

# Retracing Queer Moments: Drawing a Comparison Between Past and Present LGBTQ Issues

by

Hidehiro Endo and Paul Chamness Reece-Miller

As junior educational researchers who are seriously concerned with the future of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) students and teachers, educational issues for LGBTQ students and teachers have become our primary line of research. The prevalent LGBTQ issues found not only in the United States of America, but also in global contexts, disquiet us since we know, from first-hand experience, what it is like to be a homosexual individual where one's personality does not fit the gender stereotypes dictated by those who are intolerant of our differences, and who mistreat us. We both were coincidentally born in 1971 and experienced our elementary and secondary schooling years in the 1970s and 1980s, even though the countries in which each of us grew up are different, the USA and Japan. In our research, we have explored LGBTQ educational issues using qualitative methods in order to find the unheard voices of LGBTQ individuals, and to transform their experiences into new knowledge through our descriptive work. Nevertheless, we have not had an opportunity to revisit and explore our own personal experiences as "queer" men and how we became who we are today. These experiences from our past are the moving forces behind our desire to raise awareness of the struggles that LGBTQ students and teachers live. In an attempt to develop a better theoretical ground that directs educators/educational researchers to become aware of the importance of providing a safe space for all students and teachers regardless of their sexual orientation in the future, it is a necessary practice for us to reflect on the past experiences of LGBTQ individuals in understanding the fundamental social, cultural, and political problems centered around homosexuality. It is in this light that we came to a decision to write a narrative of our own that demonstrates what it was like to be individuals questioning our sexuality growing up in a rural area in the USA and an industrial city near

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Tokyo back in the '70s and '80s. We use our personal stories as analytic tools to investigate the relationship between homosexuality and the educational system, raise awareness of the similarities and differences between past and present LGBTQ issues, and examine the impediments that hinder people from being tolerant of homosexuality. The two stories seem to be unrelated personal experiences of East and West, but there are some intriguing connections between the two. Given that the paradigm of globalization has become a significant theoretical instrument in the academic field of education, the experiences of the LGBTQ population all over the world also become global concerns. Therefore, exploring our two short memoirs can enable us to further the importance of examining LGBTQ issues in a global context and extend queer knowledge beyond national borders. Consequently, we focus on present educational issues for the LGBTQ population and examine the challenges that they face in understanding what path today's queer researchers need to take to meet the needs of LGBTQ students and teachers in the future.

### Paul's Story: A "Recovering" Queer Pentecostal

I think that deep down I have known that I am gay for a very long time. For much of my childhood, I did not have a label to identify myself, but I knew that I was different than most of my male classmates. I also knew that I had feelings for my male classmates that were also different, and for which I seemed to have some sort of intrinsic shame. I grew up in various rural, relatively conservative communities throughout the Midwest region of the USA. At the same time, I grew up in a strict, fundamentalist Christian household, where being gay is viewed as a sin. The religious influence to which I was exposed also contributed to the fear I had of my sexual identity, which led to denying who I am to myself and trying to keep it a secret from everyone else. I was petrified that my friends, classmates, and family would find out, and I was perhaps even more worried about what would happen to me after they found out. However, my classmates were very perceptive and seemed to figure out that I am gay anyway, and they tormented me because of it. I was called names, my locker was vandalized, I was threatened, and my clothes were stolen on many occasions in gym class. Riding the school bus was an even worse experience, where I was constantly called names, poked, hit on the back of the head, spat upon, and my belongings were taken from me and tossed around the bus. Much of this occurred because the bus driver was oblivious to anything going on behind the white line at the front of the bus, although I do wonder if he just turned a blind eye and allowed my torture to take place because of his homophobic sentiments.

Because there were no teachers in my school who claimed to be supportive of LGBTQ students, and given my parents' religious views, I did not know whom I could trust. So, instead of confiding in someone, I kept these experiences and my feelings to myself. As you might imagine, although I was academically a strong

student, I *hated* school for its social aspects. I did not have many friends because I was afraid of rejection if they found out I was gay, and I dreaded cooperative learning activities, and many students did not want to work with me. It was especially stressful in those situations when a teacher would ask the class to find its own groups. Lunchtime brought on more stress, where few people were willing to sit with me. So I usually skipped lunch and hid in a cubicle in the library each day, and as soon as school was over, I went home. Rarely did I spend any time with my classmates outside of school except for those who went to my church.

