual peers (Kosciw et al., 2020), increasing their risk of absenteeism (Burton et al., 2014), depression, and suicidal ideation (Hatchel et al., 2019; Huebner et al., 2015; Kosciw et al., 2020; Zaza et al., 2016). Although research pertaining to LGBTQ issues in physical education is on the rise (Landi et al., 2020), more information is needed concerning the extent to which these marginalized students experience peer harassment in this unique educational setting.

To date, research suggests that physical education teachers are enabling homophobic bullying in their classes. For example, Gill et al. (2010) surveyed undergraduate students enrolled in an exercise science course. Participants responded to reflective questions about prior experiences in physical education. The results indicated that homophobic slurs were prevalent, with fewer than 10% of participants recalling any intervention from physical educators. Further, physical activity spaces, such as locker rooms, gyms, and playing fields, were identified as locations for harassment, particularly for male students. Further, based on survey data collected from over 16,000 American youth, it was reported that more than 40% of LGBTQ students avoid locker rooms and physical education classes due to feelings of discomfort and an overall lack of safety (Kosciw et al., 2020).

LGBTQ students who are coping with sexual identity development lack the protection and support not only of physical education teachers but also of such social-ecological entities as their peers, schools, and families (Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001). Examining LGBT students' perceptions of physical education through a social-ecological lens (Espelage & Swearer, 2004) will enable scholars to understand the type and level of support they receive. Espelage and Swearer (2004) created a bullying framework that acknowledges the complexity of this social phenomenon. Episodes of harassment are not typically isolated exchanges between two people; they have over-

lapping influences. For example, although individual factors affect how a student engages in a bullying dynamic—as either a target, a perpetrator, or a bystander—peers, educators, administrators, families, and even community norms all influence how bullying is viewed by those involved.

Given that one of the primary purposes of physical education is to promote a love for lifelong physical activity, it is critical to examine how marginalized students in particular view their experiences within these classes. Unfortunately, physical education clings to heteronormativity and gendered representations of movement experiences (Clarke, 2013; McCaughtry et al., 2005). When students deign to buck that system of oppression, they open themselves to unchecked harassment. Physical education is one of the primary school contexts in which students are supposed to learn health-enhancing behaviors; thus, scholars and practitioners must understand how peer harassment impacts marginalized students. Therefore, this investigation aimed to qualitatively explore how LGBTQ college students perceive bullying—both homophobic and general—within their physical education experiences; the role that physical education teachers play concerning bullying; the type and level of support that LGBTQ students receive from school administrators, peers, and family; and the impact, if any, of bullying on students' perceptions of physical activity.

Method

This investigation was conducted as a collaboration between me and two undergraduate physical education teacher education (PETE) students at a midwestern university. This project enabled PETE students to experience the research process by writing an internal grant proposal, creating an interview guide, and collecting and analyzing data for the purpose of presenting the findings at a national conference. Given that scholarly hindsight is 20/20, I wish I could go back and collect more forms of data for triangulation, but I cannot. I can, however, acknowledge that this was a simple, student-led design that still yielded noteworthy results. Further, although it is arguably time to move on from retrospective investigations pertaining to LGBTQ people (Walch et al., 2020), it would not have been feasible to talk to LGBTQ youth in the small midwestern community in which we conducted the study. Therefore, we moved forward with our plan to

interview a handful of young adults who felt comfortable enough to share their experiences with us. By “countering the invisibility” of LGBTQ people’s experiences in physical education (Drury et al., 2017), we hope to contribute something of interest to the field.

Participants and Setting

After following appropriate IRB procedures, six participants were purposefully sampled through an LGBTQ resource center at one midwestern university. We opened recruitment to all undergraduates involved in this organization, recognizing that those students who had graduated high school most recently may have more vivid recollections of their physical education experiences. All participants signed informed consent forms before their involvement in the study. What follows are brief descriptions of the participants (using pseudonyms) with a few self-identified characteristics (using their preferred pronouns) that each deemed important during our conversations.

Rory was 20 years old when we collected the data. They were from a small rural town in the Midwest. Rory identified as a bisexual male (gender fluid) and has been “out” to family and friends since middle school. They also perceived themselves as highly motor competent, often “beating all of the other boys in sports.”

