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THEORY AND RESEARCH IN SOCIAL EDUCATION

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Straight Talk in the Classroom: Discussing Lesbian and Gay Issues in School
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One of the most troubling issues in the discourse on diversity in American society is what happens when the conversation turns to the topic of respect for sexual identity and the rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people. Clearly, attitudes regarding sexual identity are deeply rooted in people’s religious beliefs, family and cultural backgrounds, educational experiences, and in the historically heteronormative foundations of our society. Thus, for many people, reactions to this issue range from slight discomfort and silence to moral outrage and vocal opposition.

In schools, where children and adolescents are in the process of discovering their identities on many levels, these reactions can seem even more pronounced. One especially disturbing occurrence that has long been observable in some schools is the tendency of many young people to refer to anyone or anything that seems different or strange to them as “gay,” and to use the word “gay” as an all-purpose derogation. Moreover, another disturbing occurrence is the tendency of some educators - at all levels of schooling - to ignore such comments. Whereas some progress has been achieved in terms of confronting racial, ethnic, and perhaps other kinds of slurs in schools, homophobic slurs or insults based on sexual identity seem to be placed in a different category of “official” attention.

Social studies educators and researchers have done a commendable job of addressing a wide variety of diversity issues, and there now exists a robust body of scholarship in this area. Nonetheless, research on social education and sexual identity issues, and on homophobia specifically, appears thin and often overlooked. Studies that examine social educators’ work with both adolescents and preservice teachers provide a promising direction. This issue of TRSE developed from a set of papers on sexual identity and homophobia submitted by Linda Levstik and Jeannette Groth, Margaret Smith Crocco, and Stephen Thornton. Their work was sufficiently thought
provoking that I decided to expand it into a themed issue and invite other social studies researchers and educators to contribute additional kinds of manuscripts related to the overall theme of social education and sexual identity. Consequently, the issue is organized around three sections: theory and research in this area, reflections on teaching practice from both the university and high school levels, and book reviews. Stephen Thornton introduces both the topic and the contributors to this special issue in an essay that follows this one.

Readers will note that the contributors focus on a variety of issues and use a variety of terms to describe sexual orientation and identity—gay, lesbian, Queer, homosexual, bisexual, transgender. The contributors and I believed that this would be a desirable approach for an exploratory _TRSE_ theme, and that the diversity of terms and topics would be an appropriate reflection of the complex nature of these issues.

On another note, I am pleased to announce that Kathy Bickmore of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto has accepted the position of _TRSE_ Book Editor, beginning in June of 2002. Books, and offers to review them, should be sent directly to her in care of the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Department, OISE/UT, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6, Canada. Her email address is kbickmore@oise.utoronto.ca. Book reviews sent to the editor are subject to the same review process as other manuscripts. Additionally, while _TRSE_ does not guarantee a review of every book sent to the editor, we will periodically publish a list of books that have been received and are available for review.

Finally, I wish to call readers’ attention to two important corrections to the Winter 2002 issue. Walter Parker of the University of Washington, who was mentioned in my editorial essay as a member of the TRSE Editorial Board serving a one-year term, was inadvertently omitted from the TRSE Editorial Board listing on page 3 of that issue. Also, it should be noted that the five featured articles by Diana Hess, Cynthia Tyson, Lynn Brice, Toni Fuss Kirkwood, and Brian Sevier that I edited for the Winter 2002 issue were received, reviewed, and accepted under the editorship of E. Wayne Ross.
Does Everybody Count as Human? 1

Stephen J. Thornton
Teachers College, Columbia University

The social studies curriculum concerns human beings. Educators select significant human groups and individuals for study. Social studies purposes, however, extend beyond whatever personal and academic interest this subject matter generates among students. We also embrace more expansive aims that probably cannot be directly taught, but we hope nonetheless will be learned along the way. These aspirations may include fostering, for example, human rights, tolerance, justice, civic responsibility, and caring.

These kinds of expansive aims have taken on new meaning over the last generation as attention has been given to building a more inclusive curriculum that incorporates multiple perspectives. Seen in this light, the virtual silence of early 20th century history textbooks on racial oppression, for example, now seems astonishing. At least at the level of formal statements of what should be taught and accompanying instructional materials (the "official" curriculum), consideration of, say, "justice," now often is framed in terms of "Justice for whom? From whose perspective?", and so on.

Women's experience and gender relations are two of the most obvious (and, of course, interrelated) topics in the broadening of the curriculum. Nevertheless, the effects of these changes on both the official curriculum and the curriculum enacted in classrooms remain uneven. Most often, the new material about women and gender relations is "added on" to a story still organized around the experience of men exercising power in such traditionally male-dominated fields as diplomacy, war, politics, and the economy (Crocco, 1997). Moreover, these men are mostly white (although increasingly supplemented in recent years by powerful men of color, around the globe as well as in
the United States). "Progress" on women in the social studies curriculum, it appears, has been made, but there is still a way to go.

But other aspects of gender relations remain unaltered. Missing from almost all discussions of gender in school social studies is reference to the lives and history of lesbians and gay men (hereafter, for purposes of brevity, lesbian/gay material). In effect, the assumption is that all persons mentioned in the social studies curriculum are heterosexual until proven otherwise. The same animus that fuels anti-woman sentiments, however, also fuels anti-gay sentiments. The social studies curriculum is inextricably entwined with patrolling the boundaries of sex role behavior (Crocco, 2001). It seems fair to say that homophobia—directed at women and men, girls and boys—as well as the achievements of lesbian and gay people are not even blips on the social studies radar screen.

This silence seems ever more odd as time passes. In the first half of the 1990s, I prepared a research review on social studies curriculum and instruction (Thornton, 1994). The timing coincided with two inflammatory public disputes: "gays in the military" and New York City's so-called "rainbow" curriculum. The "gays in the military" issue alone attracted almost saturation coverage in the popular media as well as in political circles. Among other things, the president's constitutionally assigned role as commander-in-chief of the armed forces was pitted against dogged resistance from cultural conservatives in and out of the armed forces. Since social studies is obliged to deal with government, the Constitution, and so forth, if the time was ever right for dealing with lesbian/gay material, it clearly had arrived.

Since gay issues could by then hardly be considered in any meaningful sense "silenced," I looked for material to include in my review that might lend perspective on how to handle the topic in curriculum and instruction. While I cannot claim that my search was exhaustive, it was extensive. With one exception, I failed to find any reference to gays in the social studies literature. The exception was a reference by Nel Noddings (1992) to homosexual love in ancient Greece. In a decade of unprecedented visibility in the media, politics, and scholarship, there has only been a slight increase in attention to lesbian/gay material in social studies since then (e.g., Wade, 1995; Crocco, 2001). Before turning to needed changes in the curriculum and teacher education, I shall briefly consider lesbian/gay material and the social studies status quo in schools.
The Curriculum Status Quo

The explicit curriculum - what schools publicly announce they teach - is the most obvious place to begin. As noted, the explicit curriculum in most places apparently avoids even mentioning the existence of gay people, both past and present. Of course, there may be mention of gay people and their issues or achievements by individual teachers in conventional courses. Some reference could be made, for instance, to Alexander the Great's sexual orientation or Nazis sending gays to concentration camps (along with other groups, of course, such as Jews and Gypsies) in a world history course. Gay issues may also arise in a civics class or under the heading of current events. But in most American schools, it seems that systematic attention to lesbian/gay material is lacking.

Nevertheless, the prospect of explicit and balanced treatment of lesbian/gay material in schools has launched a counter-explicit curriculum. At a recent meeting of a Christian conservative group in Philadelphia, for example, attention was given to the difficulties entailed in “converting” gay people into straight people. “Attacking” homosexuality early on was touted as a good alternative. Meanwhile, a psychologist advised that artistic traits in boys, such as learning to play the piano, did not need to be eradicated, but should be limited to leave sufficient time for football. Even in light of the customary silence of the curriculum on homosexuality, these conservatives adamantly alleged that schools are pushing a one-sided, pro-gay agenda on innocent young minds. Considerable attention also was given to dissuading schools from participating in any equity efforts for gay students (Lerner, 2001).

While the explicit curriculum ranges from muted to non-existent on lesbian/gay material, the implicit curriculum is loud. It is boldly anti-gay. In classrooms, hallways, and lunchrooms the boundaries of sex role behavior are heavily patrolled. Enforcement of sex role norms may involve verbal and physical harassment as well as social rejection by the peer group. While some teachers provide indispensable support to gay students, other teachers may not intervene to help the victims of harassment even when it occurs in front of them. Some teachers appear to share in the harassers’ prejudices (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Problems of violence, harassment, and intimidation may be exacerbated in parts of campus such as parking lots, bathrooms, and locker rooms where youngsters are either unsupervised or supervised by adults who do not know them personally.

A third possible division of the curriculum is the “null” curriculum (Eisner, 1979) - that is, what schools do not teach. Ignorance is not merely a neutral void. It has consequences for what we are able
to think about and the alternatives we can consider. With respect to lesbian/gay material, the null curriculum seems to take two forms, which I refer to as "unannounced" and "announced." "Unannounced" material is untaught, and its exclusion goes unmentioned. For example, many consider a central theme of James Baldwin's early novels to be self-acceptance (Bone, 1968). However, his most important early novel, *Giovanni's Room* (1963), devoted to the theme of self-acceptance by a gay man, is only described in the authoritative *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (Ousby, 1993) as "set in Paris" (p. 52).

On the other hand, the New York "rainbow" curriculum is an "announced" example of the null curriculum. This document was a 443-page collection of suggestions for New York City teachers on diversity including Irish ballads and the Mexican hat dance. Teachers were free to pick and choose or disregard any of the suggestions. On just three pages, in a section on families, there are references to lesbians and gay men. Nonetheless, critics maintained that this was forcing a gay lifestyle on all the children of the city (see Greene, 1993; Thornton, 1994). Ultimately, the document was recanted in what seems to amount to censorship.

Thus far, I have suggested that gay people and issues have mostly been ignored in social studies education. In the education literature and in policy more generally, attention has expanded over the last decade to include matters such as preventing harm from coming to gay students (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2001) and how schools should interact with gay and lesbian parents (e.g., Casper, Schultz, and Wickens, 1992). But in approaching lesbian/gay material from the perspective of curriculum and teacher education, I am most struck by the dearth of positive initiatives in the social studies. The field of English education, by contrast, has been more affirmative (see, e.g., Malinowit, 1995; Hamilton, 2000). In the remainder of this article, I suggest some possible steps that social studies educators might take as a modest beginning and then introduce the perspectives presented in the other articles and reviews in this special issue of TRSE.

**Curriculum Change**

As I have explored elsewhere (e.g., Thornton, 2001a, 2001b), in much of the last century it has usually proven easier to change subject matter within established courses such as United States history than to create new social studies courses. This is the primary approach I will adopt here in charting incremental changes, which may find readier and broader acceptance than radical ones. I hasten to add, however, that these changes fall short of what needs to be done in the long run. Other authors in this special issue present more ambitious changes. I should also add at the outset a caveat: No more than we
would recommend extreme and age-inappropriate heterosexual subject matter, we will do the same with lesbian/gay subject matter.

One method that is probably already used in a good number of schools is mentioning something about the possible sexual identities of prominent figures covered in standard courses, such as Jane Addams in U. S. history or Alexander the Great in world history. Perhaps this approach is better than nothing, but it has two drawbacks. First, simply mentioning such information is unproductive if it is reduced to gossip that is irrelevant to the lesson, and it may even do more harm than good. Second, inclusion and perspective taking require more than adding a few new snippets of information to the standard course. A transformative approach is required if tokenism is to be avoided. The conventional story needs recasting, attending to questions such as, “Whose story is included? From whose perspective?” As has often been pointed out about the greater attention now devoted to women in textbooks, too often this material is relegated to sidebars that seem tangential to the main story.

A better approach may be to start with topics where lesbian/gay material has great relevance to the subject matter. Take, for example, ancient Greece. Although the textbook may be silent on Greek homosexuality, it will almost certainly include pictures of athletes, statues, and so forth that could easily spur a class discussion. A number of topics significant to understanding life in ancient Greece readily arise. Why was the male form so prized? What did separate sleeping arrangements for men and women have to do with social class, privilege, and power? Why did the Greeks place such emphasis on athletics, and how is this related to the Olympic games now?

A number of other conventional topics in history courses also present opportunities for lesbian/gay inclusion and perspective taking. Similar to the way in which Linda Levstik and Jeanette Groth use a gender lens to examine antebellum America in a later article in this issue, the Stonewall riots could enrich a unit on the Civil Rights movement. Or, a unit on the struggle against and triumph over apartheid in South Africa might consider why that nation’s new, democratic constitution explicitly protected, among other groups, the rights of lesbians and gay men.

