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Envisioning queer curricula: A systematic review of LGBTIQ + topics in teacher practitioner literature

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ABSTRACT

Given the current political and social climate, teaching children about sexual orientation and gender identity is more important than ever. The present literature review seeks to address the following questions: How are LGBTIQ + topics addressed in practitioner literature and in what content areas are these topics most prevalent? How prevalent are LGBTIQ + topics in practitioner literature before 2015, prior to the publication of Miller's Queer Literacy Framework (QLF)? How prevalent are these topics after QLF's publication in 2015? The search for LGBTIQ + topics in the journals led to a total of 74 articles which were then coded by three independent researchers. To explore the prevalence of LGBTIQ + topics in articles published in journals most accessible to PreK-12 classroom teachers, the 13 top practitioner journals across all major content areas (i.e., English/Language Arts, social studies, mathematics, and science) and grade levels were selected. These results produce two salient conclusions. First, LGBTIQ + themes are present in articles published over the years. Second, individuals included under the LGBTIQ + umbrella are silenced. There is evidence of the use of the QLF before and after 2015, indicating that LGBTIQ + topics were addressed. Implications for teacher education and suggestions for future research are included.

The current political climate in the year 2019 is rife with anxiety for the LGBTIQ+[1] community. Anti-trans discriminatory bills banning people from going to the restroom aligning with their gender identity or serving in the military remind us that discrimination remains entrenched in the fiber of society. Simultaneously, New Jersey and California have recently considered requiring teachers to teach LGBTIQ + history curriculum in their schools (Adely, 2019). Past research has shown that teachers may feel

uneasy addressing LGBTIQ + topics in their classrooms, especially if it is a requirement (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014).

It is inevitable that teachers will have LGBTIQ + students in their classrooms. While estimates of LGBTIQ + youth are difficult to approximate for various reasons ranging from mischievous responding to fluidity (Cimpian, 2017), some have estimated the middle school population of lesbian, gay, or bisexual students to be about 3.8% and transgender students to be about 1.3% (Shields et al, 2013). It is critical that teachers are exposed to and are aware of the issues faced by LGBTIQ + students (Meyer and Leonardi, 2018), many of them suffering from negative academic outcomes (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). While some curriculum often takes for granted the idea that students' gender identities are binary, the authors understand gender and sexuality as social constructions that are assigned and assumed at birth and perpetuated through repetition by society (Butler, 2006).

To date, studies have addressed effects of teaching and addressing LGBTIQ + topics in the classroom (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015). Educators are knowingly or not, participating in what Wozolek, Wootton, and Demlow (2016) call the "school-to-coffin" pipeline. That is, an increasingly devastating number of suicides occur annually amongst queer youth, and many have failed suicidal attempts or ideations as a result of a homophobic, hostile, and intolerant schooling environment (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2018; Wozolek, 2018a, 2018b). In order for teachers to be better equipped to handle such urgent issues, they need to access research-based sources, namely practitioner literature and publications.

The purpose of this paper is to address whether LGBTIQ + topics and themes are present in current practitioner PreK-12 literature and whether they are being presented in a manner that supports inclusive dialogue. We define practitioner literature as research that is content- and language-accessible to PreK-12 teachers through content-area national organizations. To that end, we conducted a systematic review to examine the inclusion of LGBTIQ + identities in practitioner-oriented journals. Different from a traditional literature review, the systematic review summarizes literature in a particular topic through a replicable process (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). Since there are some studies that review the inclusion of LGBTIQ + topics in school counseling and psychology literature (Jennings, 2014), school support literature (Graybill & Proctor, 2016), and teacher education (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011), we seek to fill a gap present in that of educator practitioner literature.