Ryan was 20 years old when we collected the data. They were from a suburb near a large midwestern city. Ryan identified as asexual and gender nonbinary but was not “out” until they began college. Ryan attended a small alternative high school due to the amount of harassment they faced while in middle school.

Patrick was a 21-year-old gay male from a suburb of a large midwestern city when we collected the data. He came out to family and friends during his senior year of high school. He perceived himself as “feminine” in high school, often socializing more with female students.

Sam was 19 years old when we collected the data. She was from a suburb near a large midwestern city. Sam identified as a lesbian and has been out since she was 14 years old. She perceived herself as a “shield” for targeted students while she was in high school.

Frank was a 21-year-old gay male from a small rural town in the Midwest when we collected the data. He has been out since he was a

junior in high school. Until coming out, he had carried himself with confidence due to his status as a track captain.

Joe was a 22-year-old gay male from a small rural town in the Midwest when we collected the data. He has been out since he was a sophomore in high school. As a student who had previously enjoyed physical education, he vividly recalled how he could no longer find a partner for physical education class activities once he was outed against his wishes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were formally interviewed on one occasion for approximately 30–60 minutes using a semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2002). Questions pertained to the high school physical education class atmosphere, perceptions regarding harassment, and the type of support sought and acquired from various social-ecological entities. For example, we asked, “To what extent did you feel that high school physical education was a safe space in which to learn about physical activity?” We also posed the question, “How would your physical educator respond when episodes of harassment occurred in class?” Additionally, we recorded noteworthy informal interactions that occurred before and after the formal interviews. Throughout the investigation, a theoretical log was maintained to note emergent patterns and themes.

All open-ended interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Additionally, we used member checks during and after the formal interviews to provide opportunities for the participants to correct previously established assumptions, elaborate on their feelings, clarify and provide contextual relevance to answers, or make comments “off the record.” Any notes taken during the interviews supplemented the transcripts and helped with the interpretation of results. All forms of data were analyzed by open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Documents related to the study (e.g., interview transcriptions and notes from theoretical logs) were continuously analyzed for evidence of thematic relevance and similarities and differences among the data.

Results and Discussion

In the following sections, we explore the themes and sub-themes pertaining to various social-ecological factors that impacted the par-

ticipants' experiences within high school physical education. First, we focused on the overall environment and the extent to which bullying was a reality for the participants. Next, we explored the participants' perceived support of physical educators, school administrators, families, and peers. Then, we illuminated a theme related to participant empathy toward those who failed to protect them during high school physical education. Finally, we highlighted the overall impact, if any, that the participants' experiences had on their current physical activity habits.

A Toxic Setting

Using a social-ecological lens (Espelage & Swearer, 2004) to examine how LGBTQ students perceived bullying provided a rich opportunity to explore the layers of influence and support within the context of physical education. Questions were posed pertaining to participants' recollections of high school physical education and, more specifically, to examples of harassment experienced or observed during those years. Similar to other research (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021; O'Connor & Graber, 2014;), participants described their physical education settings as toxic, with memories arising related to frequent name-calling, physical harassment, and a general lack of protection from physical educators. Words and phrases heard frequently in physical education included, *don't be a girl* (directed toward males), *sissy boy*, *dyke*, and various iterations of *faggot*. When asked to describe the overall physical education atmosphere, Frank articulated, "I would say, very homophobic, very hypermasculine, and then led by people who are not able . . . or willing to engage in those conversations." The notion of a hypermasculine physical education climate, which was echoed by each participant, has been illuminated by prior research (Clarke, 2013; Sykes, 2004).

