

Ecologies of School Discipline for Queer Youth: What Listening to Queer Youth Teaches Us About Transforming School Discipline

*L. Boyd Bellinger, Nicole Darcangelo, Stacey S. Horn,
Erica R. Meiners, and Sarah Schriber*

One dean just had it out for me, I don't know why. I don't [know] if he didn't like the way I dressed or he didn't understand me. I feel like he didn't know how to communicate to someone like me. So like he would like never take the time to just talk to me or ask me a certain question. He would just be like 'oh you're f--ng up again.

—Study Participant

While an emerging body of literature has begun to document discipline disparities for queer youth,¹ very little research has been done to investigate the reasons behind these disparities (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch,

L.B. Bellinger (✉) • N. Darcangelo • S.S. Horn
College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

E.R. Meiners
College of Education, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL, USA

S. Schriber
Prevent School Violence Illinois, Chicago, IL, USA

2014). In this study we examined two critical, yet under-explored, questions. First, how do queer young people's experiences with school discipline relate to their other intersecting identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, class)? Second, in what ways are queer young people's experiences with school discipline connected to and/or shaped by their experiences with bullying and harassment?

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Research demonstrates that queer young people experience higher rates of interaction with punitive systems and more severe forms of punishment than gender-conforming and heterosexual youth (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011; Irvine, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014). Queer youth report rates of harsh and exclusionary discipline that are three times that of their heterosexual and gender-conforming peers (Poteat & Russell, 2013). Exclusionary school discipline places queer and other marginalized students at risk for serious educational consequences such as academic disengagement, failure, push-out, and involvement with the juvenile justice system (Skiba et al., 2014; Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015). A majority of suspensions and expulsions experienced by young people in school, including queer young people, are the result of minor violations of a school's code of conduct (e.g., tardiness, cell phone use, dress code) (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014) and other informal school norm/gender norm violations (e.g., dress, speech, mannerisms) (Snapp et al., 2015), rather than acts that have the potential to cause serious harm to others within the school community.

Although research on discipline disparities among queer youth is nascent, a robust body of literature exists on the higher rates of bullying and harassment students experience in school as a result of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Research provides evidence that queer young people report high rates of multiple types of victimization in school—ranging from verbal teasing to sexual harassment and physical assault (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Due to the ways schools reinforce and promote normative constructs of heterosexuality and cisgender identity,² queer youth who do not adhere to these normative constructs are at heightened risk for negative treatment at the hands of both peers and adults in school (Palmer, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2016). A recent study notes that queer young people are frequently punished for retaliating against ongoing harassment that has been ignored by school personnel (Snapp et al., 2015), but the interaction between bullying and discipline is generally less well understood.

There is a fairly extensive body of research on disproportionate discipline related to race/ethnicity (especially for African American and Latino males) and students with disabilities, but until recently, this research has not investigated the ways in which sexual orientation and gender identity/expression contribute to these experiences. This study expands the literature on the salience of intersections of sexuality, gender, and gender identity with other social categories such as race/ethnicity (Crenshaw, 2015; Snapp et al., 2015).

METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

Research Team

We convened our five-person research team based on our shared and ongoing commitments to educational research that informs the development of just school practices for queer students and staff. Our team includes two doctoral students, two university faculty members, and the director of a statewide school climate transformation and bullying prevention coalition. All members of the research team identify as White and queer. We research, teach, organize, and advocate in a state that has some existing systemic support for queer students, but also contains school districts with some of the highest suspension and expulsion rates for youth of color in the country (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Participants and Procedures

We conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews in private or semi-private settings with 20 young people who met our age criterion (ages 16–21) and who identified their sexual orientations and gender identities in a variety of ways (e.g., queer, gender queer, transgender, androgynous, gay, lesbian, omnisexual; Latino, Black, Colored, European American). We recruited participants from two queer youth advocacy organizations in the Chicago area and interviewed, on a first come, first-served basis, a group of young people who volunteered to participate and share their experiences with school discipline, school bullying, and the criminal legal system. Interviews lasted approximately 20–50 minutes each and all participants provided assent/consent prior to the interviews.³

Interview Protocol and Coding

We developed our interview protocol using an existing, semi-structured protocol (Irvine, 2010), which we piloted and refined. The protocol included questions in the following areas: self-identification of demographics, family structure, living/housing situation, employment/sources of income, school history, school context, experiences with bullying, experiences with school discipline, experiences with the juvenile justice system, and recommendations for educators.

