

THE INVISIBILIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION OF EFL STUDENTS THAT
IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ+ ON EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS.

ALEXANDER LARGO GÓMEZ

JUAN PABLO RÚA CASTRO

UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE ORIENTE

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LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS

RIONEGRO-ANTIOQUIA

2021

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ALEXANDER LARGO GÓMEZ

JUAN PABLO RÚA CASTRO

Trabajo de grado

ASESOR

JUAN DAVID MURILLO EGURROLA

magister en enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras

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Acknowledgment

We want to express our gratitude to all the members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community who helped us during this process, to our families for giving us unconditional acceptance and support, to our friends and university classmates for being part of this research and even more for sharing with us their life experiences, finally we want to thank our advisor for helping us in the development of this research project by giving us advice, recommendations, assistance, and also for being a true ally of the community.

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Introduction

Homophobia and heterosexism have been part of diverse educational contexts worldwide. There are countless reports of students and teachers who have suffered the abuse, and the lack of acceptance of stakeholders. However, most educational environments treat these issues as a taboo and few opportunities to create awareness are given.

In Colombia the article 13 of the constitution says that “all people are born free and equal before the law”. In reality, this is not enforced in many contexts of the society. For example, in many classrooms at all academic levels, teachers have biases and beliefs that imply heterosexuals are the norm, and other forms of sexuality are seen as unnatural or even unacceptable.

At an international level, in the field of EFL, there is an increasing number of researchers who have performed studies addressing LGBTQ+ students and professors from different perspectives. Nonetheless, locally, the literature exploring these issues is scarce.

This study sets out to investigate the perception that students and professors have of the exclusion and the lack of representation of sexual diversity in a private university in Colombia. We want to explore how this indirect exclusion works in the classroom and identify the discriminatory educational practices. Considering that the educational institutions focus on a binary representation, that is; men and women, boy and girl, husband and wife, etc. Those who do not feel identified with neither of them, are bombarded with a series of symbols, languages, images and mannerisms designed to resonate with heteronormative views while silencing every subject that does not fit within this view. Disregarding these

alternative views, for instance, the diverse ways of being, feeling and thinking generates discrimination and ignorance towards some expression of desire and gender identification. In that way, not talking about sexual diversity in the schools, would guarantee the silence and the invalidation of students and teachers that do not belong to this normative of femininity and masculinity.

Question

How do LGBTQ+ students and teachers of a language teaching program have experienced the invisibilization and discrimination in their contexts?

Objective:

General objective

The objective of this inquiry is to explore the non-inclusive practices that affect EFL teachers and students who identify as LGBTQ+

Specific objective

see how these practices and the no representation of people sexually diverse, contributes to the development of prejudices and the indirect discrimination that suffer the students and teachers that identify as LGBTQ+.

Literature review

The purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions that students and professors have of the exclusion and the lack of representation of sexual diversity in a BA in foreign language teaching of a private university in Colombia. What we know about discrimination towards LGBTQ+ students, comes mainly from studies in academic and non-academic contexts in North America and Europe. In Colombia, several researchers have attempted to demonstrate the problematic imbalance that people with diverse sexual identities face. However, a search of the literature revealed that few studies have focused on the experiences of EFL teachers and preservice teachers when they were university students. In the following lines, a description of some of the studies that have explored this issue is presented.

At an international level, Barozzi and Guijarro (2014) Performed a study to analyze the knowledge that a group of participants have about the queer problematic, and their opinion about the introduction and discussion of sexual identities in EFL at primary school level. The context of the study was the faculty of education in the University of Granada in Spain, and the participants were all teacher students of the faculty who volunteered to participate (six men, four women, all Spain nationals). They used an online questionnaire divided in four sections: Personal questions, knowledge of queer issues, sexual identity issues in primary education and queer issues in EFL primary educations. The data were analyzed using qualitative research procedures. The results of the study indicate that this group of teachers never received any training on how to deal with homophobia and heterosexism, and that the lack of preparation and training lead to no proper teaching practices and failure to respond to students' needs in the area of sexual identity in EFL.

In a similar way, Page (2017) described the comfort levels of English language arts teachers in the implementation of literature with LGBT themes or characters into their curriculum and classroom practices. For this research, an electronic invitation to participate in an online survey was sent to every ELA teacher in the states of Minnesota, and a total of 577 survey responses were submitted. Additionally, 30 participants volunteered for follow-up interviews. The data of the survey were tabulated to determine statistical significance, the data from the follow-up interview were analyzed through an iterative coding process.