The following research questions guide this work: How are LGBTIQ + topics addressed in practitioner literature and what content
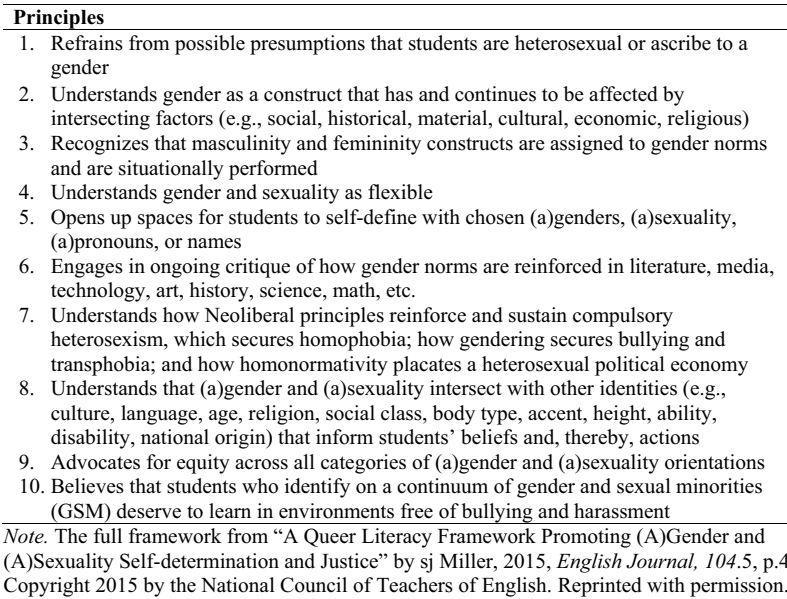
Principles
1. Refrains from possible presumptions that students are heterosexual or ascribe to a gender
2. Understands gender as a construct that has and continues to be affected by intersecting factors (e.g., social, historical, material, cultural, economic, religious)
3. Recognizes that masculinity and femininity constructs are assigned to gender norms and are situationally performed
4. Understands gender and sexuality as flexible
5. Opens up spaces for students to self-define with chosen (a)genders, (a)sexuality, (a)pronouns, or names
6. Engages in ongoing critique of how gender norms are reinforced in literature, media, technology, art, history, science, math, etc.
7. Understands how Neoliberal principles reinforce and sustain compulsory heterosexism, which secures homophobia; how gendering secures bullying and transphobia; and how homonormativity placates a heterosexual political economy
8. Understands that (a)gender and (a)sexuality intersect with other identities (e.g., culture, language, age, religion, social class, body type, accent, height, ability, disability, national origin) that inform students' beliefs and, thereby, actions
9. Advocates for equity across all categories of (a)gender and (a)sexuality orientations
10. Believes that students who identify on a continuum of gender and sexual minorities (GSM) deserve to learn in environments free of bullying and harassment

Note. The full framework from "A Queer Literacy Framework Promoting (A)Gender and (A)Sexuality Self-determination and Justice" by sj Miller, 2015, *English Journal, 104*.5, p.42. Copyright 2015 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 1. A queer literacy framework promoting (A) gender and (A) sexuality self-determination and justice.

areas are they most prevalent in? How prevalent are LGBTIQ + topics in practitioner literature before 2015, prior to the publication of Miller's (2015) Queer Literacy Framework (QLF)? How prevalent are these topics after QLF's publication in 2015?

Theoretical framing

Miller's (2015) Queer Literacy Framework (QLF) guides this work. The QLF is composed of ten principles that address (a)gender and (a)sexuality in the classroom (see Figure 1). We chose the QLF as the framework through which to code all the articles that we found as it is our contention that articles that addresses at least one or more of these principles will likely contribute to educating pre- and in-service teachers about sexual and gender diversity in their classrooms. While we are aware that the QLF was published in 2015 and we started our search in 2000, we opted to look at the literature through a pre- and post-QLF lens to provide a more thorough examination of how the conversation around LGBTIQ + issues in practitioner journals has changed over a 17-year period.

Method

The three authors have been public school teachers and/or pre-service teacher educators at one point in their career. Mario is a Latinx transgender man who was a high school mathematics teacher. Samantha is a

cisgender, heterosexual, White female who was a middle school English/ Language Arts (ELA) teacher, and Amanda is a cisgender, gay White female who is an ELA pre-service teacher educator. These three different lenses lend us the motivation to identify literature in each of our content areas as we are all currently pre-service teacher educators. This section covers six criteria used by the authors to determine articles to include, keywords used and journals searched, and the analysis process used for this systematic literature review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We conducted a systematic review to examine the inclusion of articles related to LGBTIQ + themes and identities in practitioner-oriented journals (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). We adopted what Denyer, Tranfield, and van Aken (2008) refer to as "CIMO-logic" in developing the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of articles. That is, Denyer et al. (2008) ask questions about the context of the articles, interventions, mechanisms, and relevant outcomes of interest. Drawing upon this logic contributed to initial research questions for this research synthesis.