The participants, who were at the center of their social ecology, described why they and others were targeted more often within the physical education setting. Participants indicated that students were bullied in high school physical education most often because of their perceived sexual orientation and gender nonconformity (Clarke, 2013; Hargie et al., 2017; Sykes, 2004), lower social standing, and lack of athleticism. Patrick stated, "I just wanted to get out and go to a different class because I didn't excel in it, and there were people that were like, 'You aren't as athletic as we are, so we are just going to

take you down.” Further, participants described the occurrence of physical harassment (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021), intimidation, verbal abuse (Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009; Symons et al., 2014), and social isolation (O’Connor & Graber, 2014) in most physical education spaces, most notably the locker room. Prior research has identified locker rooms as hotbeds for harassment, often due to a lack of appropriate supervision and the discomfort around bodies in those spaces (Hargie et al., 2017). Rory stated, “We had a three-tier locker system, and I was in the middle, and I was the only one out of 15 other boys. . . . They chose the other two sides [rows], so they never had to stand by me because I was the only out person in my whole entire high school. . . . If they had a boy they didn’t like, they would try to force him to change next to me as if it was some form of punishment.” Others shared feelings of dread about the locker room. Patrick emphasized, “I remember always changing as fast as I could and getting out. . . . It wasn’t the place where I ever wanted to be.” Frank described being physically attacked in the locker room by football players accusing him of “checking them out.” Although Anderson (2012) has posited that “homophobia” has decreased over the years, other scholars contend that locker rooms remain spaces for policing sexual and gender norms (Atkinson & Kehler, 2010; White & Hobson, 2015).

An Exception to the Rule

Interestingly, participants suggested that respect or protection could be gained from peers and physical educators if one had athletic aptitude. To a certain extent, athleticism superseded one’s sexuality or gender nonconformity. For example, Rory described how they earned the respect of their physical educator by dominating peers athletically in class: “The actual high school teacher who was in charge of the gym classes, he ended up calling me [Last Name] by the end of my senior year and showing me respect in the way that, like, when you call a basketball player by their last name.” In a Finnish investigation (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021), secondary physical educators observed that LGBTQ students who were “sporty and strong” carried more social capital in their classes than those who were “timid.” Further, Wellard (2006) has suggested that gay males, in particular, can achieve acceptance in sporting environments *if* they embody heteronormative gender ideals. Frank was captain of

the track team and perceived that he was well-liked and accepted by his peers before coming out: “I am six feet tall. . . . I felt OK and that I had some power in those situations because of being captain of teams. I did [feel safe] right up until I got beat up [for being gay].” For Frank, the fact that he “came out” diminished whatever social capital he had acquired for being a respected athlete, contrary to Wellard’s (2006) findings.

Sam indicated that her athleticism helped buffer harassment in some ways, enabling her to act as a shield for her friends who were teased more frequently. “Since I was a swimmer, I had a bit of power. . . . I was friends with the victims, and I sat with them at lunch, and if somebody was sitting alone . . . then I would bring my friends over and sit with them.” Ryan described how they felt safe from a verbally and physically violent student in class because they were protected by the teacher—for basketball-related purposes. The teacher, who was also the head basketball coach, did not want Ryan to get hurt because they were needed as the star of the varsity team. The teacher intervened when the bully, who was notorious for harassing others, approached Ryan in physically intimidating ways. Ryan perceived that the “supportive” teacher was protecting their athletic ability rather than their sense of well-being or identity. Ryan also reported that they felt more confident in physical education than in other high school classes. They stated, “[PE] is the one place where I didn’t necessarily feel like a victim because I was empowered by my athleticism in that class. . . . Besting people at sports gave me a round of confidence that I didn’t possess elsewhere.”

Perceived Support

Physical Educators

Teachers play a critical role in the social ecology of physical education classes. They set the tone for interpersonal expectations and can intentionally or unintentionally promote unwanted harassment or social isolation. Even though some physical educators in this investigation offered some level of support to LGBTQ participants, this was the exception, not the rule. When asked to describe the role physical educators played when bullying occurred in class, participants indicated that the targets of harassment were left to protect themselves (Clarke, 2013; Hargie et al., 2017; Larrison et al., 2011).

For example, Frank stated, “There was a lot of conversation about being a man and that hyper toxic masculinity that was encouraged in us when someone said something derogatory or that would make that space not safe—we were told to ‘man up’ and ‘deal with it.’”

