

College is a place where people begin to explore themselves. One aspect that students begin to discover is their own sexuality. As more people explore their sexuality and identify themselves as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer, more members have joined the LGBTQ community. Since this community is expanding, the issues within the sector have become more prevalent. Some issues pertaining to this group include, but not limited to, approval of yourself, bullying, and acceptance within society. One issue many members of the LGBTQ community face is approval of yourself. This process can be very strenuous, with many obstacles along the way both internal, and external, there will be many people who will accept this life style choice; however there will always be people that will be against, and offended by this choice. This is where the issue of bullying within the LGBTQ arises. There are multiple forms of bullying which include emotion, physical and cyber bullying. Each form of bullying affects the college student in a different way which also affects the students' academic life and relationship with other individuals outside of the LGBTQ community. While many forms of bullying are prevalent, the general public is slowly reaching towards acceptances. Between the formation of multiple support groups and the legalization of gay marriage, the LGBTQ community finds itself overcoming many of its formidable challenges.

College is a time of experimentation, of finding out, "Who am I?" One of the major aspects of one's self that people begin to experiment with is one's sexuality. As a result of this, many people finally find out who they truly are, whether it be they are gay, straight, lesbian, or so on. Although finally discovering what one's own sexual orientation can be a very freeing experience. There can, and will be many obstacles that LGBTQ individuals will face, when coming out in what is still a very heterosexist world. One of the most prevalent obstacles to people who have not yet come out of the proverbial closet is fear. Fear that they will not be

accepted by the one's whom they love, that their family, friends, teachers and so on and so forth will reject them, cast them aside once they discover that a person they cared about no longer fits into the ideal cookie cutter formula for what would be considered a typical person. However, that is not the only fear that queer students have about coming out; they also fear that they may not feel like they belong to the LGBTQ community. They may feel ostracized or dejected from joining the group, because they have missed the bandwagon, that they are trying to get into a niche that has already been filled, and they feel as if they try to join the community now, and are rejected by it, then where is there left to turn? With whom can they confide with about their sexuality if they believe that each group leads to a pitfall? The best solution around, especially in our more open world seems to be just jump in.

Do not be a drop in the bucket, be the cannonball in the pool. One should own their sexual orientation, and be proud of it; because this is the first step in accepting one's own sexuality. Accepting themselves, and, owning that sexuality unwaveringly is a major step in allowing oneself to be able to reach a point in one's life where he or she can come out and be prepared to accept all the negative connotations associated with that choice by some members of society, as well as the praise that will also, undoubtedly be bestowed upon them by others for revealing who they truly are to the world. However, the most important step in coming out is accepting oneself beforehand; there are many steps that an individual can make to feel more comfortable about coming out, before they eventually do open themselves up to the world. One of the major steps a person can take to make themselves feel safer about coming out is, check to see if their school has any programs, groups, or organizations geared towards gay students (Heap); then seeing if they themselves want to be a part of some of these different groups, to become more antiquated with other gay students. Another option is for the student to join the

LGBTQ society. Many people are often fearful of joining the LGBTQ society (Heap). They can be especially intimidating for people who are still not comfortable enough to tell the world about their sexuality. However, joining the community can be a great way for individuals that have not yet come out to meet people that have openly expressed their sexuality, and find out what the experience, and the reception they got from others is like. Also it allows individuals to build up a solid support network of friends who will support them once they come out, and will help them make it through some of the heartache and struggles associated with their sexuality. A final way to ease the struggles of coming out is to have a positive attitude (Heap). When a person is more optimistic, and more positive they tend to be more self-confident. With a high level of self-confidence people become far more likely to accept themselves, and feel more comfortable in their own skin. It is for this reason that a positive attitude can help a person with coming out. More self-assurance means that people will be more ready, and willing to accept themselves. Then, once they accept themselves, that high self-esteem will also allow them to come out to the world, without so much fear for the repercussions against them.

Coming out is a new, wonderful and exciting experience for members of the LGBTQ community. However it can also be very scary and intimidating, as people will face the difficulties of joining a community that is still not readily accepted by everybody. Even though there are more and more people accepting LGBTQ individuals every day, there are still those that do not. As a result of this, the LGBTQ society still faces many hurdles, especially in college. One of the major issues these individuals will face is bullying.

Bullying in the LGBTQ community is a major problem. It is unfair for someone who is LGBTQ to be harassed for something that he or she cannot change about themselves. Bullying is when someone uses intimidation or aggression to force him or herself to do what he

or she wants. Bullying is a reaction of some individuals who refuse to accept that person's sexual orientation. This aggression usually takes on three forms which are verbal, physical, and cyber.

Verbal abuse is a negative statement to the victim. Verbal abuse is usually subtle and aims to isolate the person from the group. According to a study by Zack Ford, 81.9 percent of LGBTQ youths are verbally abused because of their sexual orientation. 63.9 percent of LGBTQ youths are verbally abused because of their gender expression. It is not only attack on LGBTQ but the use of derogatory words affect LGBTQ youths. 84.9 percent of LGBTQ students heard "gay" used in a negative way. Phrases like "that's so gay" are highly offense especially to individuals who are just coming out; because it implies that being gay is a bad thing. While verbal abuse is a prominent issue within the LGBTQ society, abuse takes a step forward when it elevates from verbal, to physical.