Overall, my teachers were very nice. This was probably because I excelled in my classes and worked hard. There were a couple of teachers around whom I felt particularly comfortable in high school, although I wasn't sure they would accept me for who I was, so I still could not confide in them. Despite the stereotypes of physical education teachers and queer students, I cannot say that the teachers were a problem for me, although I really did have a difficult time in those classes. I was never very athletically inclined, and the stress in gym class certainly did not motivate me to want to participate in sports. The locker room was an awful experience, especially on days when the teacher required us to take a shower. Some of my classmates assumed I was going to "check them out" in the shower, and would make comments to me about not looking at them or sometimes they would make sexual comments in a mocking way. The ridicule continued throughout all of my high school years, and at one point in my adolescence, I began to feel like I could not take the torment anymore and wished that I would simply no longer exist. Of course, my religious beliefs forbade me even considering suicide, but I would often lie in bed at night and hope that, like Elijah, I would just vanish into thin air.

Throughout my years as an undergraduate student, I continued to remain in fundamentalist, Pentecostal-type churches. My religious beliefs were the driving force for keeping my sexual identity repressed. But for me, the life-changing experience came when I had the opportunity to study in France my junior year. Living in another country began to open my eyes to the notion that there are other viewpoints about many aspects of life, including those of faith. For example, I was astonished to see other Pentecostal Christians in France drinking wine and beer, something that is completely acceptable by European standards. Examples such as this one began to lead me to question my religious convictions and what I had been led to believe throughout my life. In particular, my experience in France was a catalyst for questioning my views on homosexuality and in essence it was at this time in my life that I began reconciling my own religious and sexual identities.

It took several years for me to fully process what this international experience triggered within me. One of the first places to which I turned was a number of gay-oriented newsgroups through the Internet, where I began to communicate with people who were experiencing similar issues. We discussed the Bible and the various verses that are frequently cited against homosexuality, as well as issues about how to respond to such arguments as the Bible being "the infallible Word of

God.” These discussions with others led to my leaving fundamentalist Christianity for a Christianity that is more affirming of all diversity. Even after leaving my church, I still struggled with reconciling my religious and sexual identity. I joined the choir in my new church and discovered that several of my fellow choristers, as well as the choirmaster, were openly gay. It was a great feeling to be in a place of worship where I could be who I was, yet I felt ashamed at the same time, and was still not comfortable with others knowing about my sexual orientation. But slowly, that shame diminished and I began to accept who I am and at the same time was able to find peace in my religious beliefs.

It was throughout this journey of reconciliation, coupled with my experience as a gay student, that I decided that when I became a high school teacher, I would make it a priority to make sure that my students knew they could come to me to discuss anything that they were going through. Of course, given the conservative nature of schools and teaching, I chose to remain largely in the closet at school, except for a few colleagues with whom I established a comfortable level of trust. I found it interesting, however, to rediscover how perceptive teenagers can be, and was even more surprised to find how open they were. Something for which I take great pride is the rapport I am able to build with my students, to the point that my students feel comfortable bringing up a variety of topics that perhaps they wouldn't discuss with other teachers. During my first year of teaching high school in a large urban school, one class in particular was very close to me. When they learned that I was single at the time, they took it upon themselves to attempt to set me up with one of our male security guards at the school.

My second teaching job was in a rural school, where the environment was very different from that of my first, starting with a prayer at breakfast for the teachers the day before classes began, to Christmas music being played over the loudspeaker during the last two days before winter break. The principal had his nose in everyone's business, and even told one colleague that he and his girlfriend couldn't live together. I am certain that the American Civil Liberties Union would have “a field day” in this school district. But despite the negativity coming from the administrators' office, I once again seemed to pique the interest of my students, who strived for an entire year to get me to come out to them. I did not want to lie, but was not comfortable disclosing the details of my personal life, especially given the conservative views of the administration. However, at the end of that year of teaching, I started my doctoral studies and left my position at this school. In the end, my students found out that I am gay, and several took the time to contact me and congratulate me on finally being honest. In most situations, students do not think of the political repercussions of a teacher coming out to them, but I cannot help but think about why parents and other community members are so concerned about “protecting” their children, when they are able to discern details of our lives that we attempt to hide from them. What is more, students, at least in my situation, are more receptive to diversity than their parents are. However, the teaching profession as a whole is still not ready to welcome LGBTQ faculty with

open arms in many places. As a result, I felt compelled to hop back into the closet at school, although I was living life out of the closet outside of the classroom.