With older students, a fascinating discussion could ensue about the nature of history that extends far beyond the lesbian/gay material itself. For example, in her biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, Blanche Wiesen Cook (1992) made the controversial claim that Roosevelt had had a lesbian relationship with her close friend, the journalist Lorena Hickok. Spirited debate resulted, especially over what counted as evidence. In particular, discussion focused on whether the flowery and romantic language used by many women of their era constituted evidence of sexual involvement.
This topic raises major issues about the nature and veracity of historical evidence. How should we deal with the ever-changing meanings of language across time? As George Chauncey (1994) showed in his award-winning history of gay men in New York City from 1890 to 1940, the construct of ‘‘gay’’ that emerged during and after World War II simply did not exist in the period Chauncey studied—or, at least, it did not mean what it now means. For example, some working class men who were heterosexual engaged in sexual relations with homosexual men—without the working class men or others considering this behavior to be homosexual, as would be the more or less automatic judgment in the United States today. Such examples could lead to a broader examination of the nature of anachronism and the challenges it poses for all historical inquiry.

In addition to history courses, gay matters arise naturally in courses in civics, government, and problems of democracy. For example, as noted above, the ‘‘gays in the military issue’’ is of obvious importance. Why was (is) there so much resistance to gays in the military? Why did the armed forces behave as they did during this debate? To what extent does this issue compare to desegregation of the armed forces and to allowing women into combat? Were the armed forces in 1993 insubordinate to their commander-in-chief, President Clinton? Given the rising numbers of lesbians and gay men discharged from the military (Marquis, 2001), has the ‘‘don’t ask, don’t tell’’ policy been implemented? Why do some other nations permit openly gay people to serve in the military?

More broadly, social studies educators have often drawn a sharp distinction between the private and public spheres, emphasizing the public sphere such as voting, civil rights, the Constitution, the economy, and so on. What people do in their personal lives has largely been considered a private matter. Family arrangements, the community groups to which people belong, the religious institutions with which they are affiliated, and the sports teams on which they play are viewed as decisions made by autonomous individuals.

Viewed from a gender perspective, however, this public-private split appears significantly less neutral. ‘‘Community’’ in social studies textbooks, for instance, is tacitly ‘‘heterosexual community.’’ The same could be said for ‘‘family,’’ ‘‘world cultures,’’ and many other key social studies concepts. As Noddings (2002) persuasively argues, these matters are relational, rather than simply about people acting solely as autonomous individuals.

In this light, teachers may invite students to examine the curriculum for themselves. Youngsters mostly seem to take for granted that what is in the curriculum is there for good reason. Seldom are they invited to look on the curriculum as something consciously made, with the assumption that what is included and excluded embodies a
public-private split. In the case of the New York “rainbow curriculum,”
students might ponder who has a legitimate stake in deciding whether
it is implemented. Since some students have gay or lesbian parents,
they well may wonder what message is sent when the curriculum
mentions only heterosexual parents? Do the children of gay and lesbian
parents have fewer rights than the children of heterosexuals?

My suggestions for curriculum changes can all be
accomplished within the confines of courses that already exist. In many
cases, all that is needed to bring about at least some attention to
lesbian/gay material is imagination and will. Note, as with religion
in the curriculum, that it is important to distinguish between
proselytizing and teaching about something. What we hope is that
students will develop understanding and tolerance.

Teacher Education

As the previous few paragraphs suggest, teachers are the key
to curriculum change. They are curricular-instructional gatekeepers.
Unless they buy into the educational significance of lesbian/gay
material in the social studies, efforts will be to no avail. Thus, we must
educate the educators (see Thornton, 2001c).

Teacher education programs today properly spend time on
multicultural education, gender, special education, and school-
community relations (Noddings, 1999). Aside from the substantive
knowledge gained in these areas, attention to these topics sends the
message that all children count (Noddings, 1999). Where absent,
lesbian/gay material needs to be added to the list. Taking school-
community relations as a case in point, teacher educators could, for
example, invite guest speakers from the local gay and lesbian
community center or the equivalent campus organization.
Nonetheless, a more comprehensive approach by teacher educators
would be highly beneficial. For example, they can apprise their
students of the guidance now available on the special demands entailed
in assuring that gay and lesbian parents are as effectively served as
heterosexual parents (see Casper, Schultz, and Wickens, 1992).

Lesbian/gay material is more than an issue to be debated; it
is a clearly visible thread in the American social fabric. It is also,
therefore, an indispensable element of teacher education programs.
Just as equal rights for women would no longer be relegated simply
to a controversial issue encountered in a civics class, the same
legitimacy should be extended to lesbian/gay material. Of course,
beginning, untenured teachers may especially encounter difficulties
when introducing this material in some educational settings, but this
challenge simply underscores the importance of teacher educators
treating lesbian/gay material as more than a peripheral matter. As
Jack Nelson (1991) has long pointed out, teacher self-censorship is perhaps the most pervasive form of censorship in American education. Unfortunately, teacher silence or indifference on lesbian/gay material and lesbian and gay students is not neutral, and may in fact perpetuate intolerance and cruelty among young people in schools.

Much of teacher preparation, of course, takes place in liberal arts courses. Thus, these days prospective teachers may well study lesbian/gay material in courses such as history and sociology. Even equipped with such knowledge, however, social studies methods professors may still need to reinforce its educational importance. Methods instructors will also need to educate prospective teachers in how to “translate” sometimes provocative scholarly content into subject matter suitable for the school curriculum (see Thornton, 2001d). Such modeling is essential if classroom teachers’ treatment of lesbian/gay material is to become a reality in schools.

Teacher educators also have important work to do with their students on the implicit curriculum. For example, lesbian and gay students have the same rights to an adequate education as other children. Frequently, however, this is denied them (Human Rights Watch, 2001). It is clear that teachers can make a difference for these youngsters. Teacher educators should forcefully point out that teachers who ignore harassment of lesbian and gay students, for instance, have made a decision, consciously or unconsciously, that neglects both the opportunity to educate heterosexual students and to give gay students a fair chance to reach their potential. Prospective teachers can also be taught to listen more carefully to their students since, in some cases, teachers may be the only responsible adults to whom lesbian and gay students can turn.

**Perspectives in this Special Issue**

Although all of the contributors to this special issue agree that gay/lesbian material and gay and lesbian students must receive more attention than has historically been the case in social studies education, their perspectives sometimes differ in significant respects from each other and from mine. Some authors raise matters that have so far gone unmentioned in this article, such as bisexual and transgender persons. Some frame their case mainly in terms of tolerance within a more inclusive curriculum, while others call for fundamental changes in our conceptions of citizenship and gender relations. Whatever perspective is adopted, however, there is no doubt that - singly or wholly - this collection of articles challenges social studies business-as-usual. It is probably fair to say that the authors would agree that the tradition of ignoring all gay and lesbian matters cannot continue if social studies educators take seriously their own rhetoric.
The first section of this special issue includes theory and research articles on matters related to sexual identity and/or homophobia. The first, by Patricia Avery, concerns "political socialization, tolerance, and sexual identity." Avery extends longstanding social studies concern for the first two ideas to their interconnections with sexual identity. Avery contends that it is "neither realistic nor desirable" that all groups in a democratic society like each other. They must, however, respect the basic civil rights of all members of society, even for those individuals and groups with whom they strongly disagree. Thus, it is troubling that only a small minority of adolescents regards tolerance as a duty of citizenship. Two research findings that she reports seem especially important for social studies educators to note. First, intolerance of "other" seems significantly correlated with right-wing authoritarianism. Second, higher levels of education are positively correlated with tolerance. These findings suggest to Avery that the demands of citizenship require far more attention to lesbian/gay material in social studies.

Kathy Bickmore is also concerned with citizenship education. She emphasizes that basic justice requires confronting the "mutually-reinforcing problems of sexism and heterosexism." Bickmore strongly argues that, while intervention procedures (regarding harassment, for example) and knowledge and skills are all needed, they are not enough. Patterns of relationships must also be addressed, and this entails challenging today's pervasive "heteronormativity," or the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm against which all else is evaluated.

Margaret Smith Crocco, too, is concerned with the equity demands of citizenship. Because changes in school classrooms and hallways will not occur without teachers changing, she focuses on educating the educators about gender and sexuality. Specifically, she describes how her students in a class on diversity have responded to methods of treating gay/lesbian material and assuring the well being of lesbian and gay youngsters. The results from several years of offering the course are heartening; unfortunately, however, such efforts in teacher education appear to be rare. Crocco makes a number of suggestions about instructional methods and materials that should be helpful to both teachers and teacher educators.

Next, Linda S. Levstik and Jeanette Groth explore gender and sexuality in an eighth-grade U. S. history unit. The unit is on antebellum America; however, unlike the usual "male" history approach, this unit is taught through the lens of women's experience. Rather than gender being an unacknowledged subtext in classrooms and curricula, Levstik and Groth use it as an analytic tool for investigating human experience. Interwoven with the account of the enacted curriculum is a complementary analysis of how the "safety"
on gender experienced by the children in this classroom contrasts with a hostile world beyond the classroom door.

Social justice is the keynote of the final article in this section. Nancye McCrary’s study explores the story of Jeff, a teenage boy who committed suicide because he was gay. (Suicide is a tragically common occurrence among homosexual youth). She examines how “Jeff’s Story,” an interactive web-based multimedia exercise, can be used to empathize with the boy’s feelings. She argues that empathy is essential if such tragedies as Jeff’s are to be mitigated; however, empathy will only develop if we can relate to or imagine the condition of the “other.”

The next section of articles takes us to classrooms and to reflections on teaching about sexual identity and homophobia. Kevin Franck reports how homophobia works and is challenged at a Harlem secondary school. Nearly all of the students are of color and come from underprivileged backgrounds. Despite their lives being shaped by oppression, Franck notes, they themselves often oppress on the basis of sexuality. He argues that homophobia is not an isolated problem that can be solved alone. Rather, he locates it at the intersection of race, class, and gender. In a related vein, Heather Oesterreich writes about transforming civic education for purposes of social justice, arguing that educating against heteronormativity is an indispensable element of social justice and describing how she has approached this in a college course on diversity. Pointedly, she notes that most people’s heteronormativity results in one-dimensional identifications of lesbian and gay people in which the persons with whom they share sexual activity characterize their entire identities. Finally, Brian Marchman reflects on his experiences with teaching a ninth grade civics unit on homophobia as part of the students’ larger exploration of tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism in American society.

Rounding out this special issue are two book reviews. Keith Barton reports on three recent books about masculinity and schooling, a subject that has attracted growing attention as a major educational issue in recent years. This attention has not been confined to the United States, but also extends to other nations such as Australia and the United Kingdom. Finally, Nina Asher reviews an educational video, developed specifically for K-12 teachers and teacher educators, on talking about gay issues in schools. She also reviews an anthology of writings by lesbian and gay youth. Although this anthology was not written specifically for educators and students, Asher says it is a useful resource for young people who may be struggling with or attempting to clarify their sexual identities.
Conclusion

In this introductory article, I have argued that lesbian and gay subject matter and people are undeniably visible elements of American society today. As the other authors in this special issue and I agree, educators’ silence in these circumstances can only perpetuate ignorance and allow bigotry to go unchallenged in the school experience both outside (and sometimes inside) the classroom. All of us have suggested some methods for classroom teachers and some concerns for teacher educators so that sexual identity issues are suitably dealt with in the social studies curriculum. Social studies educators can no longer wash their hands of these matters. As with other groups, we should strive to teach for tolerance and understanding, and thereby affirm the humanity of all.

Notes

1 I am grateful to Margaret Smith Crocco and the anonymous reviewers for their critiques of an earlier version of this article.

References


Author

STEPHEN J. THORNTON is Associate Professor of Social Studies Education in the Department of Arts and Humanities at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.
Political Socialization, Tolerance, and Sexual Identity

Patricia G. Avery
University of Minnesota

Abstract
Key concepts in political socialization, tolerance, groups, rights and responsibilities can be used to understand the way in which young people struggle with sexual identity issues. Educators may promote greater tolerance for homosexuality among heterosexuals by situating sexual identity issues within a broader discussion of democratic principles. At the same time, one of the basic principles of a democracy, majority rule with respect for minority rights, gives voice to the concerns of gay and lesbian youth.

For almost 15 years, I have been thinking about how societies treat individuals or groups who differ from the majority, either by their religion, ethnicity, beliefs, or sexual orientation. My interest centers not on whether the majority "approves" of or "likes" the "other," but whether persons in the dominant group are willing to acknowledge the basic civil liberties of minority or extremist groups. Are they willing to allow the "other" to make a speech in their city? Would they allow the "other" to gather with like-minded people and engage in protest activities? This may seem a minimal aspiration for human interactions, but I contend that it is neither realistic nor desirable for all of us to "approve" of and "like" one another. Consider the following list of groups: the Aryan Nation, atheists, Christian fundamentalists, Gay-Lesbian Alliance, Ku Klux Klan, National Rifle Association, Nazis, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), pro-choice, and pro-life groups. If, like most people, you have developed a set of values and beliefs that guides the way in which you think about life, then you will most likely be able to identify at least one group that violates your core convictions. Are you willing to accord that group the right to free speech? The right to assemble? The right to distribute pamphlets expressing its beliefs? If so, then you are demonstrating, according to Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry...
(1996), one of the characteristics of an "enlightened citizen": political tolerance.

