

**Forming Identities Amidst International Trauma: The Impacts of Over-Informed Teenagers
on their Development**

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SCG 401 201: ADVANCED LIFESPAN DEVELOPMENT

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December 23, 2024

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In the current age of technology, teenagers around the world and predominantly in the United States fend for themselves in the online sphere as the adults around them assume incorrectly that their younger generation is more familiar with these devices, which are really just as old as they are. Presently, a majority of concerns tend to blame the rise of technology rather than what is being communicated through the technology. Teenagers, who are at a pivotal stage of growth in understanding themselves, their peers, and the world around them, are currently witnessing both self-revelatory ideologies and genocidal trauma in rapidfire, relentless succession. Making sense of violence in the world while internalizing new pieces of their own personalities and identities heavily and dramatically impacts their development and growth as humans. This paper will examine specifically how the exposure of more LGBT+ resources than ever before combined with play-by-play news of international death and politics through increased global and online communications has resulted in intense, extreme, and unprecedented dimensions to teenage development.

Methodology

An obstacle that arose during research was that many demographics dealt with college-age and postsecondary students, as it was likely easier to find those participants and gain their consent for research purposes than students who are still considered minors. There is also some suspicion that there may be more faith in students aged over 18 to handle or understand dense topics such as LGBT+ identities and international conflicts, but the purpose of this paper is to mark specifically how it affects teenagers from a children's rights perspective, as whole individuals with their own influenced and influencing opinions. To that end, there was prioritization towards eye witnesses, interviews, and first hand accounts from students themselves.

Literature Review

Despite the differences in topics, the overlaps in effects international conflicts and LGBT+ resources had on teenagers showed that students had interest in these topics, whether they were directly impacted or not, even though neither topics were codified in school curricula, and sought out their own research through social media. These topics are being left out of school curricula and avoided for being controversial, as they are causing conflicts between classmates, teachers, administration, and families.

The student interest comes from human empathy. Students want to know what it is like to live in other places, and to experience different lives. In several articles, reporters mentioned that there were students who had personal ties to LGBT+ topics and international conflicts, but there were even more students who were “curious and worried for their friends” (Langreo) and “feel[ing] sympathy for their classmates” (Timmeney). Another common thread in these sources is how these topics have impacted the teaching staff, who have direct relations with the students. One Palestinian sixth-grade teacher in Alameda County, California, has had students asking after her wellbeing when they noticed and realized the effects the genocide was having on their own teacher. “I’m not as enthusiastic as I used to be, which causes my students to not be as enthusiastic” (Karimi).

Teenagers are in a stage of development where they are interested in other lifestyles and other humans, and seek out answers to inform their own life decisions. Oftentimes, in politics and wars and “adult” topics like sexuality, the younger populations are swept to the side as being incapable of understanding. However, the rise of the Technology Era has given students the tools and accessibility to conduct their own research.

From the months of September to December in 2021, a survey was put on social media through advertisements to gather information on the labels LGBT+ youth used for themselves (Mastroianni). 33,993 LGBT+ youth answered this survey. The reach of social media ads surely cannot account for every single youth that identifies as LGBT+, but in a short span of three months using only advertisements, there was a huge amount of data collected. The survey

found that more and more students are coming out, or declaring their LGBTQ+ identities, at younger ages than their predecessors. “When asked why LGBTQ youth might be coming out at younger ages now, [Myeshia Price](#), PhD, the Director of Research Science at The Trevor Project, told Healthline that (...) “young people increasingly have more access to language, education, and representation around LGBTQ people and identities” now more than ever before. “(Mastroiani) The Age of Technology is empowering young people to learn more about themselves, finding confidence and community far earlier than previous generations were allowed.

Not only are students more tuned in with their selves and identities, they are also looking at the world to understand places and people. The NYTimes hosted an online forum for teens of all ages to respond to the Palestine genocide after reading verified sources. Many teens were engaging in civil discourse, and reflected the many views that adults have postured on the same topic. A poster named ian from CA wrote: “tbh the way that Israel has reacted has not really surprised me so far while yes the needles death is horrible and both Hamas and Israel should be condemned for there atrocity's, i think Israel has bin waiting for a chance to completely get rid of Hamas and maybe even the Palestinian population the Gaza strip, and with Hamas attacking them this is the perfect opportunity to bulldoze Hamas and in the act of doing so Gaza itself.(...)” This level of critical thinking is even reflected in younger students at Elementary Schools, who are “asking if we’re headed for World War III,” (Karimi). Students understand more about conflict and war than they are taught to.

The largest piece of this research that was conducted had to do with the amount of stress caused by international conflicts and incoming LGBTQ+ information. Opposing opinions and misinformation has led to rifts between classmates, teachers, administration, and parents. To examine the rifts between classmates, it is important to acknowledge the lack of communication between the students, which in-classroom discussions could prevent. When students were able to have a civil discussion in their classroom at Benjamin Franklin High

School, they voiced their appreciation that it didn't get confrontational. (Langreo) There is a heavy implication here that the students fully believed and were worried that there would be conflict if they spoke on these issues. And they are right to assume that: in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, students broke out into a fight over the Israel-Hamas War that had parents commenting they may not want to send their students to school any more (Timmeney.) LGBTQ+ students regularly face outright discrimination and bullying from their peers due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. (Mabry) These are examples of the increased political conflict causing physical conflict between students in public schools. Rogers found that 69% of principals, according to his research, have reported derogatory remarks from classmates to fellow classmates based on political views.

The discrimination and conflict, however, is exacerbated by the lack of inclusive curricula. Mabry writes that many schools lack the resources and information to represent diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, leading to more misunderstanding and stereotyping, and leading to more isolation of LGBTQ+ students. Rosman found that beyond the friction between pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian students, there was critique from students towards administrators for avoiding lessons on the long history of conflict in the Middle East. Several sources noted the intense pushback from parents on teaching inclusive curricula, which can only be reflected in the way these schools and educators are allowed to handle real-time events. Students rely on teachers, who rely on their admin, who rely on the parents and the government to fully support our students to have difficult topics in an everchanging world.

Conclusion

Student stress is not specific to any one particular group of marginalization, and the best way to conquer and show true care to all students is to open up discussions and curricula to make room for the specific, niche, and real-time people our students are sharing their classrooms and the world with. This can only be accomplished, and is only possible, when all the adults who are working together to raise our teenagers can be on the same page about a

postmodern, diverse, and inclusive future. Any attempt to shield students from the world they live in is an injustice to them as citizens of the world.

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