My journey to complete reconciliation advanced significantly when I entered my doctoral program and I began to discover how open, accepting, and affirming many people are in higher education. I began to take classes that challenged heteronormative society and ideology, and realized that in order for society to change, it was important that I also not hide in the closet, but challenge such ideology. I am now at a point in my life where I no longer hide who I am with my friends or at work. I am actively involved in LGBTQ events and activities, and I proudly display my sticker announcing that I am a “safe zone” on whom LGBTQ students can rely. While there is still a lot of work ahead in terms of making our society an affirmative, safe place for sexual minorities, I do feel that in my life I have come a long way in my journey, where I have found many people who accept, affirm, and love me. I still have struggles, and I choose from time to time to selectively return to the closet, typically to avoid confrontation. But I am working to get to a point where I will no longer make these choices. I feel that each year I am improving in this personal goal and believe that some day I can say that I have successfully completed this journey.

### Hidehiro's Story: Memoir of a Queer Japanese Man

*Okama* (queer or fag). Several people called me this throughout my elementary, junior, and senior high school years. The term *okama* was used to refer to a male person who did not fit into the gender stereotypes embedded in Japanese society or those who were interested in people of the same sex prior to the emergence of the terms “homo” or “gay” later on. I was a young child in the mid to late 1970s, and as long as I can remember, I was aware of the term *okama*. Several flamboyant male entertainers were around as singers and actors in the Japanese entertainment business even before I was born, and people called them *okama* even back then. Although I mentioned that *okama* was also used to refer to a male person who likes other males, the term was used more frequently to refer to men who were flamboyant or feminine. I abhorred the discriminatory remark so much. I felt the term was used to insult the human character or individual personality of someone who deviated from the gender stereotypes that had been socially, culturally, historically, and politically constructed in Japanese society. Every time some of my peers in my schools called me *okama*, I was forced to feel that I was an inferior and atypical creature for not being able to fit into the gender stereotypes. The label *okama* was applied to me throughout my school years.

I was born in 1971 in Japan as the second and youngest child of my parents, whom I unconditionally love and respect. I grew up in an industrial city with a population of 150,000 inhabitants, which is located about 80 miles north of Tokyo, Japan's capital. My older sister and I were raised in a middle-class family and my father worked at one of the major automobile industries in Japan for about

40 years. My mother is a homemaker who was took care of the children and the housework. Both of my parents were born in the middle of World War II and they each grew up on a farm in rural Japan. Following the birth of my sister, they purchased one of the houses in the new residential area that was constructed for the purpose of accommodating the employees who worked for the large industry in the late '60s. A community that values ties among families settled in the residential area and the concept of caring was established. The neighborhood children, my sister, and I grew up in this community.

From my earliest recollections, I was already intrigued by Japanese popular culture, particularly Japanese popular idol music, and I became addicted to the music programs on TV and the radio. In the late '70s, a sensational female duo named Pink Lady appeared in the media and many young people of both sexes were fascinated with their songs, which were accompanied with their easy-to-remember choreography, as well as their charming appearance. My sister and I were also riveted by Pink Lady and began to learn their songs and choreography so we could sing and dance along with them. Even though Pink Lady gained a nationwide popularity from people of both sexes, singing and dancing with their songs was considered to be a "girly" thing. The norm that boys were not supposed to sing popular songs sung by female idol singers was entrenched in Japanese society. My enjoying singing songs of both male and female popular singers, which broke the social norm, guided people to see me as a "special" boy. A homeroom teacher of my 1st and 2nd grade years who noticed my "special" nature of liking to sing Pink Lady's songs with choreography sometimes made me perform Pink Lady songs in class. When I was a 2nd grader, the teacher asked me to perform a Pink Lady song at the whole school assembly. There was a time that my elementary school made some of the students who had special talents and skills perform at the school assembly. Back then, teachers were absolute figures in school, and students were supposed to be loyal to their teachers. In the educational environment where I was not allowed to say no to teachers, all I could do was complete the mission that they ordered. I could not tell my parents that I was going to perform Pink Lady in front of 1,400 students and 30 or 40 teachers. I sensed that my parents would be disappointed if they knew that their son was going to disclose his special talent that emphasized his "queerness" to the entire school population, even though they had never told me not to sing the songs of female singers. Shortly after the completion of my Pink Lady performance, the news was flashed all over the school community. My mother also heard the shocking news regarding her son's performance through the parents of the neighborhood children on that day. Although the aftermath of the event that I went through did not make me stop going to school, I was so ashamed of making the performance at the school assembly. The event unquestionably encouraged other students to call me *okama* in the school community. I became a legendary flamboyant boy in my school. I bore a grudge for a long time against the female teacher for making me perform a Pink Lady song at the assembly. I still do not understand how a teacher could be