The following criteria was used to screen all articles:

1. Articles must be published between 2000 to December 2017, due to the evolution of the terminology used in the review, as well as to capture what teachers were reading about queer issues after the Supreme Court *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision of 2015, which ruled that same sex couples had the fundamental right to marry. Essentially, did the content of these practitioner journals change following the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) decision, which is when QLF was published?
2. Articles must have appeared in practitioner journals in any content areas (i.e., English/Language arts, social studies, math, and science) and grade levels.
3. Target audience must be teachers.
4. Journal must be sponsored by a professional organization.
5. Article must have search keywords.
6. Articles must be written in English and published in the United States.

The journals included in our search, along with their *h*-index, depicted in Table 1, were chosen for several reasons. First, each of the journals included are well known among classroom teachers and have a large number of subscribers. Those with access to these journals include members of professional organizations such as International Literacy Association, National Council for the Social Studies, National Council of Teachers of

Table 1. Journals included in the systematic review.

Content Area	Journal Title	Grade Focus	Sponsoring Organization	Number of Members	H-5 Index
English/ Language Arts	The Reading Teacher	Elementary/Early middle school	International Literacy Association	Over 300,000	29
	Voices from the Middle	Middle school	National Council of Teachers of English	Over 25,000	9
	English Journal	Middle & high school	National Council of Teachers of English	Over 25,000	14
	Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy	High School	International Literacy Association	Over 300,000	30
History/ Social Studies	Social Studies and the Young Learner	Elementary school	National Council for the Social Studies	Over 13,000	5
	Middle Level Learning	Middle school			–
	Social Education	High school			9
Mathematics	Teaching Children Mathematics	Elementary school	National Council of Teachers of Mathematics	Over 60,000	13
	Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School	Middle school			9
	Mathematics Teacher	High school			11
Science	Science and Children	Elementary school	National Science Teaching Association	About 50,000	10
	Science Scope	Middle school			11
	The Science Teacher	High school			13

Note. Table is adapted from Meister, Zimmer, and Wright (2017). H-index for all journals come from Google Scholar, except for Middle Level Learning, which was not found.

English, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and National Science Teaching Association. The total number of teachers with access to these publications range from about 13,000 to over 300,000. Second, the conferences of the sponsoring organizations for each of the journals are practitioner-based. Third, we aimed to include at least one journal per subject area per grade range (e.g., elementary school social studies, middle school social studies, and high school social studies) in order to provide a more holistic view of what literature is available to teachers in each content area.

Search strategy

Using the EBSCO database, we searched the archives for articles from all 13 journals dating from 2000 to December of 2017. The article or its keywords needed to contain at least one of the following terms: *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, *intersex*, *queer*, *sexuality*, or *homosexuality*. The term *questioning* was not included due to the numerous irrelevant articles this search generated, many of which were related to questioning techniques
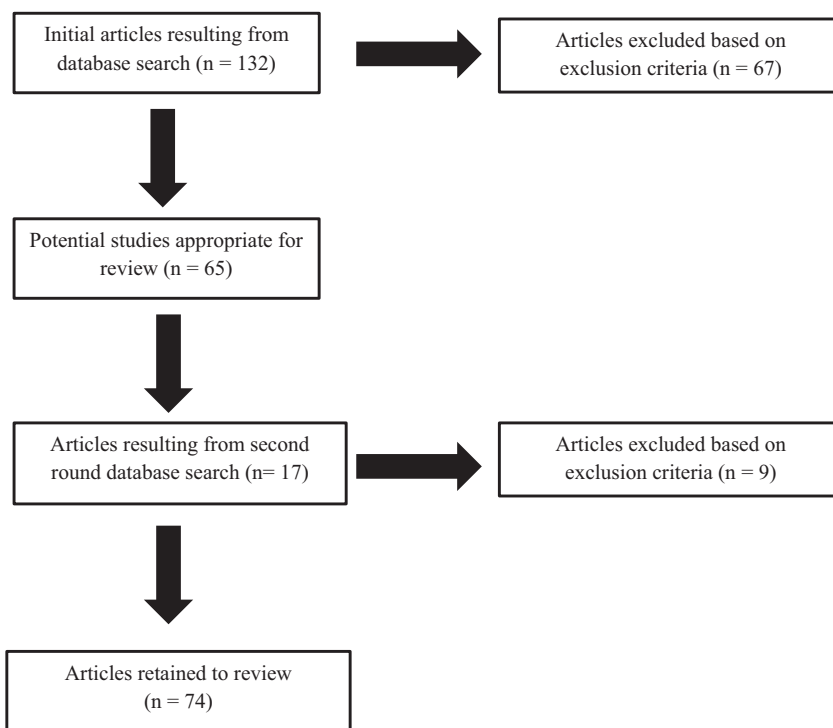
Figure 2. PRISMA diagram of screening process for the systematic review.

and comprehension strategies in the classroom. We felt that including this term would skew our data and produce an inflated number of articles, with many being irrelevant to the content of this paper. Figure 2 shows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) diagram for our search process (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & The PRISMA Group, 2009).