The results of the study suggest that younger teachers are more comfortable with the idea of including LGBT texts to their practices although they lack strategies to implement them. Also, the comfort level and implementation of the LGBT material were related to the teacher's location and strength of their religious belief. The researcher concludes, just like critical pedagogues and multicultural educators do, that the curriculum is not neutral, but it is political and ideological.

At a local level, Pulecio (2015) performed a study to explore offensive language and other behaviors used in school contexts by teachers and students when they refer to LGBTQ students. For this qualitative study, students in grades 6 to 11 from three private institutions in Bogotá Colombia were interviewed in 2009 and 2012. The schools were in affluent socioeconomic areas, and they were male only, female only and mixed respectively. The results suggest that students' use of offensive words and expressions against students with different sexual orientations is very common, and in some cases, these students are physically attacked. Additionally, the results also suggest that some teachers use offensive language, make jokes, and even humiliate them in class.

In another investigation in Bogota, Colombia, Ubaque and Castañeda (2020) explored some practices that generate discourses of inequality, exclusion and discrimination to the non-normative corporality of an EFL teacher student. The participant of this study is Valentina, a 25-year-old transgender/blind EFL student teacher in a public University in Bogota. They collect the information using life story narratives. The results of this study show that the educational field cancels and ignores the fact that identities that are non-normative exist. Also, that the recognition of the teacher's gender, identity and corporality in a language classroom can affect the attitude and motivation of the students towards language.

In conclusion it can be noticed that most of these studies are made in different countries, although studies that include the LGBTQ+ community, the educational environment and the EFL has been made in Colombia, only include big cities like Bogota, there still more to do to improve the visibility of the LGBTQ+ students and teachers in the classroom in different areas of the country.

Conceptual References

Invisibilization.

The discursive act of making something invisible. Constructing the discourse around it, so that it is not mentioned or seen. When done against a category of people, it can be either a matter of making the people in the category invisible or a matter of misrepresenting those people by invisibilizing a relevant categorization.

According to le Blanc (2009) invisibilization implies the classification of a group of human beings as irrelevant or superfluous. He says that exclusion and marginalization always contain processes of silencing and invisibilization.

Sexual Diversity.

Sexual diversity is that variety existing between the sexual identity of each individual. According to (Rutgers international 2010) this includes a whole variation in identities, expressions, behaviors and feelings that can be seen in human sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) sexual diversity is often referred with the acronym LGBT.

Sexual Discrimination.

(equalityhumanrights.com 2020) says that sexual discrimination is when you are treated differently because of your sex, this can be a one-off action or could be caused by a rule or policy and it doesn't have to be intentional to be unlawful. This can be divided into two types. The direct discrimination that happens when someone, because of your sex, treats you worse than someone of the opposite sex. And indirect discrimination that happens when an

organization has a particular policy or way of working that applies in the same way to both sexes but which puts you at a disadvantage because of your sex.

LGBT-Inclusive Education.

(stonewall.org.uk 2019) “LGBT-inclusive education ensures that LGBT children and young people, and children and young people with LGBT families, see themselves reflected in what they learn. It also encourages all young people to grow up with inclusive and accepting attitudes”

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people in the classroom and how this affects not only the students but also the teachers. To carry out this research, we drew on a systematization of experiences (Jara, 2018) and on other different sources of information (Yin, 2003).

In the next lines, a description of the research design will be presented.

Regarding the paradigm, this study is qualitative because it focuses on how reality is perceived and experienced by the participants (Richards, 2003). Regarding the type of study, this inquiry can be considered a systematization of experiences because it was done to understand a concrete phenomenon in a microsocial context, and because our aim was to rescue the relevance of brief but multiple experiences (Fantova, 2003). In this case the participants were alumni of the degree in foreign languages of a private university in Colombia who identify themselves as LGBTQ+.

Jara suggests that a systematization of experiences is a critical interpretation of one or several experiences which by being organized and reconstructed help to unveil the rationale of the process that was experienced. Our investigation explored the experiences of alumni and current students of a language program who identify themselves as LGBTQ+.

Data Collection

Different methods were used in order to obtain a detailed account of the phenomena that we investigated and to avoid bias. Namely, convenience sampling, narratives, and interviews. In the next lines, we will describe these data collection tools.

Convenience sampling

We used convenience sampling in this study since the chosen participants met the necessary requirements to be part of the study. In this case, they all belong to the same university, they are preservice teachers or have recently graduated from the foreign languages program, they identify as LGBTQ+ people, they are also open with their sexuality and do not feel discomfort when talking about it, and all agreed to participate in the study. The convenience sampling was appropriate since according to (Lopez and Whitehead 2012. P 124) "This is the most common form of qualitative sampling and occurs when people are invited to participate in the study because they are conveniently available with regard to access, location, time and willingness. Convenience sampling is a relatively fast and easy way to achieve the sample size needed for the study "

Narrative of experiences

According to Kumar (2011) narratives of experiences seek to hear a person's retelling of an incident or happening in his/her life. He adds that the narration is a very powerful method when dealing with topics that can be delicate and sensitive. It also points out that this method has a therapeutic effect on the participant since it can make them feel better when talking about the event. In this case, discrimination against LGBTQ + people in the classroom, in this way, participants could express themselves freely and share their experiences in a way that is more comfortable for them.

