

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Persons

In the Intersection: GLBT Youth of Color

"I am what time, circumstance [and] history have made of me, certainly, but I am also much more than that. So are we all."

— James A. Baldwin (1924-1987), Black GLBT essayist, author, and civil rights advocate.

Introduction

It has been well documented that many American ethnic minority students face an array of obstacles ranging from racism, crime and class barriers to unequal educational opportunities and culturally and linguistically incompatible community programs.

We also know that our nation's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students must cope with homophobia, high levels of bullying and harassment, familial rejection, homelessness, depression and even suicide.

What happens, then, when students identify as *both* an ethnic minority and GLBT? Do they face even greater hardship? How do they relate to peers, family, school and community? How does one part of their identity affect the other? Can they bridge these separate identities? How do they navigate between communities that are sometimes perceived as inimical to each other? And what are their contributions to society and to our collective experience as Americans?

This publication outlines some key issues faced by a uniquely vulnerable population: GLBT youth of color.

Multiple Oppressions

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute noted that GLBT youth of color face three distinct oppressive experiences:

- Homophobia from their respective racial or ethnic group;
- Racism from within a predominantly white GLBT community; and
- Homophobia and racism from society at large.¹

It should also be noted that transgender youth of color may be further marginalized by GLBT and other communities on

account of their gender identity or gender expression. And GLBT immigrants may experience an additional sense of cultural dislocation that presents additional challenges.²

Not surprisingly, some GLBT people of color feel pressure to "choose" between their ethnic and their sexual (GLBT) identities.³ Others feel that they have a "foot in each culture" without a sense of belonging to either.⁴ GLBT people of color continually risk losing the refuge gained from one community with which they identify when they express another part of their identity to that same community.

Homophobia in ethnic minority communities

Many GLBT ethnic minority youth rely on other members of their racial or ethnic group for support. At the same time, in these very communities, they may be subjected to a denial of their homosexuality, homophobia, and a rejection of people who do not conform to ethno-cultural norms on gender and sexual orientation.⁵ In particular, as one researcher notes, rigid notions of gender tend to influence attitudes toward GLBT people among some ethnic minority populations: "A common fallacy within communities of color is that gay men or lesbians are perceived as 'defective' men or women who want to be a member of the opposite gender."⁶

Recent polls of GLBT ethnic minorities, while inconclusive, suggest varying degrees of homophobia within ethnic minority communities:

- 22 percent of Black GLBT people have negative experiences in Black heterosexual organizations; 43 percent of Black GLBT people had negative experiences in churches or religious institutions.⁷
- Latino gay men reported experiencing negative messages within Latino communities—for example, that their sexuality was dirty, shameful and abnormal, and that they were not truly "men"—and feeling estranged or exiled from their communities.⁸
- Approximately nine out of ten Asian and Pacific Islander (API) GLBT people agreed that homophobia and/or transphobia is a problem within the broader API community.⁹



Racism in GLBT communities

While many GLBT ethnic minorities rely on the mainstream GLBT community for support, they also perceive the GLBT community as catering largely to whites, and often feel rejection or negation of their cultural or ethnic identity, and racism and discrimination from the mainstream GLBT organizations, businesses and media.

- 78 percent of API GLBT people experience racism within the predominantly white GLBT community.¹⁰
- Half of the 2,645 Black GLBT respondents to a national survey agreed that racism is a problem for Black GLBT people in their relations with white GLBT people; one fifth “strongly agreed” to this sentiment.¹¹
- Latino gay men have reported experiencing racism in the mainstream gay community and at gay venues because of their look, color or accent, and objectified in their relationships with white men.¹²

School Safety and GLBT Youth of Color

Safety remains a paramount concern for GLBT youth of color. This nearly goes without saying: the FBI has consistently reported that race, ethnicity and sexual orientation as among the top five bases for hate crimes nationally.¹³ People who identify in more than one vulnerable population may face significantly higher chances of being victimized at some point during their lives.