Political tolerance is the willingness to accord basic civil liberties to individuals or groups one dislikes or with whom one disagrees. Individually and with others, I have conducted studies of political tolerance among adolescents (Avery 1988, 1992; Avery, Bird, Johnston, Sullivan, & Thalhammer, 1992; Thalhammer, Wood, Bird, Avery, & Sullivan, 1994). Because tolerance is predicated on the dislike or disapproval of the "other," we have asked young people ages 12 to 18 to identify their "least-liked" group from a list of social and political groups, and then to indicate whether they would be willing to extend specific civil liberties to that group. I have been surprised at how often young people have chosen gay rights organizations as their "least-liked group" (typically, 30-35% of males and 10-15% of females have chosen organizations associated with gay and lesbian issues). Given that the list includes groups such as the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan whose violent, heinous actions are well documented, I have been perplexed at the students' choice of gay rights organizations. I suspect, however, that for most young people, groups such as the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan are far removed from their everyday lives. Such groups are found in the pages of their history texts, and represent very little real threat to them. Issues related to sexual orientation, behavior, and identity, however, are very much a part of the adolescent's world.

Adolescents are often concerned with questions that revolve around their identity: Who am I? Where do I fit in? Who do I want to be? What do I believe in? Such questions transcend the boundaries of social, personal, sexual, and political identity. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1968), a student of Sigmund Freud, viewed the process of identity formation as the primary task of adolescence. It involves taking into account how others see them and how they see others. For most young people, the establishment of an identity is a formidable, and sometimes painful, task. But for homosexual adolescents, it is particularly difficult. One of the major stresses for homosexual adolescents is the social intolerance they perceive from others toward homosexuals (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995). That social intolerance springs in part from other youth's struggle for personal identity, and their need to distinguish themselves from groups they perceive as different or even deviant.

In this brief essay, I place the adolescent's concern with sexual identity within the broader context of political socialization. Political socialization is about how a society transmits its political values and norms to young people, and about how youth interpret and give meaning to those values and norms to develop their civic identity. It is about our understanding of how a society distributes power, makes
decisions, accords rights, and defines responsibilities. The way in which youth come to think about the concepts of groups, rights, and responsibilities is very much a part of their struggle to achieve an identity; it is also within this context that adolescents form their attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

I look first at how young people’s concept of groups, rights, and responsibilities intersect with their attitudes toward minority groups, particularly homosexuals. I contend that the way in which adolescents understand groups, rights, and responsibilities is reflected in their level of political tolerance. Because the concept of tolerance is so central to democratic life, I then describe the correlates of tolerance and how education can play a role in promoting greater tolerance.

Key Concepts in Adolescent Political Socialization

“In groups” and “out groups”

Psychologists find that we naturally categorize people into groups—those “like us” (the “in group”) and those “not like us” (the “out group”). Groups play an important part in helping adolescents decide who they are and who they want to be. These categorizations help young people to make sense of the world, and to develop their own identity. But they can also act to reinforce prejudices and stereotypes.

Media, school, parents, and friends often convey the message that heterosexuality is socially acceptable, but that homosexuality is aberrant, if not immoral, behavior. Because young people have a strong need for social acceptance, they are particularly influenced by societal norms. Young people who are insecure about their sexual identity may demonstrate intolerant attitudes toward homosexuals as a means of reassuring themselves (and telling those around them) of their membership in the dominant, “in group.” Gay and lesbian adolescents, however, are likely to experience feelings of profound isolation, coupled with a sense of cognitive dissonance, because they are aware that the socially approved sexual orientation is in conflict with their own.

In social studies classes, young people are likely to learn about the power of groups to effect social change. The Civil Rights Movement, the Women’s Movement, and the Labor Movement, for example, made substantial strides in securing the rights of ethnic minorities, women, and labor in the past century. So too, many would argue, has the Gay Rights Movement. But while one is quite likely to find descriptions of the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington, the passage of the 19th amendment, and the adoption of minimum wage laws in U.S. history and civics textbooks, it is unlikely that one will
find mention of Gay Pride Day or the Stonewall Riots of 1969 (Avery & Simmons, 2000), much less the sexual identity of gays and lesbians such as James Baldwin, Willa Cather, or John Maynard Keynes.

Homosexual adolescents, then, are unlikely to hear any voices with whom they can identify, or to see themselves as potentially part of a broader political movement. And neither homosexual nor heterosexual adolescents are likely to see the struggle for gay and lesbian rights as part of an ongoing democratic dialogue that promotes inclusion instead of exclusion.

Rights and Responsibilities

Adolescents have a keen interest in their increasing rights and responsibilities in the adult world. U.S. adolescents and adults place much more emphasis on their rights as citizens than on their responsibilities (Conover, Crewe, & Searing, 1991; Conover & Searing, 2000). Beyond the traditional responsibilities of voting, serving on a jury, and obeying the law, most U.S. citizens see the assumption of responsibilities as a choice. To join a political party, participate in civic activities, or write a letter to a legislator may be "good," but these activities are "above and beyond" the duties of citizenship.

Although most adolescents (and adults) are quick to assert their rights, particularly the right to freedom of expression, they typically show much less understanding of how those rights are accorded to everyone and how they contribute to the sustenance of a democracy. Most citizens do not readily demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which diversity of belief might enhance deliberation about public issues, or act to develop a better understanding of the "common good."

Since the 1950s, political scientists have measured the degree to which adults profess a belief in rights such as making a speech in a community, and the willingness to extend that right to those who are viewed as nonconformists (Stouffer, 1955). Numerous studies show that support for rights decreases when people are asked about the rights of specific groups, particularly those groups with whom people strongly disagree (Avery et al., 1992; Conover & Searing, 2000; Hahn, 1998; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982). The percentage of adults willing to extend basic civil liberties to homosexuals has increased over the years; in 1977, only 62% of adults surveyed said they would be willing to allow a homosexual to give a speech in their city; by 1994, this percentage had increased to 79% (Vogt, 1997, p. 94). Still, one in five individuals would deny a gay or lesbian person the basic right of free expression. And when college freshmen, traditionally a fairly liberal group, were queried in the annual UCLA survey as to whether "it is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual
relationships," one in four said yes (Higher Education Research Institute, 2002).

In a recent set of interviews with almost 400 adolescents from four distinct communities in the U.S., student support for the "right to be a homosexual" ranked 11th in a set of 12 rights. Only 53% of the students felt citizens have a duty to "defend the rights of minorities," and less than one in five students regarded tolerance as a duty of citizenship (Conover & Searing, 2000). U.S. citizens have typically been less comfortable with the concept of "duties and responsibilities" in comparison to citizens in other countries (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001), but in the interviews conducted by Conover and Searing, one-fourth of the students failed to see any connection between tolerance and citizenship. Yet political philosophers regard tolerance as one of the central tenets of a democracy. Nie et al. (1996) state that "tolerance signals a fundamental commitment to the rules of the democratic game... Citizens who are committed to tolerance are in effect declaring their support for the protection of a free and open society" (p. 29).

Correlates of Political Tolerance

When the research on political tolerance was in its infancy, it was thought that demographic variables were the most important predictors of tolerance (e.g., older persons and those from a higher socio-economic status tended to demonstrate higher levels of tolerance). Research still suggests that males are more likely to demonstrate intolerance toward homosexuals than are females, perhaps in part because our society places such a high value on traditionally masculine characteristics. But recent research on political tolerance also indicates that personality and cognitive characteristics are generally more important than demographic variables in predicting levels of tolerance. Across the studies on tolerance for lesbians and gays, as well as for the "disliked other," one personality characteristic stands out as particularly powerful in predicting intolerance: authoritarianism, and more specifically, right-wing authoritarianism (Basow & Johnson, 2000; Whitley & Lee, 2000; Wood et al., 1994). Authoritarian personalities are more likely to perceive a greater "threat" from groups who are different from themselves, and to envision extreme consequences when these groups' basic civil liberties are exercised. For example, in a study in which intolerant young people were asked what might happen if their least-liked group were allowed to make a speech in their city, they were likely to envision physical violence and chaos. When students who demonstrated greater tolerance were asked the same question, they were more likely to see the parties involved able to reach compromise (Wood et al., 1994).
The Role of Education

Education is a strong predictor of support for homosexual rights; those who have attended college, in particular, are more likely to recognize the rights of gays and lesbians than those who have not attended college. There are a number of explanations for this phenomenon: College classes give students practice in thinking about different perspectives; college exposes people to individuals who are different from themselves, and that contact serves to reduce the threat associated with the "other;" post-secondary education helps young people to see the connection between the abstract principles of democracy (such as freedom of assembly) and the application of those to concrete situations. Regardless of explanation, education is one of the best predictors of general social tolerance and of tolerance for homosexuals in particular.

Do precollegiate experiences engender greater tolerance for homosexuals? Most studies suggest that the impact is slight, probably because most elementary and secondary schools have yet to see the needs of gay and lesbian young people and the decrease of homophobia as central to their mission. Could elementary and secondary schools play a greater role in supporting gay and lesbian youth, and in promoting greater tolerance for homosexuality? Absolutely. Crocco (2001) describes various ways in which schools could help young people develop a better understanding of homosexuality. She notes that social studies educators, in particular, have the opportunity and responsibility to integrate gay and lesbian experiences into the curriculum. The study of human rights, social movements, prejudice, and stereotyping—major concepts within the social studies—lend themselves well to looking at gay and lesbian experiences within a broader context. Crocco further contends that the central mission of the social studies, citizenship education, requires a curriculum that reflects inclusion of all segments of society, particularly those who have historically been targets of discrimination.

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I suggest that placing sexual identity within the context of political socialization helps us to understand adolescent intolerance and ways to address that intolerance. When heterosexuals understand the central tenets of a democracy, they understand that certain rights are inalienable, and that affirming those rights to the minority strengthens the democracy. At the same time, one of the basic principles of a democracy—majority rule with respect for minority rights—gives voice to the concerns of gay and lesbian youth. All young people need to recognize that they have a place in our democracy, but
they also need to know and appreciate that the "other" has a place as well. That is the mark of an engaged, enlightened citizenry.

References


**Author**

PATRICIA AVERY is Associate Professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Minneapolis 55455.
How Might Social Education Resist Heterosexism? Facing the Impact of Gender and Sexual Ideology on Citizenship

Kathy Bickmore
OISE/University of Toronto

Abstract
This paper examines the mutually-reinforcing problems of sexism and heterosexism, and the actions that may be taken by social educators to ameliorate such injustices. Various approaches to anti-heterosexism education are organized in relation to the three dimensions of handling social conflict: intervention procedures (in particular the management of sexual and heterosexist harassment), teaching knowledge and skills (in particular skills for recognizing the role of gender and sexuality in culture and for managing controversy), and restructuring patterns of relationship (in particular reducing the climate of heteronormativity and status competition that exacerbate harassment and exclusion).

What do sexism and heterosexism have to do with social and citizenship education? Everything. A person’s gender and intimate relationships are crucial elements of his or her membership and roles in society. People care so much about gender that ‘boy or girl?’ is typically the first question asked about a new baby. The ideologies surrounding sexuality and gender have shaped human social interaction spatially (for instance, housing patterns reflecting different sizes and types of families) and politically (for instance, the influence of a person’s private life on his or her chance to serve in government or the military) across history. The overlapping problems of sexism and heterosexism reflect the social conflicts embodied in the inequitable distribution of power between males and females, and between majority and minority sexual identities. Social identity (diversity and membership), social conflict (decision making and governance in the context of pluralism), and justice (contested rights and protections) are core elements of democratic citizenship. Sexism and heterosexism, and their underlying gender and sexual ideologies, highlight these
core elements of citizenship and thus provide a valuable (and often missed) learning opportunity for social education. To ignore these concerns is to reinforce dominant exclusionary ideologies.

This paper examines various aspects of social education that may reinforce—or resist—heterosexism. There are three dimensions of managing any social conflict, all of which apply to the problem of heterosexism (see Diagram 1, p. 212). These dimensions will serve to organize the paper:

- **intervention**: practices and procedures for managing conflict and violence, during and after visible incidents
- **teaching**: knowledge and skill development for managing problems, aimed at preventing violence, harassment, and discrimination
- **restructuring**: changing patterns of interaction to build equitable, resilient relationships in inclusive nonviolent climates

The first dimension emphasizes control, in this case the effort to prevent or minimize sexual and heterosexist harassment and related violence. Because violence is such an obvious human rights violation, and because of schools' tendency toward using rule enforcement to keep the lid on problems, this is probably the most common school response to heterosexism, when there is any (conscious) response at all. The fact that gender equity and especially sexual diversity are considered controversial issues tends to constrain the second and third dimensions. Thus the concepts and skills we teach are often partial: Social educators may teach about conflict resolution or bullying or women's contributions to history in a generic manner, and yet ignore underlying inequity problems such as sexism and heterosexism. The third dimension is the broadest and is not amenable to quick fixes, but again there are things schools already may be doing (such as reducing competition or helping diverse students to get to know one another) that are relevant to this dimension of social conflict management. After a brief look at the context from which we begin—what students are already learning about gender and sexual identity from schools and societies—we will look at how social education may reinforce and/or resist heterosexism, in each of these three interwoven categories of activity.
Starting Points: What Do Children Know About Sexuality?