All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, after which each team member reviewed the recordings and transcripts. Throughout the process, we met regularly to discuss impressions, generate and refine codes, and create consensus around our readings of the transcripts. Once we determined our coding structure and themes had emerged, we created visual maps of the disciplinary pathways for each of the participants, highlighting the real or perceived transgressions and the formal and informal disciplinary sanctions related to each. We also highlighted any precipitating or contextual factors that contributed to each transgression⁴ and sanction, and identified the ways each participant perceived these to be directly related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender presentation.

RESULTS

Our project sought to better understand how queer youth experience school discipline, and how their intersecting identities and any bullying and harassment they face might be related to their disciplinary experiences. Our participants described school climates that, at best, were antagonistic to queer youth and, at worst, replete with institutionalized heterosexism and racism that contributed to and supported interpersonal acts of homophobic, racist, and/or transphobic aggression. No single pathway surfaced to explain the disproportionate discipline of queer youth. While all our participants offered complex, and often painful, examples of their experiences with school discipline, we selected Kiki, Casey, and Joaquin⁵ to highlight in this chapter. We chose these three young people because they represent diverse identities, school contexts, experiences with formal and informal sanctions, and experiences with bullying and harassment.

Kiki, a 16-year-old straight female who was assigned male at birth, self-identifies as “colored,” and is an out and proud student in her public high school. Her presence as an urban, transgender Black woman in a suburban,

predominantly White high school marks her as non-normative in multiple and ultimately inseparable ways. Casey is a White, Jewish 16-year-old “genderqueer” youth who identifies as “omnisexual” and “androgynous.” Preferring the gender pronoun *they*, Casey attends a desegregated school in a suburban district. Joaquin is a 21-year-old gay Hispanic male who attended a large, urban, public high school from ninth to twelfth grades, but left high school just a half credit short of graduation. After leaving his public school, Joaquin briefly attended an alternative high school and then a technical high school, where he earned his General Education Diploma (GED).

Individually and collectively, Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey illustrate the three central findings from this research project. First, queer youth’s experiences of disproportionate discipline frequently stem from schools being sites of gender normativity and gender regulation that deem certain identities and expressions as normal and appropriate while others must be sanctioned, regulated, and controlled. Second, queer students’ experiences with school discipline do not follow a simple, linear transgression-to-sanction format. Rather, their experiences of discipline are connected to multiple relationships, interactions, and behaviors that at first seem like disparate events but are actually part of complex ecologies of school discipline. Third, young people’s experiences of school discipline include acts of resistance and self-advocacy that help them navigate and survive oppressive school cultures but, at times, also lead to additional sanctions (see also Poteat et al. chapter in this book). These themes are elucidated below.

Schools as Sites of Enforced Gender Normativity

Participants frequently described school contexts rife with the policing of clothing, embodiment, and affect perceived to be outside the boundaries of “appropriate” binary gender scripts. While not all of the interactions participants reported involved formal disciplinary actions, experiences of harassment by various school personnel shaped their life pathways in numerous ways.

Kiki recounted that school administrators expressed that her clothing and gender expression justified the harassment she experienced at the hands of her peers:

The head principal actually said that if I wasn’t dressing so much as a drag queen I wouldn’t be getting bullied so much ... [S]he said she used to teach LGBT students...to not be so openly gay.