Physical bullying is the act of imposing one's will upon another with the intention of causing harm; some types of physical harassment include but are not limited violence that causes bruises, wounds, and black eyes. Although, physical abuse does not happen nearly as often as verbal abuse this is still a serious issue, with 38.3 percent of queer students reporting being physically abused or harassed because of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, 12.4 percent of LGBTQ students report being physically harassed because of their gender expression. Although most schools view physical abuse as unacceptable and a majority of attackers are reprimanded through suspension or expulsion, physical violence is still a prevalent issue regarding the LGBTQ society. Although physical, and verbal bullying make up a large segment of the bullying that takes place within the LGBTQ community, with the dawning of new technologies and the rise of social media, a new form of bullying is on the rise, this new form of bullying is cyber bullying.

Cyber bullying is the use of electronic communication to bully a person; which usually takes form through online, messages of an intimidating or threatening nature. According to the study by Zack Ford, 42 percent of LGBTQ youths reported being harassed or bullied online. This is three times more than non-LGBTQ youths. One in four LGBTQ youths said they have been bullied or harassed online within the past year because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Bullying online usually happens anonymously where the attacker cannot be identified and or reprimanded for their actions. Cyber bullying, can be the most harmful to someone who has recently exposed their sexual identity to the world, because the student abuse never stops. He or she will go to school and be verbally abused and then have to deal with the cyber abuse online. LGBTQ youths feel as if though there is no escape.

All of these various forms of bullying take a huge toll on the mind. Bullying can affect anybody on an academic level especially people from the LGBTQ community. The results of bullying in the LGBTQ community are poor grades. Bullying takes a toll academically on LGBTQ students; for example according to by Zack Ford, LGBTQ youths reported a grade point averages that were lower than that of students who were not gay, and therefore not as frequently bullied for their sexual orientation (2.9 vs. 3.2). In more extreme cases, according to LGBT youth facts/ Stats, 28 percent of LGBTQ drop out of school as a result of being harassed by their youths. These are the so detrimental effects, which occur as a result of bullying within the LGBTQ society

Bullying is unacceptable at all times. Each form has its own effects upon LGBTQ youths. These forms of bullying affect not only the youth's academic performance, but their personal lives as well. Bullying is a result of some people's inability to accept someone for something they cannot change. Even though, some people will not accept others, the United States society is

gradually shifting towards acceptance of LGBTQ individuals. The acceptance of LGBTQ individuals is most important; if the person has this first they will more easily be able to withstand the bullying from people who refuse to understand.

While bullying is still an issue regarding the LGBTQ community, society is slowly heading towards acceptance with the various support groups formed. Support groups are visible in multiple college campuses, including SUNY Albany. There are various organizations on this campus which seek to raise awareness and make members of the LGBTQ community feel comfortable. Some of the organization on campus include UAAlbany Pride Alliance, A.S.H.A. (Albany State Hues Alliance), QUAGS (Queer University at Albany Graduate Students) and Gamma Rho Lambda. Each organization hosts events which raise awareness to students on campus. For instance, one event held is known as Safe Space Training. Safe Space Training is a training session about the LGBTQ community in hopes of raising awareness, educating students, and allowing members to feel more comfortable in their own skin. After completion, the student, faculty, or staff member leaves with more knowledge of the LGBTQ community and a plaque (Albany.edu). It is not uncommon for college campuses to have an LGBTQ support group which represents the growing awareness and acceptance of the LGBTQ community. Furthermore, the support groups go beyond college campuses. For instance, in Louisville, Kentucky, a new LGBTQ cancer survivor support group was formed. One of the primary goals of the support group is to, "...allow members to focus on issues unique to LGBT individuals, such as problems with their partners being recognized as family, the lack of insurance and other benefits they would have if they were in a heterosexual relationship, and the lack of support from their family of origin..." (Mitteldorf)." With this organization recently forming in Kentucky, it is unbelievable to imagine the number of support groups all around the world. If every support

group shares the same goal of raising awareness, it is inevitable that our society is heading towards acceptance of all members in the LGBTQ community.

Beyond awareness being raised through support groups, our society is seeing acceptance through laws. As of today, 17 states have legalized gay marriage. With 34% of the states have accepted gay marriage; there is much hope for more to come in the future. In the Washington Post, it was said that, "...58% of Americans now support gay marriage... most sizeable support comes from 18-29 year olds, where 81% now believe gay marriage should be legal..." (Rubin). If majority of 18-29 year olds accepting gay marriage, the future will definitely see a change. Those 18-29 year olds are the future and will raise children to be just as accepting as they are. Furthermore, many celebrities have "come out" and still receive acceptance from the public. For example, Ellen DeGeneres is a lesbian, but still remains very popular with audiences. For instance, she hosted the Oscar's for the second time this past year and her television show still receives many positive ratings. With regards to the future perspectives on the LGBTQ community, our society will soon become more welcoming and accepting.

Overall, the LGBTQ community is a rapidly growing segment in society. Although the members experience many struggles, which include acceptance within yourself, bullying and acceptance within society, it won't be long until our generation sees a change. As long as people within society have an open mind, they will act to fight against these injustices and inform others about the goals of the LGBTQ community.

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