Students are hardly blank slates: They typically have both knowledge (not necessarily correct) and concern about sexual identity matters by early elementary school. Information and misinformation about sex and gender relations flow freely these days in public spaces, media, and peer groups. Sexuality is present and visible, although often unremarked upon, in the public images experienced by virtually all youth in the western world. One can hardly avoid seeing people kissing, dancing, or dressing in ways designed to be sexually attractive. Political campaigners, entertainers, television and movie narratives, comic strips, and billboard advertising present powerful models regarding which members of a society, and which kinds of intimate relationships, are valued (Adams, 1997; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Ortner, 1996). Most North American children and youth have heard words such as ‘gay’ used as slurs, whether or not they know their definitions (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1997). Children also generally know that they risk being teased and hurt if they are known to live in unusual families (Epstein, 1998). By middle school, girls and boys have learned to define their gender identities in large part by heterosexual behavior: They generally believe that a girl ‘must’ have or seek a boyfriend, and a boy ‘must’ have a girlfriend or seek sexual relations with girls, and they know they will be tormented if they do not conform (Harris & Bliss, 1997; Mandel, 1996). In this age of mass popular culture, the assumption that adults can and should keep certain information away from children is outdated (Adams, 1997; Elkind, 1995).

Within the formal social studies curriculum, the seemingly neutral language used in textbook narratives and graphics carries a gendered and sexualized point of view, all the more powerful where unremarked upon. Most characters in human dramas and societies (thus in literature and social studies) have gender identities and intimate relationships:

It is impossible ... to teach almost any piece of literature without transgressing onto the field of sex education ... Similarly, imagine biology without human reproduction, geography without population studies ... or religious education without a consideration of the roles of men and women (Reiss, 1995, p. 374).

The vast majority of literature used in school generally avoids explicit (or affirmative) mention of homosexuality (Apostol, 1998, EGALE, 1998). However, it does quietly include sexuality in the form of normalized nuclear families and heterosexual relationships. Tuula Gordon and her colleagues give a vivid example from their classroom
In a lecture on South African history, a teacher told the class, "Boers took their wives and children with them" (Gordon et al., 2000a, p. 193). It is easy to overlook the sexuality in these images because they assume as 'common sense' history's emphasis on male protagonists in heterosexual, married, male-dominant nuclear families.

The recent surge of highly visible homophobic intolerance and violence has itself brought sexual identity to the surface of public consciousness (Aronson, 1994; Giese, 1998). The mass media play an important part in oversimplifying and polarizing potentially controversial issues such as those involving sexual identity. While an original news report may attempt to provide some balance and context regarding an emergent concern or issue, subsequent recirculated coverage tends to emphasize the most extreme aspects of the original story. For example, media lambasted the New York 'Rainbow' curriculum reform after someone discovered, and reported out of context, that three (out of 600 plus) books in the curriculum's recommended bibliography presented homosexual characters in a favorable light. Such sensationalism helps "to fan the flames of homophobia, and convince lots of 'people in the middle' to adopt the New Right's point of view" (Fine, 1995, p.168). Where controversies about sexual identity are unprobed and unquestioned, not discussed in social studies class, they are particularly vulnerable to inaccuracy and bigotry.

Thus the question is not really whether to address gender and sexuality in social studies class, since they are already present in the textbooks and in the ideas, concerns, and behavior patterns students bring with them to school. The important question is how to help students learn to critically filter and apply the information that surrounds them. First, we will look at the intervention dimension — teachers' and schools' responses to sexual bullying and harassment, the most visible manifestations of heterosexism in schools. Second, in considering the knowledge and skill (teaching) dimension, we will examine the practice of citizenship education (regarding controversy, inclusion, gender, and sexuality). Last, we will consider the broad dimension of citizen relationships and the school structures that help to (re)form them — expectations for gendered and sexual behavior and associated rights and protections, in the context of diverse school communities.

**Handling Sexual/Homophobic Harassment**

Teachers and schools model and practice approaches to sexual identity and diversity in the ways they handle gender-biased and homophobic behavior when it arises. Harassment is a form of bullying reinforced by bias: People who are more powerful attempt to
intimidate, control, or deny human rights to people who are less powerful. Sexual harassment, in particular, takes advantage of the power inequities embedded in sexism and homophobia to target females and some males:

Sexual harassment is any unwanted or uninvited remarks, gestures, sounds, or actions of a sexual nature that make one feel unsafe, degraded, or uncomfortable. It creates an intimidating, hostile, and offensive school environment (Ball & Martyn, 1999, p.120).

Harassment, especially among young people in schools, is often public action (for example, loud behavior in front of peers or visible graffiti) that gains the harassers status or acclaim among their peers, while exposing and reducing the status of their targets (Shakeshaft & Mandel, 1997; Stein, 1995). Students and sometimes teachers are targeted because of their presumed membership in certain gender or sexual categories, especially if they look or act in ways that seem to transcend or challenge dominant community norms of gendered behavior.

Bullying is heterosexualized because of the power this social inequity confers upon the bullies; for the same reason, sexual harassment quite often incorporates racist slurs and stereotypes (Duncan, 1999; Larkin & Staton, 1998). Heteronormativity, or ‘compulsory heterosexuality,’ is an ideology that encourages and enforces norms of heterosexual behavior, creating a climate that encourages gay- and lesbian-bashing, heterosexist teasing, and harassment (McCaskell, 1999; Mlamleli et.al., 2000; Rich, 1979). Homophobia is fear and hatred of homosexuality, which can be particularly damaging when internalized as self-hatred, leading at times even to suicide (Portner, 2001). Sexual (including heterosexist) harassment is a strategy for continually defining, defending, and embodying a hegemonic version of masculinity that incorporates heterosexuality and rejects homosexuality and femininity (Bender, 2001; Connell, 1995; Frank, 1986). In a recent survey, about 70% of 900 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth reported feeling threatened at school, due to harassment in relation to their sexual identity (GLSEN, 2001).

Harassment is a ‘weapon’ used for maintaining strict gender boundaries through peer pressure (Pharr, 1988). Calling somebody gay or lesbian is meant as an insult — not necessarily referring to homosexuality, per se, but to social rejection based on supposedly-brecked boundaries of dichotomized ‘male’ or ‘female’ behavior (Lees, 2000). Thus teachers’ and schools’ choices in managing the problem of harassment can influence the breadth and permeability of
those boundaries. Harassment would not work to shore up harassers’ power unless the sexual and heteronormative ideologies that underlie harassment were generally agreed upon and affirmed by the school or classroom culture.

Intervention procedures for handling harassment problems may range from short-term control measures, such as punishment or exclusion of perpetrators, to more in-depth problem-solving measures such as awareness discussions or group conferencing. The most common institutional response to harassment in recent years has been the ‘zero tolerance’ crackdown, which has astronomically increased the rates of school exclusion via suspensions and expulsions in many school districts (Dalton 2000, Harrington 1999). Harassment has been labeled and criminalized, focusing on punishing perpetrators and, to some extent, on protecting victims who are presumed passive. While conflict management procedures are evidently necessary for handling harassment after it occurs, they are by themselves insufficient because they do not teach individuals or groups how or why to understand gender and sexual diversities differently or to behave nonviolently. At the same time, because students are adept at hiding behavior from their teachers and because prevailing ideologies accept sexual teasing as normal, most sexual (including heterosexist) harassment persists unabated in spite of sometimes punitive climates (McCaskell, 1999; Scott, 1995). To be effective, any intervention effort would need to address the sexism and heterosexism that give school-based harassment its power and persistence.

An overly competitive school environment can exacerbate problems of heterosexist violence. In the eyes of students, many schools ignore and/or implicitly condone taunting and harassment, and encourage the social status competition that nurtures such abuse (MacDonald, 1996; Stein, 1995; Wessle, 2000). For example, a popular member of Columbine High School’s football team, describing peers’ treatment of the two students who murdered a number of their classmates, demonstrates how completely he had learned and acted upon his intolerance and imagined superiority:

Columbine is a good clean place except for those rejects. Most kids didn’t want them there ... Sure we teased them. But what do you expect, with kids who come to school with weird hairdos and horns on their hats? ... If you want to get rid of someone, usually you tease ‘em. So the whole school would call them homos... (quoted in *Time* magazine, reprinted in Aronson, 2000, p. 71-72).
Clearly, short-term or punitive interventions focusing on the symptoms of harassment would not, alone, do much to prevent violence in such a situation. When a social environment fosters a climate of rejection, and encourages feelings of superiority among some at the expense of others, harassment will inevitably flourish. Setting limits that criminalize and/or pathologize abusive behavior seems like common sense, and it is a relatively easy reform for already rule-oriented schools to implement. However, control is not education, and such strategies are unable to address the social conflicts and conditions that encourage harassment.

Teaching Knowledge and Skills for Inclusion and Problem Solving

A second dimension of handling heterosexism is knowledge and skill development, so that students and teachers recognize and handle harassment and its underlying social/interpersonal inequities and conflicts. Management of any conflict - certainly a critical component of democratic citizenship - depends on knowledge and skills such as verbal and non-verbal communication, forging relationships, analyzing sources of power, recognizing common and divergent interests, negotiation, problem analysis, creative invention of solution ideas, and making decisions. The more complicated area of resisting heterosexist harassment depends, in addition, on an understanding of sexism and heterosexism, and on a capacity to identify and respond to power imbalances and peer pressure toward ‘normalcy.’ All of this knowledge is relevant to a range of social studies coursework, and can be developed in that context (Bickmore, 1996, 1999a, 1999b).

Anti-harassment education in schools is intended to ‘empower’ youth by giving them skills and information with which to make responsible choices. This, of course, implies agency and responsibility on the part of the participants in harassment activity. In theory at least, such a program could build skills and awareness without succumbing to the pitfall of some anti-bullying and sex education programs, which implicitly expect the targets of pressure or abuse (those most motivated to learn avoidance strategies) to take the primary responsibility for setting limits. This over-emphasis on fixing the victim “naturalizes violence endured by women [and sexual minorities] by portraying it as resulting from their lack of character or aptitude” (Luschen, 2001, p. 123). An emphasis on re-educating the targets of harassment is no more palatable as an exclusive program focus than the ‘zero tolerance’ emphasis on punishing selected perpetrators.
It is not primarily the ‘abnormal’ individuals being targeted by heterosexism, harassment, or other forms of social exclusion who most need to learn new concepts and skills. Those who are ‘put down’ virtually always know more than the ‘ups’ about the social difference and inequity problem that has occasioned their oppression. Rather, it is the broad membership of their groups — especially bystanders and potential allies — who must become unaccustomed to excluding certain individuals from shared space:

[An elementary classroom is the child’s] first real exposure to the public arena ... Within this public space a new concept of open access can develop if we choose to make this a goal ... In general, the approach has been to help the outsiders develop the characteristics that will make them more acceptable to the insiders. I am suggesting something different: The group must change its attitudes and expectations toward those who, for whatever reason, are not yet part of the system (Paley, 1992, p. 21 & 33, emphasis in original).

Any change in the patterns of heterosexist domination will require the whole group, not just the targets of discrimination, to revise and broaden their expectations regarding gender and sexual diversity, because these are entwined in everyone’s practice of social exclusion and citizenship.

On the other hand, both sexuality education and anti-violence education often have been used as instruments of social control — defining ‘appropriate’ and ‘deviant’ behavior and obscuring many of the important issues behind generic ‘no put-down rules’ or rarified terminology (Lees, 2000; Sears, 1992). These kinds of education, designed to ‘fix’ social problems, have tended to expand adults’ surveillance and control over young people — for example, publicly airing topics and soliciting information once relegated to the private realm — without necessarily addressing the social structural roots of the problems (Schissel, 1997; Wyness, 2000). It would be ironic for democratic citizenship education to proceed too far in this direction. Social education needs to balance — on one hand — empowering students with meaningful knowledge and skills, giving them some individual agency, with — on the other hand — taking adult responsibility to set reasonable limits, to help alleviate power imbalances and abuse.

Although teachers often are not given much latitude to teach about sexuality, they are often held responsible when education is perceived as failing to alleviate such sexuality-related problems as the spread of AIDS (e.g. Infantry, 1998). The common assignment of sexuality education to physical/health education, rather than social
studies, may exacerbate the tendency of educators to emphasize abstract clinical information rather than human diversity, social justice, and democratic principles. There is no evidence that open or explicit sexuality education leads to increased sexual behavior of any kind: On the contrary, either it has no significant effect or it is associated with safer sexual practices and postponement of sexual activity (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, p. 172; Lenskyj, 1990, p. 219; Reiss, 1995, p. 375). Since the topic is so often censored, we do not have similarly robust evidence regarding the consequences of homosexuality education. However, it makes sense: Giving children concepts, vocabulary, and strategies for handling gender role questions and homosexuality is likely to help them to resist homophobic ignorance, to avoid unsafe practices, and to treat themselves and others respectfully (Rofes, 1995). A child’s reading about or discussing any belief or culture in school has never been shown to cause him or her to adopt that way of life (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996, p. 66).