Coding procedures & data analysis

Our initial search resulted in 65 articles eligible for coding. A randomly selected set of ten articles were coded by the three authors independently using the QLF as a coding schema. That is, we read each article carefully and searched for the presence of each of the ten principles of the QLF within the content and context of the article. For example, if the first principle, which contends that teachers should not assume a student's gender or sexuality, was conveyed by the author(s) of the article, then that principle was recorded as addressed. We met on three separate occasions to create group consensus on understanding of the QLF principles, to clarify issues of consistency in the presentation of QLF principles in the selected articles, and to address the inter-rater reliability. Any and all disagreements and discrepancies were discussed and reevaluated until we reached 100%

agreement. After that, the remainder of the articles resulting from the rest of the first and second round article searches were equally distributed amongst all three coders.

Coding data for each article was placed in a spreadsheet accessible to all authors that was split into four sections. The first section referred to the journal content area (ELA, SS, Math, or Science) and was coded with a "1" if the article was in a specific content journal. The second section referred to the search terms that appeared in the article, with one column per search term, as well as a column clarifying how they were used. For instance, if the terms *lesbian*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, and *homosexuality* appeared, we wanted to know whether they were all central to the piece, whether the piece focused on queerness in general, or whether it was clickbait as a way to reach a wider audience. Additionally, our third section consisted of two columns dedicated to theoretical framework. In these two columns, the first corresponded to whether an explicit framework was used in the piece, and was coded as a dichotomous variable (0 = Not present or explicit, 1 = Present/ Explicit). The second column served as a way for the coder to clarify the theory used in the article via notes. Finally, the last section contained ten columns (one for each principle) and was coded as a dichotomous variable, with a "1" if the specific principle was integrated into the article.

Results

Overall, the results of our search produced two salient conclusions. First, LGBTIQ + themes are present, albeit rare, in articles published between 2000 and 2017. Their inclusion in practitioner-oriented journals suggest there is at least an attempt to help teachers include a broader representation of students in the classroom.

Second, we found a silencing of the full experiences of each individual component of the LGBTIQ + umbrella. For example, an overwhelming number of articles contained *gay* and *lesbian*, yet few articles used the remaining terms. These results are highly problematic, as they suggest the negation and silencing of the experiences of individuals who do not discretely fit within the societally-constructed parameters of gay and lesbian. It also suggests that practitioners in the field are only being presented with a binary view of sexuality within which to educate their students, either heterosexual or gay and lesbian.

Research question 1: How are LGBTIQ + topics addressed in practitioner literature and in what content areas are they most prevalent?

Our initial search in August of 2016 yielded 132 articles; yet, upon deeper examination of the content of the articles found, only 65 were determined

Table 2. Frequency of articles containing each key word.

Search Term	n	%
Gay	53	67.09
Lesbian	42	53.16
Bisexual	30	37.97
Transgender	29	36.71
Intersex	1	1.26
Queer	25	31.65
Sexuality	16	20.25
Homosexuality	18	22.78

Note. Not all percentages add up to 100%, as some articles addressed multiple categories.

applicable to this present study (e.g., author's name is *Gay*, exclusion of book reviews). The second search in December of 2017 produced an additional 17 articles. After excluding some that did not meet our criteria, the final number of articles included in the study was 74. A full list of articles included in this study, along with the prevalence of each QLF principle can be found in Appendix A (Supplementary material).

Within these 74 articles and publications, the distribution across search terms displayed on Table 2 shows that *gay* and *lesbian* were the most frequently used terms (53 and 42 articles, respectively). Also, 63 of the applicable articles containing the search terms appeared in the literacy journals, 10 were found in social studies publications, and 1 was found in a science publication. A search of the mathematics publications produced 0 applicable articles. Additionally, some of the included articles were produced by more than one search term. That is, an article containing the keyword *gay* may have also contained the keyword *lesbian*. In fact, the term *bisexual* was not the independent focus of any articles found, only being included in articles also using the search terms *gay* or *lesbian*. There was only one exception for the term *transgender* (Parker & Bach, 2009) and one exception for the term *intersex* (Breu, 2009), where those terms were central to those articles. The prevalence of each term can be found in Table 2.