Despite the existence of a policy prohibiting the precise type of verbal and physical harassment to which she was subjected, Kiki knew from experience that reporting harassment would not lead to sanctions of the perpetrators and might actually have encouraged additional harassment:

I was getting, you know, bullied very bad. Like people were throwing things at me, you know; they were calling me names. It came to a point where I didn't know who was doing it anymore. I couldn't really point out. I became mute about telling people because of retaliation, the fear of retaliation. And, you know, nobody would really do anything about it and then. I ended up in the hospital, a mental hospital because I was having suicidal thoughts and I was cutting again.

Kiki reported that, with support from a school social worker, she was able to take classes online at an alternative school and only had to spend her mornings at the mainstream high school. While sympathetic, the social worker opted to ensure Kiki's safety by pushing her into an alternative educational environment. However, despite spending less time at her mainstream school, Kiki continued to experience bullying during her mornings there.

Kiki was aware that, rather than addressing those who bullied her or the impact of the institutional oppression at the school, the school determined that her presence as a transgender woman in a gender normative environment was the problem. By moving Kiki out of her mainstream school and into an alternative setting, the school effectively sanctioned her for the harassment she had experienced.

Like Kiki, Joaquin was repeatedly and openly harassed by school security guards for his clothing and also how he walked or stood "a certain way." He stated that at least "twice a week" the "way I chose to express myself, I guess, in school [was] what got me in trouble." Joaquin identified that the students whose appearance deviated from binary norms were perceived to be queer and targeted for verbal harassment by the guards:

They would clearly say fag or queer. They'd make it known that they were talking to a LGBTQ person. You know? Like if it was a girl, they'd call her a dyke. If it was a guy they would call him a faggot.

As a result of the harassment he received related to his non-normative gender presentation, Joaquin acknowledged experiencing serious depression throughout his school years. When asked how he dealt with the harassment and sanctions, Joaquin replied:

I would either not go to school, or ditch class, or I'd rebel for no reason. Just be upset. I was always upset. Or at least I hadn't ... I used to cut [myself]... So that's how I would deal with it. But eventually I ended up leaving.

Although Joaquin organized within the school in response to targeted harassment, in the end, the failure of school staff to support him effectively sanctioned him by pushing him out altogether.

Casey, too, revealed that appearance—particularly clothing—was deeply linked to institutionalized gender norms and being heavily, yet differentially, policed and monitored in their school. Although Casey suggested that clothing was policed less often in high school than in middle school, gendered and heterosexist norms were still regulated. For example, while the school required Casey to remove a t-shirt printed with “Vagina Expert” they received while volunteering at Planned Parenthood, Casey recalled a cisgender (White) male student repeatedly wearing a shirt that stated, “I’d hit that!”

While many of our participants reported negative experiences in school based on their gender identities, the data also demonstrated that gender non-normativity and queerness were inseparable from their other social identities when it came to being surveilled in school and experiencing disproportionate formal and informal sanctions. Their experiences of school discipline suggest an indivisibility of race, gender, and sexuality, as well as ability and socioeconomic status.

Casey, who is White, reported that a transgender woman of color in the same school district was suspended for using the “wrong bathroom.” While discussing this incident, Casey said, “I know I’m not allowed to use the men’s bathroom.” Yet when asked “what would happen if you did,” Casey stated:

Casey: I’d like to think I would be suspended. I don’t think I would be.

Interviewer: Why do you think that?

C: ‘Cause I am White and I am not seen as a threat.

I: Hm, say more about that.

C: So, when my friend at the other school did it she was perceived as a Black man going into the women’s restroom and she would have been perceived as a threat. Um, me being perceived as a petite White girl doesn’t seem to put as much of a threat.

Casey was acutely aware that race, in relation to gender and sexuality, affects students’ experiences with disciplinary consequences.

