

Youth development opportunities among LGBTQ+ youth: Who is being reached and who is left out?



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Background:

- Engagement in positive youth development opportunities (YDOs) predicts well-being among adolescents
- Structural oppression contributes to disparities in involvement and fewer benefits for marginalized youth; this may be exacerbated for youth with multiple marginalized identities
- Aim:** examine LGBTQ+ youth involvement in YDOs and variation in involvement at the intersections of racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities

Methods:

- Statewide school-based survey, 2022; N=24,400 LGBTQ+ students
- Grades 8, 9, 11 (~13-18 years old)
- Social positions:** sexual orientation, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, grade
- Youth Development Opportunities (YDO):** 7 items, e.g. "When you spend time doing activities outside of the regular school day, how often do you... learn skills like teamwork or leadership? ...help make decisions?"; range=1-4; $\alpha = 0.81$
- Exhaustive Chi-square automatic interaction detection (ECHAID): decision tree comparing average YDO scores across all combinations of four social positions

LGBTQ+ youth of color – particularly gender diverse youth – report fewer youth development opportunities than white LGBTQ+ youth

Terminal nodes for ECHAID lowest YDO mean scores among LGBTQ+ youth (overall mean = 2.58)

YDO	Race and ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Gender identity	Grade
2.44	White	Pan, asexual	Trans girl, quest.	8 th , 9 th
2.42	--	Bi, none	Trans boy	--
2.41	Multiracial, Black	GL, bi, quest., queer, none	Trans girl, quest.	8 th , 9 th
2.35	--	Asexual, quest., none	2-Spirit, NB/GF	--
2.33	MENA, Latina/x/o, Asian	GL, bi, quest., queer, none	Trans girl, quest.	--
2.33	Native+, Latina/x/o	--	Cis girl	9 th
2.30	Native+, Multiracial, MENA, Latina/x/o, Asian, Black	Pan, asexual	Trans girl, quest.	--
2.27	Native+, Latina/x/o	GL, pan, bi, queer	2-Spirit, NB/GF	8 th , 9 th
2.25	--	GL, pan, queer, asexual, quest.	Trans boy	8 th , 9 th
2.22	Latina/x/o, Asian	Asexual	Cis boy	--

Notes: MENA: Middle Eastern/North African; GL: gay/lesbian; pan: pansexual; bi: bisexual; quest: questioning; trans: transgender; NB/GF: non-binary/gender fluid; cis: cisgender

Conclusions:

- Some LGBTQ+-specific programs may not be inclusive spaces for LGBTQ+ youth of color
- Youth organizations should focus on creating safe and accountable spaces; training on equity and inclusion is recommended for organizational staff
- Legislative advocacy is needed to ensure legal protections for marginalized youth
- Ensuring equitable funding for, access to, and involvement in YDOs is critical to achieving health equity

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