The frequency of keywords used gave us a broad picture as to what each article might address, but we wanted to dig deeper into how the keywords were used in each article. After careful readings of each article to determine if these keywords were superficial references or substantive discussion of queer issues, we found the topics covered in most articles aligned with the keywords. We worked under the assumption that some of the articles would include pedagogical strategies and/or implications for curriculum given that they were published in practitioner journals. However, not all did. While over a third of the articles used our search word, *transgender*, few covered transgender issues as a core topic in the piece. Several talked about queerness or LGBTIQ + as a homogenous population without distinguishing differences in needs for each group within the larger LGBTIQ + population, and did not make transgender issues the central

topic (Blackburn, 2003; Campos, 2017; Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Freedman, 2009; Logan, Lasswell, Hood, & Watson, 2014; Wickens & Wedwick, 2011). Others covered strategies for locating literature for the classroom or possible activities to teach (Alter, 2017b; Fink, 2011; Letcher, 2009; Soares & Wood, 2011; Zanitsch, 2009). Two articles covered advocacy or policy relevant to LGBTIQ + issues in schools (Cruz & Bailey, 2017; Henkin, 2011).

Out of the articles found, 29 of them explicitly mentioned recommendations for the classroom, though the majority did not have a theoretical framework to support those recommendations. The ones that did used queer theory, critical race theory, critical feminism, or others critical frameworks (Blackburn, 2003; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Breu, 2009; Cruz & Bailey, 2017; Dodge & Crutcher, 2015; Falter, 2013; Kedley & Spiering, 2017; Mason, 2014; Michell, 2009; Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009; Vetter, 2010). Others offered classroom recommendations which were supported by best practices outlined by national organizations such as the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network, the National Middle School Association, the American Educational Research Association, National Council of Teachers of English (Freedman, 2009; Logan, Lasswell, Hood, & Watson, 2014; Wickens & Wedwick, 2011).

Research question 2: How prevalent are LGBTIQ + topics in practitioner literature before 2015, prior to the publication of Miller's (2015) queer literacy framework (QLF)?

To explore this research question, we looked at the 56 articles that were published prior to 2015. Many articles (18) did not incorporate any of the principles of the QLF, which was expected since QLF did not exist prior to 2015. However, 15 articles integrated at least half of the QLF principles. The remaining articles included less than half of the principles. Out of those less than half, some provided thorough explanations of language/terminology commonly associated with gender and sexuality, and how the research in these two areas relate to the lives of LGBTIQ + youth (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Crisp & Knezek, 2010; Vetter, 2010), along with a range of pedagogical tools and strategies that can be utilized in the classroom to address gender and sexuality (Falter, 2013). Breu (2009) not only integrated the QLF, but also discussed intersex issues and cited research on the topic. The principle with the most incidences was Principle 10, (addresses anti-bullying environments; $n = 32$), and Principles 2 (addresses gender as a construct) and 8 (addresses intersectionality) were tied for the lowest frequencies ($n = 12$).

Research question 3: How prevalent are these topics after QLF's publication in 2015?

In order to answer this question, we looked at the number of articles published from 2015 to December of 2017. Other than Miller's (2015) article, only 17 articles were written on or after QLF was published. Three articles did not address any part of the QLF (Meixner, 2015; Nagle, 2016; Wargo, 2017). About half integrated five or more QLF principles in their articles (Alter, 2017a; Burke & Greenfield, 2016; Campos, 2017; Dodge & Crutcher, 2015; Huang, 2015; Kedley & Spiering, 2017). That is, they all were directly concerned with critical issues in education addressing gender and sexuality (e.g., gender as a construct, allyship, anti-bullying strategies). One of them presented a victim-blaming perspective of bullying (Campos, 2017). The principle with the most incidences was Principle 10 (addresses anti-bullying environments; $n = 10$) and Principles 1 (addresses presumption of one's gender and/or sexuality) and 2 (addresses gender as a construct) were tied for the lowest frequencies ($n = 2$). One article incorporated every aspect of the QLF and had a thorough and compassionate understanding of gender and sexuality (Kedley & Spiering, 2017), which the authors saw as a model.