School-based data on verbal and physical harassment appear to corroborate what we know from the hate crime statistics. According to a 2005 national study by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN):

- 44 percent of GLBT students of color report experiencing verbal harassment due to both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity.¹⁴
- 13 percent of GLBT students of color experience physical harassment due to both sexual orientation and race/ethnicity.¹⁵
- Nearly 7 percent of GLBT students of color report being physically *assaulted* due to both sexual orientation and race/ethnicity.¹⁶
- Students who were harassed due to both sexual orientation and race/ethnicity were much more likely to miss school than students who were harassed for one or for neither reason.¹⁷

Recommendations for Schools

The following action steps may help school personnel better address the needs of GLBT ethnic minority youth. Because information related to diversity is often sensitive in nature, school personnel are advised to consult with school administrators and school Association representatives before taking action.

- Conduct training of school personnel on GLBT issues that includes discussion of ethnic minority GLBT students.
- Conduct training of school personnel on racial and ethnic diversity that includes discussion of ethnic minority GLBT students.
- Adopt policies protecting GLBT and ethnic minority youth from bullying and harassment.
- Highlight GLBT people of color in American history that may serve as role models for ethnic minority GLBT students.
- Partner with community organizations that serve ethnic minority and/or GLBT youth to ensure that the diverse needs of students are being met.
- Host parent and student/peer education programs that address issues of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Ensure that GLBT student groups such as Gay-Straight Alliances are welcoming of students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and that racial and ethnic affinity clubs are welcoming of GLBT ethnic minority students.

Recommendations for Stakeholders and Community Organizations

- *GLBT organizations*: place greater emphasis on the needs of ethnic minorities and address individual, institutional and societal racism both within and outside your organization; prioritize issues that matter to many GLBT people of color, such as race, class, poverty, criminal justice, religion, HIV/AIDS, and access to healthcare; ensure that ethnic minorities are included at every level of your organization and in every initiative and campaign.
- *Ethnic minority community organizations*: place greater emphasis on the needs of GLBT individuals and address homophobia within and outside your organization; address the silence and shame on GLBT issues that may exist in your communities.
- *HIV/AIDS healthcare providers*: provide culturally competent services to and outreach in ethnic minority communities, not only in predominantly white or traditionally GLBT communities.
- *Researchers and foundations*: study (or fund studies on) the intersections of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and

gender identity as well as how these intersections affect students and their families.

- **Government:** Enact policy protections for GLBT and ethnic minority students and employees from bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

Conclusion

“Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us . . . To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, [and] push the unacceptable parts into the shadows.”

— Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-), co-author of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*

The understanding of the lives of GLBT youth of color is still in its infancy. We know some aspects of their complex lives, but we must know more. In particular, the following topics pertaining to GLBT youth of color bear closer examination:

- Culturally sensitive outreach to families of GLBT students of color
- The influence of religion on family dynamics among GLBT youth of color
- Language barriers within the family and when seeking community resources
- Social isolation, bullying and harassment
- Truancy, dropout rates and other barriers to academic achievement
- Homelessness
- Health risks (including HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, suicide)
- Lack of tailored community resources
- Lack of role models.

We are beginning to recognize that, while there are commonalities among Asian and Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native communities on GLBT issues, members of these communities also have different histories, role models, and influences that shape their unique relationships with and attitudes toward members of the GLBT community. Likewise, the GLBT community's relationship with communities of color differs from location to location, and even household by household.

For our GLBT youth of color, race and sexual orientation are but two of the many aspects of their identity, the whole of which is continually shaped by the push and pull of the indi-

vidual parts. As education employees, we must first recognize the challenge of identity integration and other challenges faced by GLBT youth of color if we are to help them succeed in school and beyond.

¹ Cianciotto, J. and Cahill, S. *Education Policy: Issues Affecting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth*. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute (2003), pp. 110-13.