Our participants' experiences with gender-related harassment and resulting sanctions affected their lives both within and outside of school. Joaquin talked about leaving school just one-half credit shy of graduating because he couldn't handle all of the "nonsense" anymore. In addition, Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey all discussed dealing with significant mental health issues that resulted from the ongoing harassment and bullying they experienced at school, as well as the lack of any effective interventions regarding this harassment.

Ecologies of School Discipline

The mapping of our participants' disciplinary pathways highlighted complex relationships among their daily experiences of harassment, bullying, and school discipline. In schools, queer youth experience a wide range of institutional and interpersonal forms of interrelated racism, homophobia, misogyny, and transphobia enacted by both adults and their peers. Queer youth often do not report these forms of harassment and when they do, school personnel frequently do not take meaningful action, blame or do not believe the victim, or potentially respond in ways that increase the victim's vulnerability (Snapp et al., 2015). Additionally, it is often the case that, upon reaching their limits, queer youth finally resist by fighting back, disobeying authority, or skipping school (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Snapp et al., 2015). As demonstrated by the experiences described by the young people we interviewed, youth may also resist by engaging in self-harm. In response to their resistance, queer youth often receive formal or informal sanctions (see Poteat et al., this volume). Multi-directional and concurrent, these layered pathways are apparent throughout our participants' experiences with school discipline.

Participants reported that while they could identify some individual teachers and staff who were supportive of queer youth, they explained that others—sometimes key school administrators—were not supportive and actively participated in creating homophobic, misogynistic, or racist school climates. For example, Joaquin, continuing to recount his experiences with a dean who "had it out for me," stated:

He would say stuff like, 'typical fag-like complaining...' like a bunch of random crap that, yeah. That and the security guards that would make comments about how tight my pants were if they were tight. Or how I would walk a certain or stand a certain way. It was really stupid s—.

When queer students reported their experiences of harassment or bullying, they were frequently ignored. More than once, Kiki, a trans woman of color, noted that the reports she made after being harassed by peers were insufficient to lead to any meaningful intervention from school leaders: “And [the assistant principal] was like, ‘well are there any witnesses?’ and I was like, ‘no.’ And she was like, ‘well I can’t really do anything.’” Yet when other students (described by Kiki as male and White) reported Kiki as the perpetrator, their claims seemed to be sufficient to warrant Kiki’s resulting discipline although they were each other’s only witnesses. Kiki was also more harshly sanctioned for actions that, for others, went unpunished. Kiki described singing a song with the word “d-k” in it, in response to which another student, with support from the assistant principal, reported her for sexual harassment:

That’s one that really pissed me off because I said a word, and how does that offend you? You know? And I was kind of telling [the assistant principal], you know, [the other student is] telling girls to do sexual acts on him and everything, you know, and it kind of bothers me a little bit that he’s doing it and that’s sexual harassment towards [the girls], but you know I am sitting here trying to tell you like, “okay...I didn’t tell you because I knew you wouldn’t do anything.” And she [the assistant principal] was like, “well if he did we would need to have witnesses.”

Although Kiki was closely monitored by the predominantly White staff at her school, the systemic harassment against her (and, as she notes, other female students) perpetrated by a male peer was ignored.

Given the persistence of homophobia in schools, even the threat of a formal or informal school sanction that might disclose information related to sexual or gender identity or behaviors can augment queer students’ vulnerability (Snapp et al., 2015). For example, when Casey was 13 years old, their flirting with another girl triggered a series of homophobic interpersonal and institutional responses:

We would say sexually explicit things, and one day her very conservative, very Catholic parents found out and took it to the school saying I was sexually harassing her and saying they were going to charge me with sexual harassment. Which they never did, but 13-year-old me didn’t know that. ... Every time I passed her in the hallways I would start having a panic attack. ... I had very intense depression, I was self-harming, cutting myself, and [sighs] eventually the school counselor that told me I wouldn’t have any problems if I was straight said that she needed to tell my mom about what

happened with the girl that I was texting and if I didn't come out to my mom, she would have to. So at that point I had to come out to my mom. I was already out to my dad, but now it's my mom. So I came out to my mom and she was fine with it.