Simply including the occasional sexual minority person in the curriculum is not sufficient to address the problem of heterosexism, although it can be a place to begin. As Noddings shows, the important question is what range of perspectives and opportunities for critical thought might be presented, not merely whether a token woman or an open member of a sexual minority is mentioned:

[Emily Greene Balch, a feminist pioneer in working for international peace] is now included in standard texts, but the power and significance of her work, her point of view, her culture are all still hidden (Noddings, 1992, p. 234).

A curriculum for equity would examine and compare genuinely diverse points of view, in order to develop “the vital political skills required to challenge gender and class relations” (Davies, 2000, p. 294).

When brought out into the light of the explicit curriculum, gender role socialization and the accompanying devaluation of homosexual identities are clearly unsafe terrain for teachers. The news carries recurring scandals in which individual teachers are targeted for saying too much about sex, or for allowing young people to read about homosexual people. Often teachers who choose to raise the matter of homosexuality are presumed to be homosexual, and are thereby at risk of job loss. There are institutional remedies for this insecurity, to be discussed in the next section.

Sexual pluralism is not the kind of controversial issue that can or should be easily dichotomized. Social studies teachers who address public issues, as well as most North American news sources, tend to favor simplified pro-or-con questions (Tannen, 1998). As with
other matters of social rejection and exclusion, it is both important and difficult, in the context of the polarized attacks common in public discourse, to frame the relevant questions in ways that do not infringe on the human rights and dignity of individuals. In contrast, matters of policy, such as how to dispose of municipal garbage or whether to penalize alcohol possession, can often be easily framed in two-sided terms (although even here, as Tannen shows, dichotomies do not necessarily improve understanding or the potential for problem solving). Sexuality and homosexuality are controversial, but there is no defensible, simple ‘anti’ position, since homosexuality exists in all human societies, and the health and safety of real people targeted by heterosexism are at stake.

Many teachers’ avoidance of sexual identity topics is influenced less by fear of political controversy or censorship than by the challenge of teaching any conflict-laden topic. The increasing pressures of curriculum accountability make some teachers averse to addressing the complex yet meaningful subject matter of human relationships and sexuality, because to do so might open unpredictable avenues for learning and thus not efficiently meet narrow short-term objectives. In striving for comfortable classroom environments and high achievement scores, many teachers avoid complex, substantive issues. As a result, students and teachers often consider social studies to be unimportant and uninteresting; thus they miss out on learning that might help them to develop into more empowered democratic citizens (Bickmore, 1993, 1997; Hahn, 1996; Houser, 1996). Discussing controversial material such as sexual identity issues with young students is risky, but it is vitally important to their personal and political development:

If we are to have consent in a democratic people, it must be built upon the study of controversial issues, because such study is the intellectual foundation of the schools ... How else can human beings practice decision making than by confronting issues (Harold Rugg, 1941, quoted in Fine, 1995, p.109)?

This is a challenge that good teacher education, and institutional support for teachers in schools, districts, and unions, can address.

As they grow up, children gain the power to protect themselves by learning to acquire and evaluate knowledge, not by being denied information. Young people’s self-determination as citizens, and their respect for the self-determination of others, depend on their opportunities to learn to handle difficult questions and contrasting viewpoints, to correct their misunderstandings, and to get along with diverse others in their communities. Carefully-designed
education about sexuality, including homosexuality, can provide such an opportunity. Instead of trying vainly to protect young children from the discomforts of learning difficult knowledge, teachers can gently "invite [students] into the ongoing predicament" of a world that includes troubles such as homophobia (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 24). Education that emphasizes the imperfect relationships among women and men, including their mutual responsibilities and the social structures of unequal power that help to shape their individual choices, is good social studies and good citizenship education.

Rights and Relationships: The On-going Practice of Gendered and Sexual Citizenship

The relationships that are nurtured in the school and classroom context are the third important element in the development of an equitable nonviolent climate. Relationships are not merely interpersonal; they are framed by prevailing ideologies, in-groups and out-groups, and the concrete ways in which rights may or may not be protected within the institution. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender human rights issues provide interesting and troubling cases for both social education and school reform, because these rights are still so unevenly supported (Donahue, 2000; Osler & Starkey, 1998).

Educators operate within murky and moveable social and political boundaries. Teachers who wish to teach inclusivity "are in a terrible bind — they can either ignore children's often dangerous misinformation, or step in and address it and be censured" (Giese, 1998, p. A13). Most censorship in schools is self-censorship by the teachers themselves (Hydrick, 1994). In response to their own sense of students' prior knowledge and maturity, or in anticipation of parents' or principals' potential objections, teachers often avoid democratic practices such as free expression and access to information.

School, district, and province or state-level rights protections can make an important difference in defining at least a basic threshold of safety, thus serving to limit this climate of silencing. When official guidelines 'require' all teachers to cover sexual and homosexual topics, they lower the risks of dealing with such controversial material (Khayatt, 1997). A school board equity policy that does not protect sexual preference creates a chilly climate for anti-homophobia instruction. Human rights legislation that does include sexual orientation creates a warmer climate for discussions of homosexuality and a safety net for teachers who conduct them. It is surely much easier to teach children accepting attitudes toward gender and sexual identity where their school contexts label and limit bullying, gender-based harassment, and heterosexist targeting of teachers and students (Lenskyj, 1990). Teacher unions, too, could provide better protection
for members who air potentially unpopular viewpoints. Unfortunately, the National Education Association recently backed away from a resolution “encouraging schools to develop curriculum to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students and staff” (Associated Press, 2001), although a February 2002 NEA decision may reverse this action. The fact that protection of sexual diversity is sometimes on the agenda is probably an improvement over its complete omission, but as discussed earlier, often the ways in which such controversies are raised can make the climate even more unsafe for sexual minorities.

Students can be extraordinarily creative and courageous in addressing matters of sexual identity themselves, especially where their rights to do so are protected by adult staff members. For example, a high school student newspaper in a suburb of Austin, Texas, published a five-page section presenting a carefully considered range of opinions regarding homosexuality, as the first item in a series on accepting diversity at their school (Teaching Tolerance, 1994). The newspaper’s faculty advisor and school administration stood by the young journalists in the face of antagonistic criticism fomented by a radio talk show, weathering the storm and eventually winning an award from the National Scholastic Press Association. Faculty advisor Deanne Kunz explains:

Students today report that their worries extend beyond the usual college and career choices to encompass such concerns as pollution and sexually transmitted diseases, school violence, and neighborhood crime. We feel that a school newspaper should address these issues and that student journalists should report on sensitive topics. As their advisor, I wanted students to feel empowered to make tough editorial decisions ... And while we have been reminded that standing up for one’s beliefs can lead to controversy, we have also learned that controversy itself can be an educational experience (Teaching Tolerance, 1994, p. 26).

Other important student and co-curricular initiatives that require teacher and school support include advocacy and support groups, often known as Gay-Straight Alliances, that are springing up in many schools across the United States and Canada. Such groups are providing sufficient support, so that students who have dropped out due to harassment can re-enter school, as well as educating peers regarding homophobia and sexual identity (Canadian Press, 2000). Motions to support such organizations have encountered polarized
opposition, as well as support at various teachers federation (union) meetings (Associated Press, 2001; Canadian Press, 2000). In another instance, a school-based peer mediation program advisor recently described the difficulty she had in giving an openly gay male student the opportunity to serve as a mediator, and the way the student mediation team eventually came around to an inclusive stance (Cohen, 2001). Young people often have a breathtaking capacity to overcome their biases, given the opportunity and some personal and/or institutional support.

Opportunities for restructuring school citizenship space are by no means limited to the whole-school or co-curricular arena. Perspective-taking ability and empathy -- important prerequisites for reducing bias and violence -- can be developed through practice, for example, by allocating time for thoughtful deliberation regarding controversial issues and through regular work in constructively interdependent cooperative learning groups:

You don’t get students from diverse backgrounds to appreciate one another by telling them that prejudice and discrimination are bad things. You get them to appreciate one another by placing them in situations where they interact with one another in a structure designed to allow everyone’s basic humanity to shine through (Aronson, 2000, p.171).

Teachers and other school leaders can create less competitive and more inclusive climates by replacing individualistic competition and a laissez-faire approach to exclusion with regularly-structured opportunities to examine and apply multiple perspectives in cooperative settings. In the process, we create space for the development of non-harassment contexts and democratic capabilities (Avery et.al., 1997; Bergsgaard, 1997; Bickmore, 1996, 1999b). Similarly, social educators can present frequent structured opportunities for overcoming ignorance and intolerance of sexual diversity, if we have the courage to approach this messy controversial topic openly and to systematically protect the expression of human and democratic rights.

Conclusion

Like any social identity, sexual identity is socially and institutionally constructed; it is not reducible to a stable individual attribute. Labeling some people as ‘straight’ and others ‘queer,’ or assuming that sexual diversity is only a problem for gay and lesbian people, is inaccurate and misleading. Understandings of self, others, and human differences are continually reconstructed in light of specific
social interactions and power relations (e.g. Roy, 1994). Among children and adolescents, these identity reconstructions can be especially fluid. Schools and social educators facilitate this process of differentiation, steering students toward certain identities and behaviors and away from others, but they do not do so seamlessly (Gordon et.al., 2000b). The complex intersections and contradictions among school practices regarding sexual identity leave spaces for people to make a difference — to resist aspects of heterosexism and intolerance and to broaden citizenship inclusion where possible.

Put another way, sexual identity and bias implicate all of us, not just those who may be currently designated as different. We all play a part in reinforcing or resisting 'masculinity.' To affirm hegemonic masculinity as it is typically understood and practiced - as heterosexual conquest and the capacity to be violent - is to impede the inclusion and participation upon which democracy depends (Davies, 2000). We all play a part in opening or closing the citizenship gate, defining in practice who is included in ‘us’:

Citizenship education has never totally been the stabilizing force that its more conservative advocates have hoped it would be. Like education itself, it was and is an arena in which competing beliefs and interests meet. As historians remind us, the rights of citizenship have not just grown of their own volition, nor have they simply been handed down from on high. They are the result of struggle and conflict ...

Indeed, the most important purpose citizenship education should serve is to introduce students to the questions that lie at the heart of Canadian [or any] citizenship, give students the knowledge to understand them, the skills to pursue them, and the values and dispositions to do so in ways that respect the processes and commitments of democracy (Osborne, 2000, p. 9).

The questions that lie at the heart of citizenship include the social conflicts surrounding sexual identity and pluralism — how gender and sexual ideologies have shaped the societies we know, as well as how inclusivity may be protected and exclusion rejected. Anti-harassment interventions are a part of the education toward such citizenship, because such protection of human rights is a model and practice of inclusion. Classroom teaching can help our students-and ourselves-to develop more complex and inclusive understandings of sexual identity and heterosexism, as well as skills for handling a wide range of social conflicts, but not without opening the agenda to include
the occasional controversial topic. Restructuring interaction patterns in schools and classrooms toward resisting heterosexism requires reducing our emphasis on competition, dominant masculinity, and status popularity, as well as democratizing our systems of rights and participation for sexual minorities and sexual diversity topics. When educators become more conscious of the learning opportunities we are already providing in schools—including their unintended consequences such as climates of harassment and silencing—we can more effectively restructure those opportunities in line with our democratic values.

Diagram 1: Dimensions of Managing Conflict and Violence
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**Author**

KATHY BICKMORE is Associate Professor in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto M5S 1V6.
Homophobic Hallways: Is Anyone Listening?

Margaret Smith Crocco
Teachers College, Columbia University

Abstract
Findings are presented from research in a teacher education course on diversity and the social studies that takes gender and sexuality as subject matter. Five themes emerge from five years of qualitative data related to teaching the course and following the experiences of graduates attempting to apply their learning to new teaching situations. The author offers ideas for infusing discussion of sexuality and homophobia into social studies teaching and teacher education as well as professional development workshops in schools.

Introduction

For those who keep up with the literature on gender and schooling, the title of this paper evokes the one chosen by the American Association for University Women (1993) for their publication on sexual harassment. That work, Hostile hallways: The AAUW survey on sexual harassment in the schools, makes clear that the less formal spaces of schools, especially corridors, cafeterias, and playgrounds, serve as opportunistic environments for frequent verbal and sometimes physical assaults, chiefly by male students on female students. The AAUW report also notes that 86% of elementary and secondary students said they would be very upset if they were called gay or lesbian. No other form of harassment produced such strong negative reactions, especially among boys.

Likewise, Human Rights Watch, an advocacy group better known for taking on causes in overseas countries than in the United States, described schools' homophobic cultures in their recent (2001) monograph, Hatred in the hallways:

This is a report about the abject failure of the United States government to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who attend public schools.
from harassment and violence...The entrenched societal prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth is based on rigidly enforced rules dictating how girls and boys should look, walk, talk, dress, act, think, and feel. The social regime in most schools is unforgiving: Youth who break these rules will be punished. Their peers enforce the rules through harassment, ostracism, and violence. School officials condone this cruel dynamic through inaction or in some cases because they, too, judge gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth to be undeserving of respect (p. 174).