While participants were often encouraged to “man up” and face bullying on their own, at other times, bullying events in physical education were ignored or downplayed. Joe offered, “He would choose not to hear a lot [verbal bullying], and after a while, I figured that was his motive. . . He doesn’t care as long as they are doing the activities.” Although Joe did enjoy the physical education curriculum organized by the teacher, he did not turn to this individual for help or guidance related to the social ostracism he was experiencing in class. Another participant, Sam, worried that because of the experience of a close friend who was physically barred by students from entering the locker room due to his status as an “out” gay male, nothing would be different for her. Another friend, who was merely perceived to be a lesbian, had all her clothes stolen from her locker with no ramifications for the perpetrators. Sam indicated that her physical education teachers did not want to facilitate tough conversations about bullying, especially harassment targeted at LGBTQ students. Sam said they just wanted to “get their work done.” Although a physical educator’s role should encompass promoting a safe educational climate for all students, participants perceived that teachers would rather not contend with the often-difficult social circumstances facing some students. McCaughtry et al. (2005) advocated for physical educators to listen to students in pragmatic ways, attending to hurtful language in locker-room interactions—and to listen directly to LGBTQ students who express feelings of isolation and fear.

The lack of support demonstrated by physical educators took a toll on some participants. For example, Ryan discussed a type of numbing that takes place when you have been harassed for many years, making you less likely to turn to others for support. “There is a certain mindset if you have been bullied—about how you react to things—and it takes a lot to get to the point when you do report something.” While Ryan became “numb” as high school moved forward, Rory described how the toxicity and constant, unchecked harassment built up to an explosion of their own violence: “He just kept calling me a faggot or a sissy boy. Every single time he said it,

it just built up inside, and eventually it came to the point where . . . I ended up punching him in the gut.” They went on to describe how the teacher dismissed the incident without opening a dialogue about homophobic harassment and the toll that it takes on its targets. Rory perceived that if incidents were dealt with quickly, the teacher was satisfied and wanted to move on: “They didn’t really want to tell his parents that he got punched by a gay kid at school for being an asshole.”

Administrators

Overall, participants articulated a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness regarding the idea of turning to others for support, especially adults. Patrick suggested that because physical education teachers were unhelpful in combatting bullying, neither he nor others who were harassed felt empowered to reach out to school administrators for guidance: “What is the point? . . . I don’t know who to talk about with these things, because nobody else is really going through it.” Although a few participants posited that the “very, very socially conservative nature” (Frank) of their high school community, including the administrative personnel, were the reasons why they did not turn to these people for guidance, others were uncertain as to the reason. Regardless, participants were clear that these adults could not be counted on to help them contend with the often-relentless bullying they were facing in physical education.

Rory further echoed the notion that they did not often turn to administrators for help, saying, “It’s not that I wasn’t comfortable; it is that *they* weren’t comfortable.” In other words, Rory sensed that physical educators and school administrators did not know how to communicate with LGBTQ students about the issues they were facing in physical education classes. One participant, Joe, did acknowledge that he trusted one administrator at his high school, but emphasized, “Even though I felt comfortable, I would like to add that I didn’t expect anything to actually change. It was more like an opportunity to vent, have a conversation.”

Peers

While physical educators and administrators were not perceived to be a useful or empathetic support system for participants, perceptions of peer support were mixed. For example, Joe’s female friends

outed him to the football team against his wishes, leaving him without his only group of previously trusted peer allies. Physical education, a class that he had enjoyed, was no longer a safe space for him. Another participant, Frank, also perceived that he was abandoned by his close friends after coming out. Ryan described a lack of social support from peers, stating, “The first thing that bullies do when they start picking on you is isolation. That social isolation is almost worse than the bullying itself.” Rory echoed, “[Students] would all avoid me and leave me alone in a bubble.” Although their physical education peers were not helpful when they experienced bullying in class, Rory and Sam did have several good friends to lean on. Rory stated, “My friends were very comforting. . . . Most were also like, ‘They’re all assholes; forget them.’” Although encouraging one to forget bullying episodes was helpful for Rory, Patrick did not find solace in this dismissive approach. He described how friends would attempt to minimize verbal harassment by saying things such as, “Don’t worry about it; it’s just a gym class.” When asked if those words of encouragement helped, he indicated that at the time, they did not: “Those things hurt when you are in high school and at that age.” In a systematic review of the extent to which friendships attenuate the negative outcomes pertaining to peer victimization (e.g., anxiety, somatic complaints, and sleep problems), Schacter et al. (2021) reported inconsistent findings. They indicated that some investigations show strong evidence of friendships buffering the emotional and physical consequences of being targeted. Interestingly, others show no connection one way or the other—or that strong friendships may even exacerbate the stress associated with harassment.