Despite being threatened with a criminal charge by the parents of her peer, and with the threat of disclosure of her sexuality to her mother by her school counselor, Casey was never formally sanctioned in any way. Still, Casey identified that the panic attacks and forced outing were part and parcel of the punitive, disciplinary climate of the school.

As the experiences of Joaquin, Kiki, and Casey demonstrate, queer students traverse complex ecologies of school discipline. Disproportionately harassed in schools by peers and school personnel and often ignored by staff when they attempt to lodge a complaint, queer students resist in ways that increase the likelihood that they will become targets of formal and informal school disciplinary sanctions.

Youth Resistance and Self-advocacy

Pathways of formal and informal sanctions mark many queer youth's school experiences. Nevertheless, our participants were not passive victims in their discipline scenarios. Despite sometimes being punished as a consequence, they repeatedly defended and advocated for themselves against bullying, harassment, and inequitable treatment.

In a school climate rife with racial animosity, homophobia, and gender coercion, Kiki's identity, body, and self-expression marked her as a target for harassment and differential treatment by adults and peers. Unwilling to accept the limitations of her school, Kiki defended herself, organized, and spoke out. She continued to press for recognition of her identity at school and to advocate for other queer students. Additionally, Kiki started her school's Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), which she viewed as something that "took action back" to support other students going through similar experiences.

Despite the failure of Joaquin's school administration to intervene when security guards harassed him for the way he dressed, stood, and walked, he and other students resisted. They alerted the administration and their families that they planned to organize against the harassment perpetrated by the security guards:

The last interaction that I had with [the guards] was when I was actually wearing some skinny jeans and they felt the need to comment and make jokes that I was gay or whatnot and I brought to the attention of my principal and then I had my aunt and my mom working on—their part of the school council, local school council, something like that.

In addition, with support from teachers, Joaquin and his GSA pursued a partnership with a local queer theater company that facilitated a collaborative theatrical production focused specifically on queer violence and bullying.

Despite the negative consequences of their experiences at school, our participants demonstrated a well-developed sense of justice and had concrete ideas about what effective discipline would look like. Many put those ideas into action. Casey told us they were “in the process of starting a policy change group just for ... my school district. And one of the things on my list of things to change is our zero tolerance policy and bringing in restorative justice instead of punitive justice.” The youth in our project were able to articulate how to resist punitive discipline and/or harassment from peers or adults, in addition to advocating for both their own rights and the rights of others in the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey suggested, some schools have made attempts—including hosting assemblies, supporting student clubs, and creating or strengthening policies—to support queer youth. In isolation, however, none of these efforts has proven to be the key to rectifying the problem of the disproportionately punitive discipline of marginalized youth or the bullying and harassment they experience. To truly transform the disciplinary experiences of queer youth, we recommend that schools commit to an ongoing process that is comprehensive and contextualized.

As a first step, we recommend listening to Kiki, Joaquin, Casey, and similarly situated youth, because they tell us what has not worked—and more importantly, what has—to make them feel safe, respected, and even honored in their school communities. Our participants suggested a range of possibilities to help schools become more supportive places. Their recommendations ranged from increasing the number of mental health counselors at schools to creating sexuality support groups for students

to implementing restorative justice practices. Guided by our participants' recommendations, the key efforts we propose address the three themes of our project: schools as sites of gender policing, the complex ecologies of school discipline, and the ways that young people resist the injustices they face.

