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Intersections of Identity: Exceptionality and LGBTQ

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VIEWPOINT

Intersections of Identity: Exceptionality and LGBTQ

BY JENNIFER E. CHRISTENSEN & DUSTY COLUMBIA EMBURY

Recognizing the significance of Garnets' (2002) statement, "No single element of identity, be it class, race, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, can truly be understood except in relation to the others," this article is devoted to raising awareness and opening the conversation for educators regarding multiple minority youth; that is, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ), as racial minorities, and as people with disabilities. While researchers and activists recognize the intersectionality of minority status and oppression, we need to open that door to include those who identify as LGBTQ in addition to other social identity variables. That intersection of sexuality and gender identities with other social identity variables is essential to acknowledge in order to develop effective, culturally appropriate interventions and prevention programs aimed at promoting the mental and physical health of LGBTQ youth (DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, & Moradi, 2013).

INTERSECTION OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Diversity within the LGBTQ population in the United States and the lack of research regarding LGBTQ persons of color in general has led researchers to address the intersection of multiple social identities among LGBTQ people of color (Wilson & Harper, 2012). Multiple social identities are often discussed in terms of status, with some social identities being recognized as privileged and others as oppressed. Culture in the United States has been described as heterocentric, ethnocentric, and androcentric, and these groups receive privilege. Educators may learn about privilege with regard to gender and race, and more recently ability, but we must expand this to include sexual orientation and gender identity (Black & Stone, 2005).

Particularly relevant to the discussion of LGBTQ youth is the concept of heterosexual privilege (the belief in heterosexuality as the normal expression of sexual orientation, and advantages given to heterosexual individuals). Alternatively, members of minority identity groups (individuals who identify as LGBTQ, racial minority individuals, women, and individuals with disabilities) experience oppression via prejudice, stigmatization, and discrimination (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Discrimination and marginalization represent behaviors or actions, while prejudice and stigmatization correspond to more attitudinal or belief dimensions of oppression, all of which may lead to unfair treatment, marginalization, isolation, or exclusion from resources needed for diverse use to experience success (Venanzant Chambers & McCready, 2011). An important extension of our understanding of privilege and oppression is the recognition of multiple minority social identities within an individual and how this oppression may impact individuals.

There are different views about how dimensions of oppression operate for individuals with multiple minority identities. The intersectionality model (Cole, 2009) purports that identification with more than one minority group constructs unique and novel experience, including discrimination experiences, which cannot be attributed to a single minority identity. Furthermore, within this conceptualization, each identity's meaning and associated experiences can only be fully understood within the context of other social identities with which it coexists (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). As educators and researchers, we must acknowledge multiple domains of privilege, multiple identities that our students may hold, and the impact of all of these on their learning, development, and potential success. ■

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