

# Identifying the Unique Needs of Generation Z Students Who Identify as LGBTQ+ Within Higher Education

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## Introduction

The transition from secondary school to higher education is a monumental process for a student from any generation, and Generation Z is the newest generation to enter college within the past few years. Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) are at a higher risk of mental health issues and suicidal thoughts, thus establishing their needs to help counter these risks is necessary (Painter et al., 2018). Colleges and universities need to establish a new set of resources and approaches to best accommodate students of Gen Z who identify as LGBTQ+ with the goal of providing a safe space to attain higher education. Research is needed to fill the gap of knowledge on Gen Z, specifically those identifying as LGBTQ+ within higher education, so that colleges and universities can be a more safe and inclusive space for all.

## Generation Z

- Net Generation / iGeneration
- Born from 1995 to 2010
- Grew up in the age of technology
- One of the most diverse generations
- Large LGBTQ+ population within Gen Z

Considering the adverse impact of non-inclusive and unsupportive campus climates on the health of students who identify as LGBTQ+, it is imperative to recognize and accommodate Gen Z needs and make all students feel safe by implementing campus-wide changes.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants included 10 students and five faculty, staff, and administrators (FSAs) at a medium-sized university in the southeastern U.S. All participants were 18 years or older.

### Measures

Demographic questionnaire

Five interview guides based on participant type (student or FSA), generation, and sexual orientation

### Procedure

Semi-structured interviews with students and FSAs were conducted to gather information on the perceived climate for students who identify as LGBTQ+

### Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to extract themes from interview transcriptions to describe overarching ideas of participants

## Results

Theme	Need	Supportive Quote
Institutional Support	Safe spaces	"I immediately sought out a Pride Club at the university to find a place in which I could be in a safe environment."
	Inclusive application process	"Applications need to be inclusive to all identities, which includes race but primarily gender and sexual orientation."
	Visibility of faculty and staff that identify	"when the LGBTQ+ community can see people who look like them, love like them, perform their gender like them, ... they feel more comfortable coming out whenever they choose to come out."
Education	Resources for students who identify as transgender	"They have anxieties about being more involved on campus due to how they will be received by people who are not part of the LGBTQ community."
	Revise existing trainings	"Training was uncomfortable to sit through when I felt like I knew more about it than the people that were giving the presentation."
Peer Support	Education of professors	"in regard to a classroom setting and whether people feel safe to express their ideas and who they are, some faculty know how to create that, and some don't."
	Increased peer support	"They can recognize what they've been through, where they are now, and how they have done that."
Generational Differences		"to have real connections with one another face-to-face, real conversations with people sitting together physically and not be distracted by technology."



## Discussion

### Present Study

Current findings are similar to Seelman, Woodford, and Nicolazzo's (2017) study of the higher education environment, which suggested that institutional support and awareness of the effects of microaggressions against the LGBTQ+ student community is necessary in order to accommodate these students. Despite the need for research on the climate of the LGBTQ+ community in the southeastern U.S., this region has been the focus of disproportionately less research than other regions of the country (Stone, 2018). An overview of sociological LGBTQ+ research conducted in the U.S. over the last twenty years shows that the southeastern U.S. has been the focus of only 10% of studies on the LGBTQ+ community (Stone, 2018). With the southeastern U.S. containing 23% of adults who identify as LGBTQ+ within the U.S., more research needs to be done in this region to quantify progress toward equality (LGBT Populations, 2019; Stone, 2018). Current findings contributes to narrowing a regional gap in the literature.

### Limitations

Results are affected by the fact that none of the participants identified as transgender, although several participants did identify as "other," meaning they fall outside of the gender binary. Results also may have been influenced by an uneven distribution of sexual orientation among participants.

### Future Directions

Studies using larger and more representative samples are needed as are studies designed to better compare the needs of GenZ students to the needs of students from other generations. Quantitative studies that can answer questions about the impact of intersecting identities on the needs of students who identify as LGBTQ+ also may be useful.

## References

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