Teachers and teacher educators interested in advanced ideas about democratic citizenship that are respectful of human diversity (Crocco, 2000b; Parker, 1996; Smith, 1999) find such school cultures challenging. This paper focuses on a set of themes that emerge from five years of student writing in a required course on diversity and social studies within a master's degree program in social studies. The data suggest silence in social studies classrooms, secondary schools, and teacher education programs about homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980); the everyday occurrence of students' labeling other students as gay or lesbian in order to insult them; the use of school hallways as the preferred stages for such activity; and the typical lack of response by teachers witnessing such behavior.

What makes this research different from previous publication in this area is: 1) its focus on social studies at the secondary level; 2) its linkage of silence in the social studies curriculum with homophobia in the hallways; and 3) its attention to "educating the educators" (Thornton, 2001). The research by Human Rights Watch suggests that teachers, gay and straight, who address issues of gender and sexuality in schools make a difference in all their students' lives, whatever their gender or sexual orientation. This article will conclude with recommendations for ways in which these topics can be introduced into teacher education courses in social studies and professional development in the schools.

Defining Sexual Harassment

The central message communicated by the Human Rights Watch study and numerous other reports (AAUW, 1993; Brandenburg, 1997; Stein, 1999) is the commonplace nature of sexual harassment in our nation's schools. Judith Berman Brandenburg (1997) describes the harassment tied to homophobia as "hostile and insulting attitudes and
behavior based on the presumed sexual orientation of the harassed” (p. 8).

Masculinity and femininity ideology, which are implicated in issues of sexual orientation and harassment, operate in a myriad of ways to shape the gendered environment of schools. Rigid sex role socialization contributes to the problems of homophobia and gender-related violence in the schools (Crocco, 2001). The Human Rights Watch report characterized the link between gender and homophobia in this way:

It quickly became obvious from our research that the abuse of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth is predicated on the belief that girls and boys must strictly adhere to rigid rules of conduct, dress, and appearances based on their sex. For boys, that means they must be athletic, strong, sexist, and hide their emotions. For girls, that means they must be attentive to and flirtatious with boys and must accept a subordinate status to boys. Regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, those who violate these rules are punished by their peers and too often by adults (2001, p. 49).

Nan Stein cites a “national report card” issued in 1997 by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) of New York City highlighting the following facts: A typical high school student hears antigay slurs as often as 25 times a day. When these slurs occur, only 3% of faculty members speak out against their use. Not surprisingly, nineteen percent of gay and lesbian students have also suffered physical attacks in school. Thirteen percent skip school at least once a month. Twenty-six percent drop out of school altogether (Stein, 1999, p. 23). According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), 80 percent of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth in a 14-city study have experienced verbal abuse; 44 percent, threats; 33 percent, having objects thrown at them; and 30 percent, being chased (Checkley, 2001, p.5).

If the lack of intervention by teachers in situations in which homophobic views are expressed is as low as the research suggests, then the near absence of literature on sexual orientation and schooling comes as no surprise. Despite the general disregard for this problem, perhaps more troubling is the fact that social studies educators, whose mission is democratic citizenship education, should have had so little to say about homophobia. In the next section, I argue that dealing with issues of sexuality in the social studies should be a moral imperative for the field, with attention paid by social studies educators
to the myriad dimensions of the subject within the context of school and teacher education curriculum.

**Homophobia and Social Studies**

Why should these issues be of concern to social studies?

The relationships among social studies education, sexual orientation, and homophobia move in several directions, relating both to the formal and hidden curriculum. Although little by way of explicit curriculum attention is typically given to these issues in the social studies, students are still learning lessons about gender and sexuality as part of the hidden curriculum (Kimmel, 2000).

Scholars of masculinity call homophobia "a weapon of sexism" (Pharr, 1997) and link it to socialization to modern manhood (Plummer, 1999). A number of recent historical works (Chudacoff, 1999; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Bederman, 1995; May, 1998; Rotundo; 1993) suggest that modern male sensibilities have been created in response to what was perceived as an increasingly feminized and overly civilized culture during the late 19th century. Chudacoff (1999) argues that modern images of masculinity encouraged a self-assertive, activist, and individualist male identity increasingly defined in terms of a "boys will be boys" mentality. Taken together, this scholarship seems to suggest that modern manhood has become consumed with patrolling the boundaries of sex role behavior and punishing those who deviate from these prescriptions.

Such analyses indicate further not only how important society and culture are in the making of gender and sexuality, but also the degree to which social studies has abdicated treatment of these issues to the health curriculum, where coverage focuses on medical, psychological, and physiological aspects of this subject matter, at best. Societies have constructed gender roles and sexual identities differently over time and space. These topics thus have histories, ones that have received attention from researchers in the humanities and social sciences over the last thirty years. Introducing gender and sexuality into the social studies as matters for historical and sociological consideration would better reflect contemporary scholarly thinking than the current silence on this topic.

Inscribing such silences into the curriculum militates against the open, tolerant, and equitable nature of citizenship education in a democracy (Crocco, 2001; 2001b). It is important to remember that lessons in civic education get grafted onto cognitive and normative frameworks reflecting students' socialization by a variety of institutions. To the degree that students learn homophobia as a result of these influences, social studies teachers can expect such attitudes to color, interfere with, and undermine the teaching they do about
democratic citizenship and its obligations. If social studies teachers (who often are coaches of athletic teams) tolerate expression of homophobic or sexist attitudes in classrooms, in the hallways, or on the playing fields, their tacit agreement undercuts students' sense of the universal obligations around respect, toleration, and inclusion that democratic citizenship entails, obviating application of these commitments to groups seen as beyond their purview.

What's happening in the hallways should, therefore, be of particular (although not exclusive) concern to teachers directly engaged in citizenship education, a philosophical stance that unavoidably extends the scope of social studies teachers' obligations beyond classroom walls. Libraries that carry no books on gender and sexuality, athletic settings where sexist and homophobic comments are ignored, and hallways where young women and those believed to be gay or lesbian are harassed, all create a climate inimical to the support for human rights that should infuse the educational enterprise in American society. Social studies courses that avoid discussion of the gay liberation movement as part of the civil rights movement, that overlook gay issues and women's rights as "controversial" subject matter, and social studies teachers who condone abusive verbal and physical behavior towards gays and women, all contribute to a climate of intolerance that is hard to square with the demands of citizenship education in a pluralistic democracy.

Like it or not, teachers of social studies are adults with authority in schools. To the degree that teachers ignore their moral responsibility for bullying, threatening, object throwing, and chasing those labeled gay or lesbian, they countenance a school culture that is sexist and homophobic, tacitly endorsing a world view that sanctions school violence against those not fully accepted as citizens. The clear message such a school culture sends is that one standard of behavior is demanded for interaction with certain categories of persons and another for those despised. This is a dangerous message for future adult citizens within a pluralistic democracy and rapidly globalizing world.

Preparing Teachers to Address Gender and Sexuality

Given the above rationale, it is surprising that social studies educators and teacher educators have published virtually nothing about gender, sexuality, and the social studies. Although attention to gender has ebbed and flowed over the last three decades, discussion about sexuality has been meager to nonexistent. An ERIC search of publications using the keywords gender, sexuality and the social studies yielded ten citations, with only one focused explicitly on sexual orientation. Indeed, its author (Wade, 1995) characterizes this subject
as a "diversity taboo." Human Rights Watch confirmed this reality: "Most of the teachers we interviewed did not feel that they could bring up lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in class. 'My principal would faint,' said a teacher in West Texas when we asked him" (p.121). Perusing the general educational literature also yields few publications on this subject, with several notable exceptions in special editions of three educational journals (Harvard Educational Review; Volume 66, No. 2, Summer 1996; Radical Teacher, No. 24, 1984 and No. 45, 1994; and High School Journal, Volume 77, Nos. 1&2, 1993/94).

Changing the silence associated with gender and sexuality in the social studies begins, at least in part, with changing the way social studies educators conceive of their domain, roles, and responsibilities. As Stephen J. Thornton (2001) notes, questions concerning what social studies teachers need to know and be able to do are hardly settled ones. Thornton reviews the multitude of ends embraced by social studies education—culminating patriotism, advancing gender equity and appreciation for diversity, encouraging community service, appreciating democracy, the Constitution, and free enterprise, among others—finding it a daunting list. Adding sexual orientation to the mix complicates (subject) matters, in large measure due to its "taboo" status. Nevertheless, unless we educate the educators about this subject, little change will occur, even among those committed to diversity in other guises.

In one graduate program in social studies teacher education in New York City, discussions of diversity have been infused across all courses found in the master's and doctoral programs. Focused attention is given to gender and sexuality in two program offerings: Diversity and the Social Studies Curriculum deals with multicultural education in the United States, and Women of the World: Issues in Teaching addresses gender and sexuality within the context of global education (for a full description of the latter course, see Crocco 2000a).

The findings reported here are based on five years of data from the diversity course, including student writing to a set of prompts aimed at eliciting recollections of school experiences with issues of gender and sexuality, in-depth interviews with twenty former students of the course one year after entering teaching, the author's field notes from teaching the course, and a set of semi-structured interviews and discussions with others who have taught comparable courses at this institution. Analysis was done using the constant comparative method for identification and validation of emergent themes across all sets of data.

In dealing with diversity, students and teachers confront their own life experiences, entrenched attitudes and values, socialization and personal identity, in sometimes unsettling ways. In personal
conversations with colleagues who teach multicultural education, a widely shared belief emerges that, without engagement of issues related to social identity, efforts to transform future teachers' classroom behavior will have minimal, if any, effect (see Banks, 2001, for further discussion of this viewpoint). As one teacher educator remarked, the diversity course does not make for a "feel comfortable pedagogy." Without some degree of discomfort, students will not confront the beliefs and attitudes that interfere with acquisition of knowledge and pedagogy critical in teaching all their students in a democratic fashion.

Each year, approximately twenty-five to thirty-five graduate students enroll in the diversity course. They keep a structured journal using stems such as "In my high school, sexual orientation was...." As a final project, students, working in teams, devise a series of three faculty development workshops on diversity. Over the years, many have chosen to produce workshops addressing the problem of homophobia.

Of the roughly 150 master's and doctoral students who have taken the diversity course over the last five years, most have been master's students in their early twenties. Although a few have been born and raised outside the United States, most have grown up in suburban and urban settings across the country; are African American, Euro-American, and Asian American; were raised as Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim or without religious affiliation; and attended public, parochial, or private schools. Despite the range of backgrounds, the chorus of common phrases, stories, and labels related to sexual orientation was astonishing.

Interestingly, none of those enrolled in this class ever self-identified as gay when this author taught the course. Only with the arrival of a self-identified lesbian instructor did one of the students identify himself as gay and several as bi-sexual. Naturally, this raises many issues, one of which is the degree to which student writing/comments in any class can be "trusted" as representing their "real" viewpoint, given what's at stake in terms of grade, group perception, etc. This caveat relates to the diversity course in ways that would take us beyond the scope of this paper, but should be kept in mind as the findings are described.

With the exception of one student schooled in New Delhi and Athens whose experiences were somewhat divergent, five themes ran through virtually all the other data:

1. "Compulsory heterosexuality"

As one student put it, there were simply "no options" when it came to sexual orientation: "We all assumed everyone was straight." Words like "assumed" and "expected" in terms of heterosexuality were repeated again and again. Many students reported that the topic was
rarely discussed among friends and acquaintances. Some students claimed they never thought about the issue of sexual orientation until they got to college. Again, it was simply assumed that everyone was heterosexual and sexually active. Not to be sexually active made one an outcast, prudish, un-cool, and probably a lesbian. Criticizing those who engaged in gay bashing could result in being labeled deviant: "Constant gay-bashing in casual conversation bothered me. When I began to voice my dislike for such language, I was immediately labeled as a lesbian."

2. Silence of the formal curriculum

"I encountered few gay or lesbian role models, never read any works by gay or lesbian authors and only heard about the issue in history class with a brief mention of the suspected sexuality of historical figures such as Jane Addams." What this student perhaps meant to say is that she had never read any works whose authors had been identified as gay or lesbian. By not identifying authors in this manner, teachers simply collude with a system that keeps gays and lesbians invisible, both in history and in life. Another student indicated something similar about English classes "when we discussed Allen Ginsburg or Walt Whitman." Several noted how little was said about the subject even in health classes. When schools made an effort to introduce diversity into the curriculum, this meant only racial and ethnic issues, not gender, and not sexual orientation. Textbooks, unsurprisingly, were silent on the subject.

3. White noise outside the classroom

"Stereotypical slurs like 'fag' or 'dyke' were often heard in the hallways"; "within the non-classroom environment of the hallways or cafeteria, [sexual orientation] was a topic only for ridicule, alienation, and harassment"; "on the playground, 'smear the queer' was a popular pastime." Such labels were used as shorthand for despised identities: "People who were gay were not even considered to be real people." However, the terms took on more global connotations, being used to put down any "un-cool" person, behavior, or even an article of clothing.