Families

While friends were a source of comfort for some after experiencing harassment in physical education, family support was associated more with the protection of the participant’s physical safety; it was not explicitly an endorsement of their LGBTQ status. Although one’s physical well-being is important, Roe’s (2016) research highlighted that LGBTQ youth need *explicit* support from families to feel safe. Rory commented on their mother’s role: “[The support] wouldn’t be when I approached her saying, ‘Hey, mom, I am uncomfortable in my gym class.’ . . . It would be her saying, ‘Why are you crying’ or ‘Why do you have bruises and scrapes?’” Rory went on to describe

how it was more of a maternal instinct to protect her child rather than to worry about their emotional comfort in physical education. Like Rory, Joe's parents were supportive in a protective way; they did not want him to get hurt or killed for being gay. While Rory and Joe had parents who would at least seek to protect their physical safety, a few other participants either expressed discomfort at discussing parental support or articulated that while in high school, they were no longer allowed to live at home once they were "out." Unfortunately, outright family rejection can have dire consequences for LGBTQ youth, including significantly higher rates of suicide and drug use (Rosario et al., 2004).

Participant Empathy

Although descriptive memories related to high school physical education evoked emotional pain for participants, many expressed empathy for those involved in the bullying dynamic. For example, when speaking about the students who most often perpetrated harassment in physical education, Rory stated, "[Bullies] don't know what words to use, so [they] use abusive language. I don't think that those students even knew about themselves. . . . One day you'll grow up." Ryan stated, "I could not hate him. I could not be angry at him. I could only feel empathy toward him. . . . That makes it really hard if you are the victim of someone else's harassment and you can only feel sorry for them. . . . I could see that he had been hurt enough in the past, and that is where his reactions came from." Evidence suggests that empathy is a critical step toward forgiving those who have harmed you in some way (Davis & Gold, 2010). Research interventions that focus on the forgiveness of bullies have been shown to reduce anger (Watson et al., 2017).

Participants also did not blame their peers or friends who offered lackluster support for what they were experiencing in physical education. Rory said, "I don't think that was because they didn't want to do anything. I think it was because they were scared." After Frank came out, many of his friends, especially those he competed with athletically, no longer interacted with him socially: "They stopped hanging out with me." However, he could empathize, knowing that they did not want the type of social ostracism that he was experiencing from others: "I imagined they didn't want that to happen to them, and that is completely understandable from my point of view."

Although bullying in physical education was a reality for participants, they did not blame the teachers who made little effort to stop the harassment. Many were able to identify that physical education teachers simply lacked the appropriate tools to help. Rory offered, “They are just uncomfortable breaching [*sic*] the subject of emotional content.” Sam articulated, “[Bullying] was ignored, and I’m not trying to say that the teachers were mean people. I knew them, and they were good people. I just don’t think they had the skills or ideas of how to combat that. I don’t think that was part of what they were trained to do.” Frank echoed, “I don’t think the teachers themselves were homophobic. I think they just lacked any ability whatsoever to talk about those topics and no had idea. I think if they were forced to talk about it, they would be like a deer in headlights. They had received no training, had no ability, and they just had no idea, which is scary. . . . I still don’t talk to them, obviously, but I still think of them as decent human beings.” Although physical educators who enable homophobic bullying were possibly acculturated in similarly homophobic climates during their education, it is remarkable that the participants were able to express such an understanding of their limitations.

Future Impact

It is worthwhile to consider the social ecology of high school physical education and the potential lasting impact that one’s experiences can have on future physical activity. Prior research has shown a connection between negative experiences in secondary physical education and adult physical activity patterns (Strean, 2009; Cardinal et al., 2013). However, when asked if the harassment they experienced impacted their current physical activity, two of the participants reported that high school physical education had no impact, either positively or negatively, on their current physical activity habits. Patrick indicated that he still enjoys individual pursuits such as skiing. Sam also did not feel that high school physical education impacted her current activity levels at all as she still swims regularly.