The interview

according to (Burns 1997), “an interview is a verbal interchange, often face to face, though the telephone may be used, in which an interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs or opinions from another person”. Interviews containing closed and open questions were conducted in order to identify a common factor among the participants, but at the same time give it the opportunity to express their experiences in the classrooms as an LGBTQ + student and teacher.

These questions were divided into one before graduating from the degree and one after as a professional, this includes their years of school, their discoveries as LGBTQ + people, their references and representations in the classroom, if they use strategies that allow inclusion and representation of sexually diverse people, etc.

It was decided that the interview should be a semi-structured interview (SSI) according to (Adams, 2015) the SSI employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions. Since each participant does not identify in the same way and they have different experiences, in this way they can have more freedom when speaking.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, we followed these steps. First, we made transcriptions of the interviews, and read the data from the questionnaires and narratives multiple times. Next, we coded and analyzed the data inductively which means that codes emerged through the repetition of patterns.

Ethical considerations

Because it is a sensitive issue that many people do not feel comfortable talking about, only we, as students/researchers, and our advisor, had access to the handling of participant's personal data (name, age, sexual orientation) and the data collected in the narratives and interviews.

The participants were fully informed of the purpose of the project, also the participants signed a consent which clearly expresses the procedures for data collection, the possibility of withdrawing or skipping their participation in case they did not feel comfortable sharing personal information, and the way information was going to be handled, for example the access to the information, and the use of pseudonyms to keep identities secret.

Findings

The objective of this study was to identify the non-inclusive practices that affect EFL teachers and students who identify as LGBTQ+. Besides, this inquiry also explored how this type of indirect and sometimes direct discrimination affects the students and teachers in different stages of their lives. That is, before the university, when they were just students in any kind of institution; during the university, while they were in the middle of their transformation as EFL teachers; and finally, as teachers, either after graduation from the university or as preservice teachers.

All participants provided a narrative and answered questions in a semi structured interview. The narrative included a description of their experience in the three key moments and the interview helped us to clarify and add some details to some of the ideas in the

narratives. A careful exploration of the data followed by an analysis showed five emerging categories that represent the different factors highlighted by participants in the description of their experiences, namely, the traditional orientation of the family, the lack of education and representation by the institutions, fear of being bullied by classmates, discrimination from the teachers and the institutions, and finally, social pressure outside the classroom and the institution.

The traditional conservative orientation of the family

The strong traditional orientation in the families, we found, was common to most of the participants. Colombia is a very traditional country that has changed a bit over the years, but most traditional families and especially those with people of older generations are still full of prejudices and taboos. They tend to care about the “what will people say”, and “what will people say in church”. For them is really important that all things in life are “correct” in the eyes of God. This, directly or indirectly, affects the free development of those who do not fit in the ideals of the traditional beliefs. One of the participants told us.

“In my case, I come from a religious family, as conservatives, you don't know what you are going to face, you have a lot of fears ... My mother took it very badly at that time, I had a very bad experience for a long time because they restrained me from doing many things, I didn't have the freedom to go out because they were always watching me” (narrative, participant 2)

The previous excerpt shows how for this participant the experience of coming out was a difficult one. Because the participant's family has a traditional religious background, enjoying the freedom that youngest heteronormative people have was forbidden.

The ideals and principles of some families make them create expectations that most of the non-heteronormative individuals are not willing to accomplish or cannot accomplish. This seems to be a common factor that is represented more in the maternal figure, in some cases, after “accepting the differences” they still expect their child to have a “normal life” in other words, living a heteronormative kind of life. One of the participants said the following:

“My mother, being of the Christian religion, was always a little against, there were two parts of the story, one in which she, as a mother, told me that in spite of everything she was going to give me all her support and she was going to still loving me, and the other face of the coin already related to her religion, where she kept insisting and said comments such as "I know that you are going to get a good wife, I know that you are going to have children" which also in some way made me feel depressed because I thought "what support is she really showing me?" (narrative, participant 4).

In this scenario we can see how some members of the family can react incoherently. There is certain kind of duality in the process of accepting an LGBTQ+ child when there is a religious belief behind. While the family seems to understand the situation, they still keep the “hope” that their child will have a “normal” life in accordance with the principles dictated by their social and religious ideals.