Engage Students as Active Participants

We present the following recommendation first, as it is in many ways our most important, and is a direct and specific way to put listening to young people into action. Additionally, this recommendation can—and should—be integrated into each of the others that follow, which increases the likelihood of success in creating safer schools. Students like Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey reveal critical insight into the overlapping issues they face in their schools—racial profiling, gender coercion, homophobia—and are tenacious in their efforts to challenge them. As such, students make up a critical stakeholder group, but are often devalued or overlooked (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013; Pittman, Martin, & Williams, 2007). If those typically empowered to make changes in schools collaborate authentically with students by seeking their input and actively engaging with them in the transformation process, students' experiences and insights become assets that contribute to relevant and effective solutions.

As highlighted by Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey, schools' efforts to protect marginalized students, for example by removing them to another setting, frequently compound harm to queer students. Rather than viewing particular queer students as the problem and subsequently targeting or excluding them because they do not conform to school-based norms, schools can engage the experiences and expertise of students to address and transform the systemic biases that make them vulnerable (Palmer et al., 2016; Poteat, 2016). As demonstrated by Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey, when queer young people participate in transforming their schools by naming and breaking down the harms they have experienced, their contributions improve school climates to better support all students, including other queer students.

Yet before engaging young people in collaborative school transformation efforts, school leaders must acknowledge the power relations at play and work to protect young people from potential harm. It can be counterproductive and even dangerous to bring young people who are already vulnerable into school transformation work before the adults in a school

are supported to understand the complex ecologies of school discipline. This leads us to our second recommendation, which is aimed at helping adults learn to better support queer youth.

Provide Both Baseline and Targeted Professional Development

It is clear from the experiences of the young people we interviewed that schools are often biased, explicitly and implicitly, against non-normatively gendered and racialized bodies, suggesting the need for baseline professional development on anti-oppressive education, both within pre-professional preparation programs and as a part of a regular cycle of in-service professional development within schools. Even within the larger context of systemic oppression, however, the biases that impact queer students manifest in different ways in different school communities. How youth in our project experienced school discipline was dependent on the situated norms of their schools and the ways systemic biases—including racism, sexism, cis-sexism, homophobia, and classism—were reinforced in the attitudes and actions of people (and policies) in their school contexts.

To transform the disciplinary issues unique to their school communities, schools can provide ongoing professional development tailored to the particular ways in which racism, hetero- and cis-sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other institutionalized forms of oppression impact formal disciplinary systems, as well as students' informal experiences of school discipline (Espelage, Basile, & Hamburger, 2012; Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, 2015; Schriber, Horn, Peter, Bellinger, & Fischer, 2016; Szalacha, 2003). For example, to address the interplay of gender coercion, harassment, and school discipline reported by Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey, schools could train those school personnel most often charged with enforcing dress codes (and implicitly monitoring gender norms), including security guards, to recognize and respond appropriately to issues of gender and gender non-conformity.

Ongoing professional development that is tailored to address a particular school context can also support all school personnel in understanding the impacts of bias on bullying and harassment and the consequences of failing to take these behaviors seriously (Schriber et al., 2016). Kiki's, Joaquin's, and Casey's experiences demonstrate the serious damage caused when those charged with students' safety and wellbeing ignore, aggravate, or instigate the harassment or disparate treatment of queer youth.

To transform a school climate that is antagonistic to queer youth, schools can rethink and positively develop the ways varied personnel interact with students. Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey each confirmed that the adults at school who knew them well were ultimately the most supportive of their safety and wellbeing. In order to foster these supportive relationships, a school can train all personnel, including those often left out of trainings, such as building leaders, deans of discipline, and security guards, in the basics of queer identities, communities, and terminology. Additionally, targeted training can help these varied personnel to recognize the tremendous power they have in their school setting and how to use this influence to positively and productively interact with queer students. Schools can optimize the impact of professional development on school climate transformation by supporting all personnel to participate and by continuing to follow up with and provide additional support to staff as they work to put their learning into action in effective and productive ways.

Assess School Policies and Their Implementation

A school's educational policies represent the shared values, commitments, and priorities of the school community (Schriber et al., 2016). Strong, school-level policies that state explicitly that students are protected against bullying, discrimination, and inequitable treatment related to queer identities and provide clear guidance to both students and staff about rights, protections, and procedures for intervention (Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010), are crucial to reducing bias-related bullying and harassment, as well as inequitable discipline.