² Ryan, C. *A Review of the Professional Literature and Research Needs for LGBT Youth of Color*. National Youth Advocacy Coalition (2002).

³ See, e.g., Dube & Savin-Williams (1999).

⁴ See Tremble, Schneider and Appathurai (1989).

⁵ See Ryan & Futterman (1998).

⁶ Ryan, C. (2002), p. 7.

⁷ Battle, J. et al. *Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud*. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute (2002), p. 45.

⁸ Diaz and Ayala. *Social Discrimination and Health: The Case of Latino Gay Men and HIV Risk*. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute (2001), p. 9.

⁹ Dang, A., and Vianney, C. *Living in the margins: A national survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Asian and Pacific Islander Americans*. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute (2007), p. 5; Dang, A. and Hu, M. *Asian Pacific American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People: A Community Portrait*. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute(2005), p. 4.

¹⁰ Dang and Vianney (2007).

¹¹ Battle, J. et al. (2000), p. 6.

¹² Diaz and Ayala (2001).

¹³ <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2005/victims.htm>

¹⁴ *The 2005 National School Climate Survey*. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (2005), pp. 59-60.

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ Id.

¹⁷ Id. See Table 12.



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Resources about and for GLBT ethnic minorities

Note that some organizations below are national in scope; others are local or regional. The links below represent only a partial selection of such organizations. Because some GLBT ethnic minority organizations are transient and under-funded, some organizations may no longer exist or have active staff. Please check the resource pages of existing websites for a list of the most current resources.

Adodi. African American GLBT organization. <http://members.aol.com/adodiny/Default.htm>

African Americans and Coming Out. Latinas/Latinos and Coming Out. Asian Pacific Americans and Coming Out. Human Rights Campaign. www.hrc.org

Amassi. HIV/AIDS/health organization for African American and Latino men. www.amassi.com

API Family Pride. Organization for Asian American and Pacific Islanders with GLBT family members. www.apifamilypride.org

Asian Equality. An ad-hoc coalition of GLBT API organizations. www.asianequality.org

Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center. HIV/AIDS/health organization for the Asian American and Pacific Islander (API) community. www.apowellness.org

Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits. GLBT American Indian organization. www.baaits.org

Bienestar. HIV/AIDS/health organization for Latino/a community. www.bienestar.org

California Safe Schools Coalition. Excellent research publications on GLBT youth. www.casafeschools.org

Gay Men of African Descent. www.gmad.org

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. *The 2005 National School Climate Survey; School-Related Experiences of LGBT Youth of Color* (2004). www.glsen.org

Immigration Equality. GLBT & immigrants' rights organization. www.immigrationequality.org

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. Human rights organization for GLBT people and people with HIV/AIDS. www.iglhrc.org

Kulia Na Mamo. Kulia Na Mamo is a social justice organization established in 2001 to help disadvantaged people of color - with particular focus on Hawaii's transgender population. www.kulianamamo.org

Latino Gay Men of New York. www.lgmny.org

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. *Education Policy: Issues Affecting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth* (2003). www.thetaskforce.org

National Native American AIDS Prevention Center. Addresses impact of HIV/AIDS on American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian peoples. www.nnaapc.org

NativeOUT. A grassroots Native American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Two-Spirit (LGBTTS) group in Phoenix, Arizona. www.nativeout.com

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Families of Color Network. *Nuestra Hijas y Nuestro Hijos*. A guide for parents - in Spanish. www.pflag.org

The Red Circle Project. Resources Program Targeting Native American/Two-Spirit People with HIV/AIDS. www.apla.org/nativeamerican/RCP/twospiritgroups/index.htm

Safe Schools Coalition. Provides clearinghouse of resources for the education community on GLBT issues. www.safeschoolscoalition.org

Trikone. GLBT South Asian organization. www.trikone.org

United Lesbians of African Heritage. <http://members.aol.com/uloah/>

Youth Resource. Plethora of information for GLBT youth, including youth of color. www.youthresource.com