The non-education and lack of representation in the institutions.

Some of the participants address the issue of the lack of sexual education in the schools and institutions before starting university. In a similar way, some participants said that some teachers failed to help them forge an authentic personality and make them feel happy or at least comfortable with themselves. Instead, some of them were repressive. The

participants reported that they experienced discrimination and didn't have a clue of how to deal with the situation.

“the teachers advised them (classmates) not to spend time with me because my behavior or my tastes could suddenly affect them It was only at that time that I came to realize their discriminatory acts and that those behaviors were wrong, but even so, I was still very young, and I really did not know what to do: who to turn to, where to ask, who to complain to” (narrative, participant 1)

In most of these cases, LGBTQ+ students don't know how to face this type of situations. The educational institutions don't teach students about sexual diversity and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ people properly. This lack of knowledge only increases the ignorance and willingness to discriminate on behalf of the heteronormative teachers and students, as we can see in the next case.

“At one point in my university career, I considered myself non-binary and this generated bullying from the teachers and my classmates, who did not respect my pronouns and I also perceived that they put barriers in my transformation process. Also I requested to be called by my female name and the teachers and directors refused to and continued to calling me by my old name” (narrative participant 3)

In this case, we can see how a transgender student is discriminated against due to the little knowledge that teachers have when dealing with students of diverse genders and sexualities. Participants also highlighted the low sensitivity of teachers and some institutions towards young students that are discovering themselves with no help or orientation; without a model to follow. The following excerpt shows the participants' need for understanding how diversity works and their need for teachers' support.

“There were comments from teachers that sometimes unconsciously made you feel bad, you repressed yourself more and more and more and more, as if you were trying to get back into where it took you so long to get out” (narrative, participant 2)

The previous excerpt depicts how in some occasions, teachers unconsciously create a scenario where the rejection of diverse students is generated, and because the institutions do not provide teachers with enough resources on how to refer to non-heteronormative students. Although, for the most part, they are not intended to hurt, the lack of sensitivity can be quite harmful.

Fear of being bullied by their classmates.

The fear of being bullied is another relevant aspect that participants of this inquiry unveiled. They reported that since they were very young, they became aware of the mistreatment against those who do not fit certain standards. For example, when a boy is feminine, a girl is masculine or a person's gender can't be easily identified. These forces most LGBTQ+ students to hide their identity by “wearing a mask” in order to protect themselves from the hatred and violence of their classmates. Participant 4 said the following:

“Bullying was always present, because even though I considered myself a “masculine” person, there were always traits that did not go unnoticed: mannerisms, ways of speaking, way of expressing myself, tastes, interests; so I always made a difference, from a very young age I always suffer discrimination from school” (narrative, participant 4)

The previous excerpt shows how binary roles are often imposed on people, that is, everyone has to subscribe to being a man or a woman. This implies imposing a gender on

things like toys or colors which could be a barrier in the development of a person who does not identify with these binary roles. Besides, it may be the reason for the rejection by other children in the classroom when they see that they do not fit into the roles that are imposed on them.

Sometimes this environment can be toxic, and the way we speak might affect the development of the diverse personalities. In Colombia the use of homophobic slangs is normalized, that is why these types of insults are part of some classroom environments. This creates a high level of stress in the non-heterosexual student.

“I heard comments and let's say that the word "gay" was like an insult, like an offense, like anyone who wants to make another feel bad said like "you're so gay" or something like that, then I started to feel like that fear to be myself because I felt like I was going to be judged”. (narrative, participant 2)

In the previous excerpt, participant 2 describes how some words used to refer to alternative forms of sexuality are also used to denigrate and offend. In Colombia disparaging and derogatory expressions are often used towards people belonging to the LGBTQ + community.

Discrimination from part of the teachers or the institutions.

In most cases discrimination by institutions and teachers are very notorious. This type of discrimination can be seen as being direct or indirect, which means that the act is not always obvious or intentional. Most participants acknowledged that in their experience, the majority of teachers were willing to accept diverse students, and that they did not

discriminated them. However, there is still people who may have a more traditional point of view. This is shown in discourses that can permeate the classroom. In school contexts students tend to accept in silence to avoid the bullying from part of its classmates, but things tend to be different at university as LGBTI students usually become more conscious about the discrimination they are facing. The following excerpt illustrates this:

“The teacher sent us some documents that he had written where he expressed his conception of family and where he said that the family was father, mother and children and that it did not exist another type of family. At the time of reading all that I felt very bad” (narrative, participant 2)

In this case, it is notorious that the teacher decided not to have any consideration for other forms of families. Instead a limiting personal interpretation of the concept was offered. Cases like these, where teachers do not allow the inclusion of diversity because of their own views seem to be quite common.