Policies alone, however, cannot sufficiently address disparate discipline or bullying and harassment (Fischer, Bellinger, Horn, & Sullivan, 2016; Lugg & Murphy, 2016; Meyer, 2009). To improve the effectiveness of anti-bullying, non-discrimination, dress codes, discipline, and other school policies intended to maintain schools as safe and supportive for all students, schools can create ongoing initiatives to assess whether policy implementation is equitable and aligns with their intended purposes. For example, while a school may develop a strong anti-bullying policy intended to prevent bullying by sanctioning "bullies," its policy may inadvertently lead to the use of its corresponding discipline policy to sanction students who defend themselves against ongoing harassment. In this way, an anti-bullying policy ends up triggering the punishment of the very students it aims to protect. Casey's effort to convene a district policy work group offers schools an example of one way to address these unintended

consequences. Additionally, Kiki, Joaquin, and Casey revealed that their experiences with school discipline or informal sanctions often stemmed from their dress and self-presentation. Schools can examine the ways in which they interpret, implement, and enforce dress codes and whether such policies permit and aggravate implicit and explicit gender policing.

Utilize Data to Uncover How the Intersections of Biases Related to Race, Gender, and Sexuality Impact Queer Students

Our final recommendation is that schools continually engage in attempts to bring to the surface the ways both direct and implicit biases toward queer students impact their experiences with discipline, harassment, and inequitable treatment. One way to do this is through data collection. In Illinois, to better understand the ways in which systemic biases related to such social identities as race, ethnicity, gender, and religion impact students at an institutional level, schools have begun to administer the Bias-Based Bullying Survey (BBBS) (Prevent School Violence Illinois, 2012), an instrument available free of charge. Schools can analyze their BBBS information alongside other data—such as existing discipline records—to discern which groups of students are disciplined, how often, and for what reasons, and to uncover the ways that young people with multiple “marginalized” identities might be at heightened risk for discipline due to discrimination and bias. To ensure the data are most relevant, schools can revise the forms they use to document instances of harassment and discipline to include categories of bias such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Informed by their own unique data, schools can tailor professional development and other interventions that are relevant and impactful.

Data collection can also be informal and student-led. For example, schools could support students in a club or a class to do participatory action research or lead focus groups to gather information around issues important to them (see Chmielewski et al., this volume). Students can then use that information to recommend and implement the interventions they believe would improve the ways in which they experience school.

CONCLUSION

Our project expands a limited body of research by seeking to understand how and why queer youth experience disproportionately punitive school discipline. It suggests that youth’s experiences with school discipline are complex and multifaceted, related to their intersecting identities and the

cycles of surveillance and harassment to which they are continuously subjected within schools. To rectify the disproportionate discipline of queer youth, schools can commit to a comprehensive approach that coordinates tailored educational, data collection, policy, and student engagement interventions. In this way, schools can become safer, more supportive, more equitable, and, ultimately, more engaging spaces for all.

NOTES

1. Throughout this chapter, unless otherwise specified by participants or when citing relevant research, we use the term “queer” as a proxy for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer), to represent a wide range of non-norming sexual and gender identities and expressions.
2. Cisgender is a term denoting or relating to a person whose gender identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex or sex assigned at birth; not transgender.
3. For the purposes of participant safety, we requested and were granted a waiver of parental permission for the study by the University of Illinois at Chicago Institutional Review Board.
4. Throughout this chapter, *sanction* refers to an actual or threatened institutional response from adult disciplinary actors and/or an informal response from school personnel or peers. We use *transgression* to refer to the actions, as recounted by the young person that precipitated a disciplinary sanction, regardless of whether the action violated any actual school rule or policy.
5. All three are pseudonyms.

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