so insensitive and make one of her students be a laughing stock. It should not be so difficult to imagine what the consequences of the performance would be, which was something I had to confront in my school.

In my early childhood, I was not so conscious of my sexual orientation. It was reaching puberty, which aroused my interest in people of the same sex. Not much information regarding the life of queer people and who they were existed in mainstream Japanese society in the early '80s, except for the presence of the flamboyant entertainers. I intuitively knew that liking other men or saying that I liked men was taboo. I knew that living my life as a homosexual would bring me bountiful socially and culturally intricate hardships. Most importantly, with the traditional custom of the Japanese family system developed in the Edo period (1600-1868), a child of parents, commonly the oldest son, is supposed to extend the family that his/her parents or grand parents developed and become a successor to the family house. And of course, I was the oldest and only son for my parents.

The deplorable news of the death of an American actor, Rock Hudson, who died with an AIDS-related illness extended Japanese people's acknowledgement of HIV/AIDS and the term homosexuality in the mid '80s. Along with the image of Rock Hudson, a masculine Caucasian man, gay-themed British films, such as *Another Country* and *Maurice*, played in select theaters and led some Japanese people to become aware of the presence of "manly" men who are attracted to people of the same sex and increased an awareness of the term *homo* to refer to "men" who like "men." The influence of the West unquestionably contributed to the construction of the homosexual image that differs from that of *okama*.

Through my junior and senior high school years, there were several people who continued making fun of my Pink Lady performance and called me "sissy." But with my athletic talents and leadership qualities, I had many opportunities to show people that I was not just a sissy boy. Also having a group of good friends helped me to disregard the name calling. There were a few other boys who were also labelled *okama* in my schools. They must have gone through the similar psychological anguish that I experienced for being who I am. Sadly, I spent my schooling years in the period of time when it was only natural that a person who could not fit into the "appropriate" gender roles would be publicly rebuked by others. Even though ridiculing a "special" individual who deviates from the stereotypical gender image constructed in Japan was acceptable social conduct, being different or becoming who you wanted to be was an intolerable human behavior. The field of Japanese education was negligent in educating students about the presence of diversity in sexual orientations and was completely unconcerned with questioning the social and cultural norm that reinforces the validity of heteronormativity.

Between the late '80s and the early '90s, while Japanese society was celebrating a period of prosperity called "the bubble economy," the number of LGBTQ organizations gradually grew. Japanese media started to feature the news regarding LGBTQ activism taking place overseas, especially in the USA. The news

had an impact on the development of LGBTQ communities in Japan. “Gay” and “lesbian” became more general terms in the early ‘90s to refer to those who are attracted to people of the same sex, and the use of the discriminatory remark *okama* was slowly disappearing. A few gay-themed Japanese films were made and the lives of gay Japanese people became an important social and cultural component of mainstream Japanese popular culture in the early ‘90s. In 1993, a primetime Japanese TV drama called *Dokyusei* (classmates), which was centered on the lives of gay Japanese people in their 20s and their friends, was broadcast on one of the national TV networks for three months. The TV drama that portrayed closeted gay individuals’ struggles drew many Japanese people’s attention.

