Bullying

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Assignment Description: Write a paper that focuses on educational themes

The recent events that have flooded the very fiber of the media with regard to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth have been emotionally horrific on many levels. The events that lead to the decision to take one’s life because of that bullying are far too numerous to try to understand, besides being very private and personal on many levels. Their names however, are burned forever in our minds. Raymond Chase of Providence, Rhode Island, who was nineteen years old when he ended his life; Tyler Clementi of Rutgers University, New Jersey, who was eighteen years old when he jumped from the George Washington Bridge, ending his pain of being bullied and his life; Billy Lucas of Greensburg High School who was fifteen years old when he decided to commit suicide. Seth Walsh of Tehachapi, California, who ended his life by hanging himself when he was thirteen years old; Asher Brown of Houston, Texas, was only thirteen when he put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger, ending once and for all the years of torture at the hands of bullies. These young gay men all share beyond the tragedy of death one common thing; they were victims of bullies and they saw no other way out other than suicide. Were those bullies texting inappropriately all hours of the day, posting vulgar messages on Facebook, tweeting crude thoughts on Twitter, or was there physical violence involved against these sensitive children who feel so deeply different? This leads us to ask how is gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered bullying different from the bullying that their peers experience that could cause them to commit suicide?

What many believe to be a hostile climate that promotes the very essence of acceptance of bullying surrounds every inch of our lives on a daily basis. The preconceived notion of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” that is rampant in the military. Sends the message that we as gays and lesbians are less than our heterosexual counterparts and that we as gays pose a national threat to the very existence of our armed services. The fact that gay marriage is not yet legalized is an additional issue that sends the message that we as gays and lesbians are somehow less, that once again we are denied the rights and privileges of every other person on the planet. What message are we sending our children? Gay adoption is for the most part forbidden by law, when children are in need of loving, caring homes sends the message that we as gays and lesbians do not deserve the right to be parents. You can still be fired from your job in thirty-three of the United States based on your sexual orientation sends once more a “less than human” message to our future generations who will inhabit our workforce (Wendland). Finally, that religion denies gay and lesbians their overall acceptance from not only the church but from G-d Almighty sends the worst message of all that we as gay and lesbians were somehow a mistake and not part of G-d’s divine plan. It is in this environment that many people feel is a trickledown effect that we let pervade our everyday thinking and form our opinions about complete and utter strangers and that by accepting these things we are in many ways condoning the entire notion of bullying as a whole on a national level. While for some people in the public it is taken to the extreme that until these issues are dealt with and made right on behalf of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people that bullying will never go away.

According to research, gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Ryan). Can this information
then come as such a shock considering an overall American landscape that tolerates bigotry, misunderstanding and downright hatred? For many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth, the feeling may very well be they have nowhere to turn when bullying happens. Out of the number of youths who are likely to attempt suicide, more than one-third have reported of having already made the attempt to end their lives (D’Augelli). This figure is much higher than national figures of their peers. Actual increased isolation from family and friends pervades many of our gay youth, not counting just the fear of that isolation happening. Signs of depression can and usually are very obvious as well as loss of interest in activities. According to one survey, these factors, with a myriad of many others, can and do lead to a one hundred ninety percent greater chance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth abusing drugs and alcohol compared to their peers (Marshal). This issue for many is a very real issue that could and can play a role in leading gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth to suicide. The combination of factors of rejection, bullying and drugs and alcohol is the final pivotal moment that could lead to a child’s death.

What factors play into this entire atmosphere of gay bullying? Popular opinion believes, and is shown in studies, that bullying starts in the school environment and for many follows them home once school is over. Nine out of ten gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth have been bullied in the past year alone (Ryan). For many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth anti-gay slurs, which are a part of bullying, happen about twenty-six times each and every day or once every fourteen seconds (Chase). Words like “faggot”, “dyke”, “sissy”, “homo”, and others make many feel unsafe in an environment that is to be used for learning. The schoolyard bully of years ago is no longer confined just to the schoolyard, but follows the victim home in the form of abusive text messages, abusive Facebook behavior, reprehensible Twitter behavior and vulgar instant messages and creates an environment of twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week non-stop torture. This kind of cyber bullying could continue without a teacher ever being aware of it because a student’s phone is turned off, is also an issue and why many have made rules in regards to where exactly children keep their phones at school.