In one school, those males believed to be homosexual were spat at in the hallways: "It was not uncommon to hear the words 'queer' or 'fag,' 'homo' and very rarely 'lesbo' echoing in the hallways or on the grounds of the school, yet nobody was one." Again, this statement was made in an ironic fashion, indicating that its author understood the role compulsory heterosexuality played in form and substance of the recollection. In another school, there was a lot of talk about a gay bar downtown: "Certain students would make threats about going there to beat up the patrons." Another male student noted
that although “homophobic slurs were not marking the school-yard... heterosexual privilege was.” With all these statements, students indicated that only heterosexual students were allowed to exist openly and comfortably in their schools.

4. “Breeding grounds for homophobia”

Again and again, students reflected on schools as “breeding grounds for homophobia.” Whether the schools were found in Harlem, Westchester, or the Midwest, “the lack of involvement by administrators and faculty made the homophobia and abuse more pervasive and intense.” When one Muslim student recounted her effort as a school newspaper editor to raise the problem of homophobia in print, the principal intervened and prohibited the issue from going forward. By contrast, another student told the story of a principal who “got out in front of” his parents on this subject and was “canned.” One young man who had attended a Catholic high school put it this way:

No one ever said they were gay or it would be o.k. to be gay or even, it’s wrong to hate people for being gay. Everyone was against apartheid in South Africa, racism at home, famine in Ethiopia and sexism, but gay rights never entered the list of student causes or crusades.

One student, however, did report that her school had attempted a “Value Difference Day” in which sexual orientation was mentioned, but she found the approach a “band-aid” to a much larger problem. Another student indicated that since she graduated, her high school’s administration had brought about a high level of awareness about sexual orientation and had trained an extensive peer mediation group to work with students in “resolving conflicts” related to this issue.

5. Close encounters of a positive kind

A small number of students, about 10% of the total, told tales of changed attitudes, their own or other students’, based on getting to know those who were gay or lesbian. Although these stories appeared infrequently, they are worth noting since they echo what social psychologists tell us about the best way to change entrenched prejudicial attitudes (see, for example, the recent summary of Eliot Aronson’s work in the New York Times, Gilbert, 2001). Sustained interpersonal contact with the “other” helps to break down stereotypes and reduce prejudice. Cooperative learning has been highly touted
both for its pedagogical effectiveness as well as for producing social cohesion across racial, ethnic, gender, and class lines.

My students told stories of siblings or friends who had come out and how these experiences produced changes in their own attitudes during high school. One wrote of becoming interested in gay/lesbian issues during these years because her brother came out. As a result, she vocalized her dislike of slurs and advocated energetically the rights of gays and lesbians in class discussions whenever issues of civil rights arose. Another told of her experiences working for three years with a number of gay men in a restaurant. She said these friendships “changed my mind” about the stereotypes associated with gay men. Finally, one young woman told of a female friend from high school who had dated men during her freshman and sophomore years, but who made a very public statement about being a lesbian at an assembly during her senior year. A member of the “in” crowd, she “sent the message that gays are not weird, ugly, or losers” but can be “popular and cool.” No recriminations or shunning resulted from her avowal of sexual orientation. According to my student informant, this young woman maintained her popularity and helped to change attitudes dramatically at this high school. As a result of her action, this high school initiated the peer mediation program mentioned earlier.

What Can Be Done?

These stories suggest the importance of moving sexual orientation into discussion as a topic in teacher education programs and challenging the homophobic atmosphere of schools. If curriculum offers no reflection of gays and lesbians, their history, agency, creativity, struggles, failures, and lived experience, then schooling certainly contributes to the marginalization, invisibility, and erasure of these groups. At the same time, heterosexual students are robbed of the opportunity of getting to know individuals different from themselves who remain ciphers and caricatures. Breaking down stereotypes about sexual orientation may help to undermine overgeneralized and intolerant thinking about all categories of human beings. In teacher education, invoking traditional themes in social studies such as tolerance, bias, stereotyping, fairness, and citizenship all may provide paths into discussion of these issues, through courses on diversity, teaching social issues, methods, or foundations. The description of students’ final projects in the diversity course will provide concrete suggestions of what can be done in teacher education as well as professional development workshops in the schools.

The diversity course required preparation of a culminating project consisting of plans for three 2-hour faculty development workshops for a hypothetical school setting of students’ own creation.
The students described rationales, steps, materials, and assessment tools necessary for implementing their plans. On the last day of the semester, teams presented their ideas to other students as a simulation in which peers played the role of a school district’s Board of Education.

Most projects emphasized allowing “teachers an opportunity to confront their own feelings, beliefs, and values.” This is crucial. Getting these viewpoints on the table will, according to the authors of one project, “facilitate participants’ understanding of the challenges and the dangers facing gay and lesbian teenagers. Anecdotes, statistics, research, and stories will be available.” Likewise, these efforts should allow safe space for gay and lesbian teachers and students to describe their own experiences and comment critically and constructively about the school culture: What are the ways in which this culture promotes compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980)? To what degree are gays and lesbians marginalized by policies and procedures, norms and assumptions of school life? How do white privilege and heterosexual privilege enter school and community life? The workshops encourage participants to engage in exercises in free writing and role playing that explore personal histories, attitudes, and belief systems, for example, ideas about gender role expectations and the manner in which such notions reflect each person’s own social location. To this end, several workshops featured an exercise used in the diversity class from an article entitled “In Our Own Hands: Diversity Literacy” by Emily Style (1996) that structured this experience of identifying one’s own social location.

Designers of the workshops operated from the assumption that only “by stepping into the shoes of gay and lesbian teenagers for the day...[will] teachers and other staff members...become sensitized to the feelings and challenges their students face.” Materials from groups such as the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (12 W. 27th St., Suite 804, NY, NY 10001; www.glsen.org), the National Advocacy Coalition on Youth and Sexual Orientation (1711 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 206, Washington, DC 20009), and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (www.ngltf.org) were seen as useful in this regard.

Likewise, students suggested literature as another means of creating empathy and understanding on the part of teachers and students. Nancy Garden’s Annie on My Mind (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982) and M.E. Kerr’s three works, Deliver Us from Evie (HarperTrophy, 1994), “Hello,” I Lied (HarperCollins, 1997) and Night Kites (HarperKeypoint, 1986), all deal with gay youth in a manner that is sympathetic and engaging. Ann Heron’s Two Teenagers in 20 (Alyson, 1994) offers insights into growing up gay and lesbian based on personal testimonies.
Many authors of these projects saw teachers not only as disciplinary specialists, but also as caring adults with a responsibility to "consider all of the students with whom we come in contact, not just 90 percent of them." Thus, the workshops typically called for bringing the entire school faculty together for the professional development experience, at least initially, rather than segmenting them by academic department. The aim at the outset of the series was to uncover the "ways that homophobia exists in our school and develop[ing] mechanisms to address these issues." Through such a holistic effort, the scope of individual teachers' responsibility is expanded beyond the classroom. Many students noted the utility of the book, *Gay and Lesbian Students: Understanding Their Needs* by Hilda F. Besner and Charlotte I. Spungin (Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis, 1995), in creating a climate of concern and understanding for the risks faced by gay and lesbian youth. Many also found the video, "*It's Elementary*" by Debra Chasnoff and Helen S. Cohen, helpful in generating thoughtful discussion among teachers about different school environments.

After these preliminary steps, teachers might work by department to consider the ways in which the formal curriculum lends itself to incorporating topics dealing with sexuality and gender into the curriculum. Many practicing teachers as well as teacher educators have little background knowledge about these matters. Nevertheless, abundant material can be found across the humanities and the social sciences that will help to dispel ignorance. In the field of history, several examples of widely available material that could be reworked for secondary social studies classrooms include Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey's *Hidden from history* (1989); Lillian Faderman's *Odd girls and twilight lovers* (1991); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's *Disorderly conduct: Visions of gender in Victorian America* (1985); and Jonathan Ned Katz's *Gay American history* (1991).

What will be the chief impediments to bringing about change? In the case of teacher education, threat of official sanction for broaching these subjects will, in most places, be relatively minor. This is not to underestimate, however, student and colleague resistance to these new ideas. In the case of schools, the problems may be greater. Interviews with one cohort of beginning teachers who took the diversity course suggest the problems often encountered at the secondary level. After one year of teaching experience, many reported that they had "made an effort" to deal with diversity topics. However, most admitted that it is easier dealing with race, ethnicity, and religion than with gender and sexuality. Their avoidance of sexuality, in particular, reflects the view that students, school administrators, and parents would resist discussion of this topic. As untenured teachers, many said that the best they had been able to do was to forbid homophobic slurs in their
classrooms. Some also expressed the hope that “post-tenure,” they would be able to do more. Many of those teaching in New York State stated their belief that the pressures associated with high stakes testing undermined their ability to deal sensitively with these sorts of topics.

A minority of respondents, including one working in a private school in a conservative midwestern city, indicated that they had brought gender and sexuality into their teaching to a considerable extent. One teacher relied on primary sources, current events, and Supreme Court decisions as vehicles for opening up the topic. Several others noted that the New York curriculum in social studies did, in fact, include gay and lesbian rights as part of a unit on human rights and the civil rights movement, with lessons on the Roman emperor Hadrian, Greek society, and the Stonewall Revolution. Others mentioned materials from Rethinking Schools, Facing History and Ourselves, and Teaching Tolerance as helpful in doing this work.

Examples such as these suggest that “pedagogies of possibility” do exist for teaching about sexuality within the social studies. As new teachers gain comfort with their teaching environments and awake to these possibilities, they may discover openings in the curriculum for connecting to gender and sexuality. Overall, however, the interviews clearly suggested that beginning teachers tread carefully in introducing controversial subject matter into their social studies curriculum. The pressures of parents, administrators, high stakes testing, and tenure all loom large in their lives.

From a broader professional perspective, two other pieces of information should be introduced that have bearing on this situation. Over ten years ago, ASCD adopted a resolution calling on its members to “develop policies, curriculum materials and teaching strategies that do not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation” (1990, as quoted in Hatred in the hallways, 2001, p. 121). By contrast, the National Education Association (NEA) in July, 2001 dropped its own resolution encouraging schools to develop materials supporting the struggles of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and staff (USA Today, 7/4/01). The resolution called for the development of curriculum and instructional materials about sexual orientation as well as problems such as suicide and “health risk behaviors” among gay and lesbian youth. NEA president Bob Chase linked the issue to human rights: “We have positions right now, throughout our organization, that protect the rights of women, that protect the rights of ethnic minorities, that protect the rights of physically challenged—go down the list. Should gay and lesbian kids be excluded from that? I don’t think so.” About 600 protesters picketed the meeting of the NEA in Los Angeles communicating their view that the resolution “promotes homosexuality to students.” As a result, the NEA moved the resolution
off the table and referred further discussion of the matter to a special taskforce.

**Conclusion**

National data as well as personal testimony support the contention that the problem of homophobia suffuses American schools. Undoubtedly, therefore, the problem also exists to some degree within schools of education. Getting a handle on what’s happening requires breaking the silence of the formal curriculum and challenging the beliefs and values that sustain the invisibility of gays and lesbians. Social studies teachers and teacher educators have the responsibility to lead the way in this matter by creating a more equitable approach to citizenship education.

While recognizable risks exist for teachers in some parts of the country who address these topics (see for example, *Rethinking Schools online*, 1997), it is perplexing why social studies teacher educators have been so silent. Academic freedom has been a major preoccupation of social studies teacher education since the field’s inception. Many social studies professors have fought for the right to articulate politically unpopular viewpoints, especially during the Cold War and other periods of national crisis. Where have these voices been as regards the often culturally unpopular position of finding room for gender and sexuality in the social studies curriculum? Or is silence related to a sense that taking up these issues trespasses on religious territory? Demarcating the private spheres in which citizens enact their beliefs from the “free spaces” of democracy (Evans and Boyte, 1992) in which public claims prevail defines one of the challenges of citizenship education in a democratic society.

Certainly, a plausible first step in normalizing the treatment of gender and sexuality in the schools might be for social studies teacher educators to provide direction by engaging in more teaching, research, and writing about this topic. Only by breaking the silence about sexuality and the social studies will all the hallways citizens pass through become safer places for students, teachers, and teacher educators alike.