In the early ‘90s, I attended a university located in Tokyo and lived by myself in an apartment. That was the time that I gradually began to achieve emancipation from my homosexuality that I had attempted to deny and subjugate since puberty. I could not continue to deceive myself to pretend to be someone who I did not know in order to blend into the continuum of heteronormativity. There were a few key factors that were behind this emancipation. A meeting with a friend who was also questioning his sexuality at that time at my university was the biggest support that I had in accepting my homosexuality. My living condition, living alone in Tokyo where Japan’s largest LGBTQ community, Shinjuku *Ni-chome*, exists, was absolutely one of these significant factors, too. There are hundreds of various gay and lesbian bars and dance clubs in *Ni-chome* located in Shinjuku Ward, one of the 23 Wards that are part of central Tokyo. Being able to meet and talk with other LGBTQ people in the largest community in Japan encouraged me to think positively about my sexual orientation.

Although the coming-out process that I endured was not an easy path, I began to come out to my closest friends following the completion of my Bachelor’s degree. Yet, I was a closeted gay man. It was very difficult for me to live my life as an openly gay man in Japanese society, especially Japanese business society, in the mid ‘90s. I was not content with my job, my life, and who I was. While I was in a college, my attention to American culture, American people, and English language vastly grew because “America” was portrayed in Japanese media as a great country with freedom, democratic society, and liberal people who are LGBTQ friendly. My interest in “the dream land” continued to grow. Together with my robust desire to become an English/Japanese bilingual, my strong interest in experiencing an America that had been depicted in Japanese media as the greatest place in the world, full of liberty and happiness following the end of World War II, finally led me to move temporally to this “magical land” in 1998.

At that point, I saw America as a diaspora where I could copiously enjoy my life as a gay person. I voluntarily left Japan 11 years ago. I cannot tell whether this country is the diaspora I once thought it to be. Additionally, I am not sure whether I am an individual who needs a diaspora. But I am still in the USA, the country that I thought was a peaceful and joyful place for LGBTQ people.



## Past – Two Queers from the East and West

These two short autobiographies centered around our queer questioning moments are very personal and might be distinctive experiences. However, these experiences have had an effect on how we became who we are today. Some of our bitter experiences in the past pushed us to carry out extensive research on educational issues for LGBTQ students and teachers in order to understand and meet their needs. Our educational experiences were mostly overlooked back in the '70s and '80s. It is our obligation to develop an awareness of the educational issues that are significant for LGBTQ students and teachers. Furthermore, we thought it was necessary to disclose our past struggles that have been concealed for far too long. There must be something that we can pass on to the next generation through the examination of our experiences. By exploring and comparing these two short memories of two queers in their late 30s, we found some differences, similarities and connections between the two, which we examine in the next section by further revisiting our past.

The most significant differences are religious, cultural, and regional factors that reinforce the ill representation of homosexuals. Paul's narrative raises some questions regarding the socially, politically, historically, and culturally intricate relationship between Christianity and homosexuality. Christianity has been the predominant religion in the USA, and many Christians believe that homosexuality is a sin and an intolerable human characteristic (Fetner, 2005). Considering the fact he grew up in a fundamental Christian family in the rural Midwest, it was only natural that he was afraid of accepting his homosexual identity in his youth. There was no one to whom he could talk about the fearful truth of his sexual identity throughout his elementary and secondary schooling years. Moreover, the school was not a safe and pleasant learning space for him. Although he was not out to anyone in his school milieu, many of his peers took notice of his unusual characteristics that diverged from the stereotypical male gender images, such as tough, rough, rowdy, strong, etc. Given that understanding the presence of the LGBTQ population was not respected in the area where he grew up, his differences became an easy target for his peers.

In contrast, for Hidehiro, who grew up in an industrial city in Japan, there is no strong religious influence that severely affects how people see homosexuality and the lives of LGBTQ people (McLelland, 2005). Of course, the lack of religious affiliation does not mean that Japanese people are tolerant of LGBTQ individuals, but in Japanese society, being gay is not seen as sinful conduct. Rather, it is perceived as a nuisance that prohibits people from having a "traditional" family. This societal ethical value is anchored in the principle of Confucianism, which highly emphasizes the importance of family. Marrying someone and raising children is seen as "normal" human behavior in Japanese society. Japanese society views being gay as a shameful and abnormal human behavior, especially since gay people do not typically carry on the family name with children from their

own bloodline. Moreover, in a society where male chauvinism has historically been valued for such a long time, homosexuals who deviate from the societal male roles such as strong, patriarchal, manly, and so forth, are, more or less, considered outlandish human beings.