There is a lot of shame and negative perceptions towards LGBTQ+ teachers in general. In EFL contexts, discrimination is equally present; the participants of this investigation identified some situations that have affected them. For example, the resistance to assign them courses with young students. Non-heterosexual people are considered by some as child molesters who could ultimately “corrupt” children.

“When they made the distribution of the students depending on the grade, boys were never assigned to me... one day I heard a comment from a teacher telling another colleague that they didn't assign me boys because suddenly my behavior was going to have a negative effect on them or was going to confuse them” (narrative, participant 1).

This type of unfounded discrimination is the most harmful and common towards LGBTQ + teachers. It also demonstrates the lack of empathy and knowledge on the part of stakeholders when they make such statements. This is only speaking for the teachers and students who identify as gay, lesbian and bisexual, since this type of discrimination can be much stronger to transgender people.

The discrimination is more evident in people who identify as transgender or non-binary, not only it is more violent, it is also promoted by some teachers and even institutions. The following excerpt shows how this type of discrimination works.

“When I wanted to be referred as “Valeria” the teachers didn’t respect my decision and my identity as a transgender woman. I didn’t know where to go, and when I went to the principals in the university they didn’t do much about that” (narratives, participant 3)

The fact that transgender people today can have the opportunity to be in classrooms training to fulfill their dreams and goals, is a huge step since we can say that this is something new. On the other hand, as something new, many obstacles arise and they must be overcome. Teachers need to be able to educate themselves to be able to refer to transgender and non-binary students adequately.

Social pressure outside the classroom and the institution.

Social pressure outside the classroom is a strong aspect that LGBTI teachers have to deal with because it not only leads to acting in certain ways and accommodating our behaviors to the rules of the institutions inside these establishments, but also outside. LGBTI teachers, suggested some of our participants, have to act differently because of fear of

criticism that might come from students and their parents, and the institutions themselves.

One of the participants said the following:

“I am doing my practicum now in a school that also has a religious orientation and is a bit conservative ... Since I started doing my practice, I have felt very self-conscious about being myself and expressing myself freely on the street. I currently have a partner and I do not feel well, I no longer feel comfortable at this moment, and it is something that hurts me a lot because I can't go out with total freedom with her. I can no longer do things such as grabbing her hand on the street or suddenly giving her a kiss or anything because the parents of my students or my students can see me”
(narration, participant 4)

The previous excerpt shows how social pressure has affected the participant. The fact of having to hide her identity and not being able to enjoy her relationship in total freedom due to possible discrimination is evident. It is important to keep in mind that LGBTI teachers feel forced to hide their identities during their classes and since in many occasions the discrimination can come from parents who do not agree with the sexual orientation or with the identity of the teacher, they also have to hide it in public places and even if they are outside of working hours.

Although there is an attempt to create programs to educate young people on issues of diversity and tolerance so that in the future they can change the directions of our country, terrible situations still occur to diverse people because of hatred and chauvinism. This leads to the fear of being judged, denigrated or harmed, so many people belonging to the LGBTQ + community avoid raising their voices to combat inequality in our country.

“at a certain point it seems to me that sadly it is better not to deal with such topics in the workplace; First, because in Colombia mainly, there is still a lot of ignorance on

the subject ... in Colombia there have been many unfortunate events where many times education wants to address the issue of diversity, but it is always silenced, that is why at this moment I would not like to be in a stage of my life where I want to fulfill my dream, but cannot do so because of being gay, homosexual or belonging to the LGTBI community” (narratives, participant 4)

It is here where we can see how fear influences LGBTQ + people who on many occasions decide to put the issue aside and not to talk about it, since it is evident that some entities have a quite negative conception of non-heteronormative people.

Discussions

As we can see in the results, most of the participants had similar experiences in almost all the cases, in which we can evidence how the traditional orientation of the family in a certain way limited the development of the personalities of some of them, and as in The school suffered bullying, discrimination and experience invisibility by other students, teachers and by the institutions themselves.

the results will be discussed through different authors and studies, different opinions will also be given in which similar cases and cases that contain an experience totally opposite to that of the participants will be able to be evidence, in this section it will also be possible to know some of the experiences by the researchers.

The traditional orientation of the family

Data analyzed for this study suggest that most of the participants come from families with a deeply rooted traditional background, which is culturally typical in the region. For them, family is one of the fundamental supports of the development of each person, since it is responsible for providing security and support. This help, they suggest, should include emotional support. For example, family members should help them to express their different feelings and preferences naturally since for heterosexual people this is not a problem; they do not go through a process of changing the mentality of their family. According to (Balbuena 2010) traditional heteronormative families usually transmit their own ideology based on their own relationships and interactions. This includes their social and religious practices such as marriage, parenthood and binary roles in society of men and women.