While Patrick and Sam saw no connection between their experiences in high school physical education and their college activity levels, others could not seem to forget how scarring their previous experiences were. For example, Frank described how running used to be a part of his identity and that since he has been in college, he

has gained over fifty pounds. “Mentally, I always think about how my friends peaced out and how out of shape I am now and how that disconnect happened after I came out. But that is what always happens when I exercise: I think about being in cross-country and track and then how everyone stopped talking to me after I came out.” Joe echoed Frank’s feelings: “It actually took me another three years to get physically active again . . . three years actually to find the level of comfort that I had prior to that. I tried going to . . . the weight room, but then my initial reactions when I get into them was that these are not safe places anymore. Then it took me a long time to actually come back and feel comfortable again.” Rory said, “I don’t ever work out. . . . I don’t want to have that happen again. . . . Being made fun of makes it uncomfortable to approach a weight room or . . . run on the track because I run femininely, and someone is going to point that out because it’s a bad thing.” Since graduating high school, Ryan has avoided team sports due to their perceived toxicity and has sought out martial arts and individual pursuits like rock climbing as a way to not feel like a target anymore. “I am learning how to stand up for myself and protect myself. . . . I am in martial arts as a way to become more powerful, and I also do rock climbing to build muscle . . . to make myself more intimidating.” Ryan further offered a much-needed call to action for physical educators, indicating that they should develop “activities that everyone can participate in . . . [where] nobody feels threatened or overpowered.”

Conclusion

Research shows that LGBTQ students experience fewer instances of homophobic bullying when attending intentionally inclusive schools (Proulx et al., 2019). This article does not resolve how to make secondary institutions more welcoming in general, but it does call for solutions on how to make physical education specifically a welcome space for LGBTQ youth. One of the participants in this study, Patrick, articulated that during his time in high school, physical education was simply “a requirement to get out of the way.” Prior research has illuminated how queer people have not perceived physical education as beneficial, with some articulating disdain for the subject based on their traumatic experiences (McGlashan, 2013).

If LGBTQ students perceive that physical education is a hostile, unwelcoming climate, scholars and practitioners must consider ways in which various social entities can begin supporting these students.

Unfortunately, research to date points to more than a few isolated cases of physical educators failing to support and protect LGBTQ students. For example, evidence suggests that physical educators find the work of inclusivity to be too challenging (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021). Further, LGBTQ youth were *least likely* to identify a physical educator as someone they could talk to about the harassment they face at school. Additionally, only 5% of high school students indicated that they had ever seen a positive representation of an LGBTQ topic in physical education (Kosciw et al., 2020). Concerning teacher training, Coll (2019) argues that we must go beyond encouraging “tolerance” and cultivate PETE programs that disrupt norms (Devís-Devís et al., 2018). However, this might prove to be a difficult endeavor. When examining the attitudes of college students, O’Brien et al. (2013) found that students in PETE programs carried more prejudicial attitudes toward LGBTQ people than those training to teach and work within other content areas and disciplines (e.g., biology and psychology). Improving the culture of physical education is going to be a lengthy endeavor, but we can and must work within the social ecology of the gym to facilitate change. Asking undergraduate students to reflect on their subjective warrant and their personal biases, as well as more clearly dissecting the insular and heteronormative culture of physical education, could help in training a new and more sensitive generation of educators.

The results of this investigation will hopefully raise awareness of the unique social-ecological reality that LGBTQ students face within the physical education context. Scholars and practitioners must consider ways in which various social entities, such as peers, school personnel, and families, can begin protecting and supporting these students. Additionally, if it is found that physical education teachers are enabling homophobic bullying, specific pro-social educational interventions may be needed. It is hoped that LGBTQ students will report that physical education teachers, peers, school personnel, and families are working hard to support and protect them. If we find otherwise, significant steps will be necessary to ensure their future physical and emotional safety.

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