Discussion

Overall, these findings reveal that LGBTIQ + students are potentially provided an opportunity to have their identities and experiences affirmed in the classroom. However, even within the LGBTIQ + umbrella, exclusion is present in most subjects, particularly in social studies, science and mathematics. This could be due in part to the lack of curricula available in preservice teacher education textbooks, which can lead to a lack of visibility in these subjects. This is not to say that resources are not available or professional development is not provided in these subjects. Rather, it is further evidence that professional organizations and practitioner journals have an opportunity and an obligation to reach a wider audience.

Our results are consistent with content analyses that have focused on examining LGBTIQ + content in multicultural education and teacher education textbooks. These studies found little to no representation in textbooks examined (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). Creating an affirming schooling environment for LGBTIQ + youth is important, especially when legislators try to restrict LGBTIQ + representation in the curriculum (Macgillivray, 2008). Research by Kosciw et al. (2018) shows that having an LGBTIQ+-inclusive

curriculum contributes to sexually diverse and gender expansive students who feel safer at school.

Disrupting the binary

To begin to create more inclusive classroom spaces, practitioners and researchers alike must extricate themselves from a binary view of sexuality and gender. Miller, Mayo, and Lugg (2018) talk about "fracturing sex and gender" as a means to create interdisciplinary discussions in classrooms in a dynamic way that reflects the fluidity of sex and gender (p. 356). Inclusive spaces must be established with the understanding that gender and sexuality are best understood and expressed without imposing rigid norms and roles. In doing so, practitioners are better prepared to create a classroom environment that is truly inclusive.

No research is free of limitations. When conducting this study, we noted elements that may have impacted the results. The first is that searches within the EBSCO database, specifically involving the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) journals did not yield consistent results. This may be due to the NCSS journals varying in how their journals are indexed and/or differences in how their keyword terms were selected for the database. Because of this, we chose to also directly search the NCSS journal archives through their website to verify the inconsistent results from EBSCO. Finally, a number of articles covering LGBTIQ + themes have been published in online forums and blogs for the organizations' journals included in our search. This is worth noting, as LGBTIQ + themes are being discussed within these organizations, specifically the International Literacy Association (Hayn, Cobern, & Langley, 2016). These posts were not included in our discussion because they did not meet the criteria for selection. However, further research could explore the coverage of these themes in online publications and forums within national teacher organizations.

Prospective teachers would benefit from the contributions of LGBTIQ + individuals within their respective fields of expertise. In other words, these LGBTIQ + researchers and teachers are well-positioned to help others integrate curriculum in their content areas that disrupt the misguided notion that gender and sexuality should be seen as a binary (Gunckel, 2009; Pennell, 2016; Rands, 2013, 2016). Beginning to disrupt and deconstruct sex and gender in teacher education courses will establish the foundation for more inclusive teaching practices and classroom spaces as these teachers enter the field.

In our study, we found that many articles used the keyword terms to either reach a wider audience or because they saw the community as

homogenous. We recommend journal editors and reviewers examine the keywords used in their assessment of the article to ensure specific keyword belongs with that particular piece. Additionally, it is important for scholars who do work in this area to continue publishing in practitioner journals outside of LGBTIQ+-focused journals as a way to reach more teachers and have a broader impact.

Going forward, the exclusion of bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and queer voices must be acknowledged and given space within both practitioner publications and classrooms, especially in social studies, mathematics, and science. Teachers must continue to educate themselves by learning from their students whose identities often lie outside the binary and on a continuum. It is time for the experiences of these individuals to be fully acknowledged and included in the curriculum. LGBTIQ + students and teachers need external resources to further their knowledge of their own identities. Teachers need more resources to help these students grow as individuals. Unless action is taken, we fear that our schools will only serve to perpetuate the school-to-coffin pipeline (Wozolek et al., 2016) and we will continue to lose our LGBTIQ + youth.

Note

1. The + symbol is used in LGBTIQ + here in this paper to acknowledge a part of the queer community that is not always named, which consists of those who are lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer/questioning and are HIV-positive. However, due to the nature of this article covering prevalence of queer topics in practitioner literature for youth, we did not pursue queer HIV-positive key words as a subject in our literature search. This does not mean that it does not exist, however.

Acknowledgments

Notes on contributors

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