For LGBTQ + people this is different “in the case of young people who manifest a homosexual identity, the relationship with the parental figure usually goes through a process of reconstruction of that relationship and of the roles assigned in the culture and within the framework of recognition of a choice of life different from what parents expected for their children” (Arévalo, Lizama & Sanhueza, 2011; Florez & Builes, 2018). They also suggest that this event has been a complex issue to face because, generally, these people have been labeled as deviant, immoral, abnormal and transgressors of the duty to be reproductive of the heterosexist norm”.

The analysis of data for our study suggest that, in most cases, mothers tend to react in a more negative way than fathers do. According to Miller and Boom (2008) “the female

parent seems to be the “chosen one” in the light of the trustful relationship that daughters and sons feel they have with their mothers”.

(Baiocco et al 2014, p.8) performed a study to show “a correlation between a negative perceived maternal and paternal response and a parents’ perceived right-wing conservative political view; the same correlation has been found between maternal negative reaction and parents’ strong religious involvement, these data suggest that believing in conservative traditional values can be a predictor of sexual prejudice. In countries, where religious feelings are ingrained in the culture, it is not unusual for LGBT people to experienced religion-based homophobia”.

Even though in most cases participants reported they had experienced certain kind of discrimination from at least a person in their families, overall, there is a willingness to accept and love the LGBTQ+ individual. According to Cornejo, (Pichardo and Henriquez 2014, p3.) “If a citizen has to choose between what is dictated by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the rights of people who are in their environment -that is, family members, friends, work colleagues and neighbors, who are not heterosexual and that show themselves as such in their daily lives - they will probably opt for the second one”. One of the researchers in the present study also corroborates this idea in his own narrative:

“When I came out I was very afraid because my family came from a very strong Catholic tradition and I was afraid of being rejected. But I was lucky that my parents had an open mind to see far beyond the differences, with the rest of my family it was a longer process, but over time they took it quite well, to this day the loving environment is maintained and also the traditions” (Researcher 1)

We could say that the reaction, whether negative or positive towards the different sexual orientations of the diverse people will depend on the influence. However, for LGBTQ+ people revealing themselves as they are is an aspect of their life that produces stress and concern.

The non-education and lack of representation in the institutions.

When LGBTQ+ students feel the lack of representation and support at school, the consequences can be weighty. According to (Minero 2018) Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are two to three times as likely to be bullied than their non-LGBTQ peers, and they're more likely to miss school and almost five times as likely to attempt suicide, the number is even higher for transgender people.

Data in our study suggest that, on many occasions, the teachers are not ready to deal with situations where homophobia occurs, and that educational institutions do not provide sufficient training to face this type of scenario. Some participants consider that this might be the reason why hatred and discrimination against LGBTQ + people is still present today.

In a similar way, (Penna and Mateos 2014) suggest that a real limitation in most Latin American and Caribbean countries is the insufficient training of teachers in psychosocial issues, such as the prevention of homophobia or sexism, and a lack of comprehensive intervention through specialized personnel dedicated to contributing to the policies of social or community welfare and comprehensive health

It is necessary a space where diverse people can feel confident, and more importantly a space where they can be educated without any type of prejudice that damages or harms their development.

“At school I never received an education that adequately informed me about different sexualities or gender identities. On many occasions when I was in primary school I felt frustrated as if a person like me did not have a place in society, it must also be added that on many occasions the subject was talked about in a rather degrading way, which made me close myself off and start to generate a dislike for myself. It wasn't until high school that I began to discover sexual diversity through the internet”.
(researcher 1)

On many occasions the only alternative that LGBTQ + people have to discover about their own identity is through alternative means outside of educational institutions. It should be added that, on many occasions, the information available on these sites is not produced by professionals. Consequently, misinformation and confusion are abundant.

Fear of being bullied by their classmates.

When it comes to talking about non-heteronormative people in the classroom, it is impossible to ignore bullying. Data suggest that it is a common experience for most LGBTQ + people and that this practice is usually perpetrated by their own classmates.

Similarly, a study of the United Nations Free and Equal shows that “Students and staff who fail to conform to ‘masculine’ norms (including men and boys who are gay or bi, and trans women and girls) are more likely to be the target of violence. Although homophobic and transphobic violence is typically perpetrated by boys and young men, girls

and young women also carry out such violence”. It is also important to highlight that in many cases this violence goes unnoticed or it is ignored by the teachers and sometimes the institutions. This same study also shows that “Students and adults who witness homophobic and transphobic violence often fail to react. This is in part because this kind of violence is rooted in deep cultural beliefs about gender roles related to masculinity and femininity”.