Within a hostile school climate, gay, lesbian bisexual and transgendered youth report that 84.6% of them have been physically harassed and 18.8% have been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation within the past year. This number by itself is beyond staggering, but when it comes to gender expression, the same group of kids reported that 63.7% had been verbally harassed, 27.2% had been physically harassed and 12.5% had been physically assaulted. These types of bullying and harassment have remained relatively constant for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth (Kosciw). Within this very environment many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth feel unsafe, unwelcomed, and many opt to skip school entirely, which in the larger picture causes their grades to suffer. These circumstances may also lead to other concerns with regard to these at risk youth. This includes but are not limited to expression of negative attitude toward themselves, expression of hopelessness and or helplessness, giving away valued possessions and depression.

While for some gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth, the bullying may not be from a peer but from their parents or other adults. Adults are to be the safe haven that a child can turn to in their time of crisis, and for some that cry for help leads to further bullying and overall prejudice. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth who come from highly rejecting homes of their “life style choice” are eight times more likely to commit suicide than their peers (Ryan). How does a child even begin to tell a parent “Mom, Dad I think I might be gay” when deep down Johnny or Susie knows Mom and Dad will never understand and accept them. When that fear is compounded into its own form of bullying by name-calling, mental abuse, physical abuse and throwing the child out of the home, where now are Johnny or Susie to turn? It takes tremendous courage for a child to face a parent after more than likely months or
years of agonizing, do I tell Mom and Dad “I think I might gay, can we talk about this?” For many parents, grandparents and other authoritative adult figures a child may turn to talk to about sexually natured themes may in fact be dreaded by those adults. How do I even begin to talk to Johnny and Susie about sex as a whole? Does the average parent even think about their child being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered in the first place? If this even happens, what preconceived thoughts, ideas, moral teachings do we as parents bring to this conversation that may prevent us from being completely open, honest and frank about sexuality as a whole.

According to several surveys, four out of five gay, lesbian bisexual and transgendered students say they do not know one single supportive adult in school (Sessions). Also we know that when students, teachers, school faculty and school administrators look the other way when bullying happens it is only compounding the issue and making it worse. If children got the support they needed from their school faculty or had an openly gay teacher, they were more than likely to feel as if they did belong in school (Kosciw). That is why one organization called The Trevor Project is doing everything they can to provide our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth a safe space by providing for schools free of charge the Trevor’s Survival Kit. A kit of invaluable tools to help teachers and community leaders to create a safe, affirming space that can save the life of a child. A movement that will not only make our children safer, but will empower them to survive these moments of anguish that they receive at the hands of bullies.

On September 19, 2010, Wendy Walsh, a single mother, came home to find her middle son, thirteen-year-old Seth Walsh, dead after hanging himself in a tree in his own desert town backyard (Forde). Police reports indicate Seth was found on the ground unconscious and not breathing. The report further indicates that CPR was administered and Seth was airlifted to Kern Medical Center (Ethan). Seth had just transferred into an independent study program after only two weeks of school. Seth was put onto life support for over a week before his body gave out and he peacefully died on September 27, 2010 (Forde).

The Tehachapi Police Department at this time is continuing an investigation into issues of bullying because of one instance of reported school bullying, where the perpetrator was suspended. Earlier this month in September when the Tehachapi news reported Seth Walsh’s death, there was also a mention of school bullying but many feel that the school turned a blind eye. Tehachapi police investigators who interviewed some of the young people who taunted Seth the day he hanged himself determined that despite the tragic outcome, their actions towards Seth did not constitute a crime and criminal charges were not being pursued. “Several of the kids that we talked to broke down into tears. They never expected an outcome such as this,” said Tehachapi Police Chief Jeff Kermode (Saeyang).

Seth’s grandfather, Jim Walsh, a former principal and four-year retiree of Mojave High School, has gone on record as saying, “He is not satisfied with the police investigation” (Elliot). Many feel the same way. Mr. Walsh, that despite all of the information, despite the crime committed justice will never be served in regard to your grandson Seth, and that this issue will not go away until we as a society demand that changes are to be made and made immediately.