There are also other differences of note between the two stories. While Paul was forced to dislike his physical education classes due to the intolerable harassment, Hidehiro, who enjoyed playing sports, gradually developed his athletic talents, and they were noted as another dimension of who he was. Even though Hidehiro's athletic talents did not eradicate his standing as a queer individual, the physical strength that he developed prevented his peers from physically harassing him. Additionally, he earned some respect from his peers based on his athletic talents and fostered a better friendship with them. However, the remorseful fact is that Paul lost opportunities to enjoy his physical education classes and expand his athletic skills due to the physical harassment that he endured. Consequently, he lost some of his accessibility to educational knowledge and experiences. Queerness that LGBTQ students own cannot be a factor that denies them the same educational opportunities that their heterosexual peers enjoy. Throughout our elementary and secondary schooling experiences, no teachers taught other students the importance of being tolerant of the differences that made us who we are.

Conversely, there are also similarities between Paul and Hidehiro's stories. Firstly, it is very important to call attention to the fact that we were subjected to cruel name calling throughout our schooling. We view name calling as a form of verbal abuse, which is also considered by many as a form of violence (Elze, 2003). The name calling that we experienced frequently hurt us, and this traumatic experience made us fearful of constructing our homosexual identity and becoming who we wanted to be in our youth. The name calling experiences we endured seems to have had a strong relationship with the gender stereotypes our peers believed, with the gender roles deeply entrenched in our society. Our queer nature deviated from the stereotypical image of male roles. We often felt that the verbal abuse we experienced was punishment for our inassimilable nature to the male roles.

Another similarity worth mentioning is that we both had a meaningful encounter with gay individuals in our college years. Having the opportunity to interact with other gay persons in the community where we belonged was instrumental in establishing our own life as gay individuals. Gaining a gay friend with whom we could share our agonies, struggles, and happiness as gay men unquestionably taught us that we could be proud of who we are. This commonality indicates that attending our university was a very crucial turning point in establishing our queer identity. We both went to a large university that serves a diverse student population. For us, attending a university was more than an experience of gaining skills and knowledge to help us to find a better job. University also provided us with a learning experience that developed our self-esteem, established our queer identity,

and taught us the importance of being tolerant of and eventually accepting and embracing others *for* their differences.

The last significant commonality between our stories is that we both had an international experience. Living in a foreign country without a doubt assisted us in broadening our multicultural outlook on life. Furthermore, these experiences also served as a cultural lesson that made us question our ethnocentrism that we had developed from living in a relatively monocultural society throughout our youth. By seeing social and cultural phenomena to which we were so accustomed outside the box, we were able to objectively comprehend why many people who live in our society have some hatred toward the lives of LGBTQ persons. Becoming aware of the reasons why it is so important for the dominant group (i.e., heterosexuals) to uphold heteronormativity, taught us what it is like to be a LGBTQ individual in today's society. Then, we realized that we were born in the world not to live our life being ashamed of our queerness in this heteronormative society, but to proudly live our queer life by questioning the culture of the dominant group.

## Present and Future: Creating safe space for LGBTQ students

In this last section of our article, we aim to examine whether the social circumstances for LGBTQ students at present in the educational environment have improved since the time we experienced our schooling years. In so doing, we attempt to address the challenges that LGBTQ students and teachers face in today's society and why it is important for educators and researchers to mull over the significance of providing a safe space for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation in schools.

One of the primary concerns in school is unquestionably the long standing presence of name calling centered on the LGBTQ population and jeering at queerness in the educational milieu. As Galliher, Rostosky, and Hughes (2004) have noted, schools fail to foster a sense of belonging for LGBTQ students; instead, they encourage invisibility, forcing these "invisible" students to spend a good deal of their time in school on "visibility management" (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). The outcome of this invisibility is bullying, harassment, physical harm, and other hateful acts against LGBTQ students (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; D'Augelli, et al., 2002; Rivers & D'Augelli, 2001).