Unfortunately, in countries like Colombia, LGBTQ + people live in terrible situations where their physical and psychological integrity is often compromised and in some cases they go to extremes.

Cases like that of Sergio Urrego, who committed suicide because of the bullying that he suffered for being homosexual in his school, shows that it is still necessary to take measures to educate teachers and students on the respect for diverse people.

(Rivera and Arias 2020 P.149) demonstrate through a study that “LGBT children and adolescents usually experience depression or symptoms associated with depression, feelings of internalized homophobia, suicidal ideation and in some cases suicide or suicide attempt, little satisfaction with their lives and low self-esteem. In addition, the mechanisms to deal with this discrimination, violence and harassment at school often result in risky sexual behavior, running away from home, and alcohol and drug use”.

Discrimination by teachers and institutions.

A really interesting result of our study suggest that one of the problems LGBTQ+ students face comes from the teachers. As it is such a sensitive issue for many people, most teachers and educational institutions decide not to deal with it. But in some cases, teachers

decide to do it from their own perspectives, which in many cases can cause harm to the students themselves.

"When I was in the last grade of high school, I suffered discrimination from one of the teachers. She had religious beliefs with a very strong opinion towards homosexual people; one day in class, when she was talking with the students, she said that homosexuality was not something natural, and that they were sick people and should go to hell. This was enough for some students to start bullying very hard at me, causing me to drop out of school" (researcher 1)

Scholars have identified that, while there has been a growing interest in educating instructors on themes such as inherent prejudice, diversity, and inclusion, most of the time this training do not include LGBTQ+ issues because most school systems do not request it. (Minero 2018).

In the classrooms, on many occasions, situations arise where the practices of some teachers can generate an unfavorable environment for LGBTQ + people since they can generate indirect discrimination. (United Nations Free and Equal 2017) says that some teachers think that some topics are better for students simply based on their gender, sex, sexual orientation or gender experience. On many occasions, this only increases stereotypes in the curricular materials of the institutions and reinforces prejudices against the LGBTQ + community, generating homophobia and transphobia.

Social pressure outside the classroom and the institution.

Although nowadays people belonging to the LGBTQ + community are recognized, they are not accepted in their entirety. There are several people do not support the fact that a non-normative person can work in certain social sectors such as education in this case. Due to

this social concern, homosexual people must not only deal with their own acceptance process: they must also deal with rejection and discrimination from society.

In many cases the stigmatization of LGBTQ + people is especially present in environments where young people and children are educated, today some people still label non-heteronormative people as mentally ill, promiscuous, pedophile and carrier of sexual diseases (Gonzales and Toro 2012).

It is due to this pressure that LGBTQ + people are forced to have a hidden life, so as not to suffer rejection, contempt and fear from their families. Sometimes, the non-heteronormative person does not accept their diversity, and they resort to alcohol, drugs, depression, and in some cases, they feel obliged to have a double life, denying their true self. (Gonzales & Toro, 2012)

There are situations where it is the families of LGBTQ + people who generate this type of pressure with the intention of protecting their non-heteronormative relatives from discrimination and violence.

“In my case, at the time of working at the school as a practicing teacher, my family asked me not to wear flashy clothes, to control my attitude in front of other teachers, as this could cause discomfort among students, teachers and parents. Although their intention was to protect me, I felt repressed from being myself, I must also say that this generated stress when being in the classroom since I was constantly correcting my attitudes” (Researcher 1)

In this way, we can see how on some occasions, due to the influence of external factors and the fear influenced in the families of non-heteronormative people, a harmful

social pressure is generated, which does not allow the free development of LGBTQ + people in society.

Conclusions

In this section we will present the conclusions of the study after analyzing the narratives of the participants and their experiences, including the experiences of the researchers. These conclusions will be divided into the same categories that were proposed in the previous sections, namely, the traditional orientation of the family, the lack of education and representation by the institutions, fear of being bullied by classmates, discrimination from the teachers and the institutions, and the social pressure outside the classroom and the institution. This in order to achieve a better understanding of the study's conclusions.

The traditional conservative orientation of the family

As we have seen, “coming out of the closet” can be quite stressful for many people, especially when families have a very strong religious orientation. On many occasions, for LGBTQ + people, this process can generate situations such as increased levels of stress and even illnesses; and although this is not the case for everyone, it is true that most of the time there are concerns about the family's reaction to this situation.