The findings from the latest national survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008) reveal many of the outcomes that exist for LGBTQ adolescents. For example, 73.6 % of the participants, 6,209 LGBTQ middle and high school students surveyed from all 50 of the United States, heard derogatory comments such as "faggot" or "dyke" in their school. Alas, approximately 60 % of all the participants reported that school is an unsafe space for them as a consequence of their sexuality. As these percentages suggest, verbal victimization such as this is the most common

form of harassment found in school, and is even perpetuated by teachers who use and allow these comments to continue in the classroom (Elze, 2003). Several other studies across the nation have reported similar results (see D'Augelli, et al., 2002; Remafedi, 1987).

It would appear that a significant result of avoiding the issues that LGBTQ students experience in school is the continued discrimination and marginalization against them. To make matters worse, as some researchers claim, not only do numerous teachers harbor negative feelings when placed in situations of direct interaction with LGBTQ students, colleagues, or parents (Sears, 1991), but they also use homophobic jokes (Elze, 2003). Teachers are supposed to be role models for their students. If the role models chronically use homophobic slurs in front of their students, it is unfeasible to imagine that their students can comprehend the consequences of the vicious name calling practice. Moreover, the phenomenon of teachers using homophobic jokes in schools undeniably perpetuates the idea that LGBTQ population deserves to be bashed because they are "homo." It is clear that the indissoluble bind between the anti-homo sentiments deeply entrenched in our society and the heteronormative ideology requires further challenging.

Conversely, there is remarkable progress regarding the appearance of student organizations that support and shape the LGBTQ population and community in schools, particularly in the USA, compared to our secondary school years in the mid '80s. Alas, the presence of such organizations is absent in several Asian nations, as well as in many other countries in the world. The number of organizations, so-called Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), has drastically increased in the past decade. According to GLSEN (2009), the first alliance was founded in 1988 and the number of GSAs reached 1,000 in 2001. Astonishingly, the number has quadrupled in the past seven years (GLSEN, 2009). This improvement, which has advocated for the significance of making available safe spaces for LGBTQ students, is a vast progression. Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer (2004) have argued that GSAs play a significant role in developing an awareness of the presence of LGBTQ students in schools. However, Griffin, et al. also conjecture on the GSAs' role as a liaison for improving anti-LGBTQ attitude ingrained in schools.

Certainly, neither of us had a GSA in our high schools. Having had such an organization would have brought forward the time that we first contacted other LGBTQ people. It is indeed pleasing that the number of GSAs has increased over the decades since we were in school, and GSAs have become a safe haven for many LGBTQ students. However, as the results of the national survey conducted by GLSEN indicate, the increasing number of GSAs does not necessarily correlate with the improvement of LGBTQ students' educational experiences. Moreover, there are still many schools in rural and conservative communities that do not have a GSA. Although we are entitled to celebrate some of the progressions that now exist in the lives of LGBTQ students as well as teachers, we still have a lengthy way to go in reconstructing schools to be a safe space for *every* student.

There are some visible improvements in regard to the educational experiences of the LGBTQ population in today's society compared to those 20 years ago. Nevertheless, the public's fundamental attitude toward homosexuality and LGBTQ people does not seem to have improved significantly. Achieving educational equity for the LGBTQ population will never be an easy accomplishment since it is a socially, culturally, politically, and historically intricate issue in the world. We every so often hear some people claim that time is what we need to improve people's understanding of LGBTQ individuals and their equal human rights. But we would like to challenge this view by addressing our presumption in regard to meeting the educational needs of LGBTQ students and teachers. The negative attitude and hatred toward homosexuality is a learned human behavior. Without questioning, interfering, and confronting the central idea that reinforces the negative outlook on LGBTQ issues and people, will repeatedly recur from generation to generation. In order to change this vicious cycle, we need to plant seeds that will eventually grow as a tolerance of human diversity in the world. We will not cease to question the heteronormative ideology that is deeply embedded in today's school milieu in an effort to achieve social justice for LGBTQ students. Clearly, we need to plant more of these seeds by raising awareness of the importance of developing a better teacher education program and educating both in- and pre-service teachers on the significance of achieving educational equity in meeting the needs of LGBTQ students.

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