We can say that due to the traditional and religious culture in which we have been raised, Colombia being a country with a deeply rooted religiosity, it is to be expected that all people fulfill the ideal of a heteronormalized man or woman, with a very marked role of masculinity and femininity, where sexually diverse people have no place to fit in. This is why many families, upon discovering that one of their members does not meet this ideal of

heteronormativity, goes through an assimilation process which can take a long time and in many cases can be quite painful for some families.

Through the years and thanks to the efforts of many people belonging to the LGBTQ + community, a change has been achieved and the prejudices and stereotypes of sexually diverse people have been changing little by little, now some families with a traditional or religious background are willing to accept LGBTQ + family members, such as the cases of the participants in this study.

The non-education and lack of representation in the institutions

Many of the participants expressed their frustration at not being able to find support from educational institutions when dealing with cases of discrimination by students and teachers. This is the invisibility that occurs in schools and colleges that can be so harmful for sexually diverse people, where this lack of representation can generate the growth of prejudice and violence.

In many settings there are teachers who want to teach about diversity and the different representations of gender, but due to the little knowledge provided by the institutions, it is very difficult to achieve this much-needed change. Today, educators need to learn how to deal with situations such as homophobia and transphobia.

Fear of being bullied by their classmates

The majority of people belonging to the LGBTQ + community have suffered bullying in the study centers, discrimination is evidenced when behaviors that are not appropriate

according to social ideals occur. In this case, a feminine man or a masculine girl can be a target of ridicule by heterosexual students. In this sense, everyday acts such as walking, speaking with a particular tone of voice, preferring certain colors for their clothes or playing with toys considered to be use only by one of the accepted genders, can lead to discrimination and violence.

In many cases this discrimination is also represented in an indirect or passive way, since on many occasions students who witness acts of homophobia and transphobia against one of their classmates, decide to keep quiet. This silence and lack of action may be due to the fact that they also agree with these practices against diverse people or also out of fear of being judged and discriminated in the same way.

Discrimination by teachers and institutions

On many occasions, teachers mix their personal beliefs and their concepts regarding what is correct or not in society with their classes, this includes their opinions regarding sexual and gender diversity. The problem is that on many occasions these opinions promote stereotypes and prejudices about this population, although on some occasions it occurs indirectly or unintentionally, this can generate negative feelings in students who are not part of heteronormativity. On the other hand, direct discrimination by teachers towards students who do not comply with their ideals of masculinity or femininity continues to be a reality in the classrooms, as we could see in some experiences of the participants, prejudices and ignorance still prevail.

Finally, it should be noted that the lack of knowledge when dealing with issues related to discrimination against LGBTQ+ people causes many cases of hatred by students and other

members of the institution to ignore, which reinforces the Invisibility towards LGBTQ+ students.

Social pressure outside the classroom and the institution

To this is also added social pressure outside educational institutions, where in many cases LGBTQ + teachers must act according to what is traditionally "normal" in society, taking into account that many people in whom they include not only students but also their parents, they can generate conflict when learning that the teacher does not comply with what is stipulated in this ideal and therefore harm the development of the person who does not identify with performativity.

Recommendations and implications

When conducting studies regarding the sexuality and identity of a certain type of population, we must bear in mind that this can be a sensitive topic depending on the contexts and environment in which the research is carried out. This refers to the fact that in some places such as institutions, towns or countries, non-heteronormative practices are not well received, which is why the confidentiality of the study participants must be essential to guarantee their safety and well-being.

It is important to provide a safe and comfortable environment where data collection can be carried out, this is a subject that can be sensitive for some people belonging to the LGBTQ + community due to various factors such as family, friends, work environment, etc. As

researchers we must take into account ethical considerations to respect the spaces and the decisions of the participants, flexibility when collecting data is very important since several setbacks may arise as the study progresses, to achieve for a good result, we recommend taking into account the requests of the participants to achieve a comfortable, intimate and reliable environment where the subject of study can be developed with total freedom and safety.

difficulties

Although all the participants agreed in the first instance with the requirements to be followed for the study, in some cases changes had to be made to guarantee the comfort of the participants. Because gender and sexual identity is something intimate and personal, one of the participants did not feel completely comfortable with the idea of an oral interview via the internet, specifically participant 3 asked to do the interview in person with one of the researchers, the participant expressed that his/her identity as an LGBTQ+ person is something intimate and that doing it in this way could be much more personal and meaningful for him/her.

One of the factors that also presented difficulties was the time in the elaboration of the interviews, since the intention was to provide the greatest possible comfort to the participants when obtaining the data, it had to be very flexible with time since the participants had limited time in their schedules.

Although the results obtained in the narrations were positive, there were cases where some questions were left in doubt due to the missing time.

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