**Notes**

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Author

MARGARET SMITH CROCCO is Associate Professor of Social Studies and Education in the Department of Arts and Humanities at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.
"Scary Thing, Being An Eighth Grader": Exploring Gender and Sexuality in a Middle School U.S. History Unit

Linda S. Levstik
University of Kentucky

Jeanette Groth
Lutheran Mission-Accra, Ghana

Abstract

The study reported here provides an example of the complex interface among historical study, current issues, and adolescents' complex social worlds. The authors investigated the ways in which a group of eighth grade students conceptualize the significance of gender in the context of a study of antebellum U.S. history. Fifty students participated in a set of inquiries into women's involvement in nineteenth-century U.S. reform movements, industrialization, and culture contact and conflict on the shifting frontier. Classroom interactions, museum-like displays, presentations, and interviews contrast students' public constructions and private responses to issues of gender and sexuality in the context of historical study. Among other findings, students identified women's experiences as historically significant, recognized, analyzed, and expressed interest in the variety of perspectives represented by women they studied, and worried about "reverse sexism"--studying women at the expense of men. In addition, students' historical inquiries generated discussion about current issues of gender and sexuality, both inside and outside the classroom. In discussing the contrasts between the classroom culture and the encircling "homophobic hallways," the authors suggest the importance of establishing environments where 1) gender is not an "add-on" or "extra" but fundamental point of analysis, and 2) adolescents build a vocabulary for discussing human rights issues and engage in critiquing current practices in regard to gender and sexuality.
At least since the nineteen-seventies a variety of historians have taken on the challenge of investigating the significance of gender in the historical past (Green, 2000; Lerner, 1977; Lerner, 1979; Lerner, 1993; Smith, 1998). As scholars make use of new sources and new methods of analysis, the lives of girls and women, as well as boys and men, open up in interesting and challenging ways. Increased interest in cultural history, for instance, shifts historical focus away from "symbolic individuals"—the political and military heroes (and some heroines) who proliferate in traditional histories—to the ways in which a broader array of women and men assign "meaning to events and [make] sense of their lives" (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1997).

While much of this scholarship is available in professional journals, teaching packets, lesson plans and the like, too little of this flow of ideas filters into classrooms (Crocco, 1997; Hahn, 1996; Levstik, 2001; Orenstein, 1994). Teachers’ lack of content background, along with pressure to cover content included on standardized tests, may limit the amount of classroom attention afforded this scholarship (Crocco, 1997), but the dominance of males in the classroom and their hostility to a more gender equitable environment often creates an even more intractable problem (Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). One teacher who attempted to provide more equitable attention to the girls in her class found that the boys grew angry, perceiving attention to girls as a loss for themselves (Orenstein, 1994). In other classrooms boys’ “acting out” behaviors absorb teachers’ time and attention. As one middle school teacher acknowledged, “[Girls] feel reduced by the experience of my class” (Orenstein, 1994). Despite the daily grind of gender inequities reported in these studies, explicit attention to gender continues as a rarity in the school curriculum (Hahn, 1996; Kleinfeld & Yerian, 1995; McCormick, 1994; O’Reilly, Penn, & deMarrais, 2001; Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Of course schooling is not the sole source of young people’s images, myths, and theories about gender. Rather, cultural, familial, and personal definitions of masculinity and femininity—as well as institutional practices—shape gender perceptions. Adolescents face the task of ignoring, rejecting, or reconciling often widely varying perspectives on gender, and too often the curriculum provides little help with this task. Ideals of equality and full civic participation for women are asserted in an array of documents, from United Nations’ declarations and national constitutions to a national narrative in the United States in which the guarantees of the Bill of Rights are expected to redress historic wrongs, including gender discrimination (Elshtain, 1981; Hahn, 1998; Levstik, 1999a; Levstik, 1999b). Yet adolescents’ experiences too often belie these assertions (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Finders, 1997; Hahn, 1998; Lesko, 2000; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2001). Not surprisingly, their attitudes reflect the complexity of their
experiences with gender. A study of students' political understanding, for instance, found that while a majority of those surveyed in five democracies supported women's rights to political leadership, a sizable minority, particularly among males, did not (Hahn, 1998). In two other studies (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Levstik, 2000), students in the United States and New Zealand supported women's right to vote, but were divided on the issue of political leadership. New Zealand adolescents argued that women were as likely as men to make good political leaders, and they were able to give specific examples of women in leadership positions. American students more often expressed reservations about women in leadership roles.

Despite—or, perhaps, because of—their varying attitudes toward women's political leadership, adolescents in these studies were interested in and engaged by gender issues. Arguing from much the same premises as their suffragist foremothers, they claimed that husbands could not and should not speak for wives, that one sex should not dominate the other, and that women and men should have an equal say in "what affects their life" (Levstik, 1999a). Some students also argued that women's voices and votes redefined politicians' responsibilities, forcing attention to areas men might not notice (Levstik, 1999a). A sizable proportion of the boys in both the U.S. and New Zealand studies suggested that women, having once been denied the vote, would pay more attention to politics. This is particularly interesting, given that earlier studies found higher rates of political interest among male than female students. In a 1961 study (Greenstein, 1961), for instance, elementary boys in the United States were found to be more likely than girls to recognize the names of political leaders and to attend to political news. The National Assessment of Education Progress (Educational Commission of the States, 1978) also found that adolescent girls did less well than boys on test items measuring knowledge of facts about government, the law, and international politics. International studies reported similar findings (Hahn, 1996).

More recent research, however, indicates that adolescent females seem "to be almost as likely as males to see that they have a stake in public policies, and to be interested in following the issues" (Hahn, 1996, p. 87). Hahn (1996) suggests that this apparent shift in political interest may be more the result of changing definitions of political knowledge than of changing attitudes among adolescents. Because previous researchers focused on knowledge of public figures rather than sociopolitical issues, they may have missed the meanings that many females and males construct of political concepts such as power, authority, justice, freedom, civic responsibility and the like. Similarly, findings that males are more confident of their own political efficacy than are females may reflect gendered experiences and the sociopolitical realities of a particular time and place (Stone, 1996).
Of course, the classroom construction of gender involves more than student perceptions and behaviors. Through methodological as well as content choices, teachers, too, shape the ways in which gender will surface in the curriculum. Although there is relatively little research on teachers' own conceptions of gender in the context of social studies, there is evidence that gender is more often an unacknowledged subtext in classrooms and curricula rather than an analytic tool for investigating human experience. As a result, the gendering of social studies often goes unrecognized (White, 1997, p. 291). Altering practices in these circumstances requires more than simple inclusion, especially if women enter the curriculum largely when their activities approximate those of males. Rather, a more gender equitable curriculum requires reconsidering what counts as legitimate knowledge in schools (Crocco, 1997; McCormick, 1994). This, in turn, requires attention to several aspects of historical teaching and learning, including how teachers and students currently conceptualize the significance of women in history, and how those conceptions might be challenged, expanded, and/or supported in the social studies curriculum. This article addresses a subset of these issues: How a group of middle school students conceptualize the significance of women in the context of a study of antebellum U.S. history.

**Mostly Girls: An Unusual Setting**

The study reported here was conducted in two eighth grade social studies classes at the School for the Arts (SOTA). SOTA is a magnet school serving approximately 250 students from fourth through eighth grade in a midsize city in the upper South. Crammed into a building that was designed for small classes of students with multiple and severe disabilities, the arts program is poised to move into new facilities. Although the school is located in a predominantly African American community in an urban/county school district, the student body is predominantly European American. It is also predominantly female. At the time of the study, for instance, only nine of the fifty students in the eighth grade were male. The middle school teachers generally attribute this imbalance to the lack of intramural sports in the school, noting the number of boys who transfer out of the school as they enter middle school. Students agree that athletics draw some boys away from the school, but suggest an additional disincentive for male students. They explain that boys who express interest in the arts risk being labeled as gay. Interviews with the nine males in the eighth grade indicate that each of them experienced some degree of harassment around this issue. In addition, interview data suggests that imputed sexual orientation served as a powerful and frightening weapon when wielded peer against peer.
Most of the students in the eighth grade at SOTA have been together since fourth grade. Students who enter the school after fourth grade often find it difficult to break into this close-knit community with its shorthand references to shared experiences and its tight social groups. From a researcher’s perspective, however, entry is relatively easy. Not only do students respond comfortably to cameras and tape-recorders, they are willing interviewees. All fifty eighth graders agreed to participate in the study and all remained active throughout. Indeed, even though the final interviews were conducted after more than a month of intensive study, students demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for discussing the work they had just concluded. Some of this enthusiasm grows out of the students’ experience in the performing arts—they enjoy being “on-stage” for almost any audience. Their willing participation is also a sign of respect for their teacher. About half of the eighth graders have had the same social studies teacher—Jeanette Groth—for their entire middle school experience. Jeanette’s inquiry-based, arts-infused approach to the social studies was an important factor in selecting this site for the study, as was Jeanette’s interest in gender issues at her school. Another point of interest for both of us was that SOTA’s scores on state level social studies assessments for the middle school were consistently among the highest in the state. Teachers in other schools constantly tell us they cannot use the methods typical of Jeanette’s instruction because of pressures to prepare students for testing. Jeanette’s classroom stands as a counter-example—students are regularly engaged in interesting and in-depth study while performing admirably on statewide tests.

Of equal importance to us both, we were full partners in the research. Together, we developed a methodology that would do several things. First, it met Jeanette’s curricular requirements, including covering the antebellum period in U.S. history, but it did so by focusing on women’s perspectives. Second, we organized instruction to allow for multiple ways to collect data on students’ responses to the shift in gender perspective. Students kept journals, gave regular status reports on their work, developed exhibits, recorded their planning and research sessions, and participated in follow-up interviews. Finally, we arranged authentic audiences—faculty, staff, students and visitors at the nearby College of Education—for the results of the students’ inquiries. Creating a women’s history display at the College served as an important impetus for student inquiry. The completed exhibit occupied the main lobby in the College and garnered media coverage as well as considerable attention from people passing through the building.
Shifting the Focus: The Context for Study

The true Republic: Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less.
Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906). Motto printed on the front of her newspaper, Revolution.

The context for the study was a month long unit on antebellum America incorporating three areas typical of traditional U.S. history periodization—culture contact and conflict on the frontier, industrialization, and reform movements—but we began with women’s experiences and perspectives rather than the more common male-oriented approach. We developed a set of lessons that introduced each of the three topics from women’s perspectives. Initially, too, students worked with a variety of primary sources and artifacts to generate interest in and questions about each topic. The remainder of the unit was organized around two major activities: conducting research to address student-generated questions and developing displays and interpretive material for a public exhibit on women in antebellum America. Jeanette took major responsibility for conducting the lessons; Linda worked with small groups to provide additional support for student research. We debriefed after each session. All lessons, small group work, and students’ final “dress rehearsal” presentations were video and audiotaped. Linda kept notes on the debriefing sessions. The exhibit was mounted in the College of Education during Women’s History Month and remained on display until the end of the semester.

Once the exhibit was completed, Linda interviewed students in small groups (2-3 students per group) using a set of demographic questions and a set of broader questions designed to explore their understanding of the historical significance of different categories of women’s experiences. Interviews were audiotaped. We analyzed data from all audio and videotapes using a process of analytic induction. We identified a set of thematic strands in participants’ responses/discussions, and subjected the transcripts to a systematic content analysis in which we categorized responses/discussions according to coding categories based on those strands. Many of the initial categories were broken down, combined, or added to during the course of coding, and the coding includes a systematic search for negative or discrepant evidence. We then analyzed the coded data using cross–case analysis (in which we group answers responding to the same items or topics in the task and interview) and constant comparison (in which we compare students’ responses across different portions of the task and interview). This resulted in a set of descriptive generalizations, which form the basis for the discussion that follows.
Well Behaved Women Rarely Make History:  
Students’ Responses to a Differently Gendered History

Men may cook or weave, or dress dolls or hunt humming birds, but if such activities are appropriate occupations for men, then the whole society, men and women alike, votes them as important. When women perform the same occupations, they are regarded as less important.

Margaret Mead, 1949

On Monday, March 6, 2000, twenty-five eighth graders blew into Jeanette’s homeroom. Students swirled around, chatting with each other, tripping over backpacks and desks, jockeying with their peers to show Jeanette or the student teacher, Ashley, pictures from a recent performance, complaining about an instance of “unfair” dress code enforcement and slowly settling into their chairs. Announcements filtered in over the PA system, Jeanette checked attendance, a straggler entered the room, another teacher stuck her head in the door to ask about a field trip, the class sang a jazzed up version of the Pledge of Allegiance, and the school day officially began. In the midst of all this Linda checked the video cameras and tape recorders, made sure the permission slips were in order, responded to student questions and comments, and hoped all this energy would carry over into the upcoming history unit. She need not have worried. The movement, speed, and enthusiasm of that first day proved emblematic of the general tenor of the entire group of eighth graders. They never lacked for ideas and opinions and their energy level was amazing, as was their sense of the dramatic. At one point, one of the students, Eugenie, summed up much of the wild mix of ecstasy and angst that characterized these students. “Scary thing, being an eighth grader,” she said.

Fortunately for us, the students loved social studies, explaining that it helped them to be more “open-minded.” “You should at least open the eyes of every child to see kind of what happened . . . never tell them just one part of their history . . .” one student explained. Her classmate, Ruth, added that social studies helped her refine her views on different issues. “I’m really glad I’ve had the opportunity to go to [SOTA] because I don’t know if I’d have the same views . . . [Here] I have the support of my classmates and my teachers.” In interviews these young women and their peers explained that they felt safe to explore ideas and opinions in their social studies class. They knew their peers well and felt reasonably comfortable speaking in front of them. The school had “almost a minute amount of guys” so young
women did not have to compete for airtime, and both males and females felt safe and supported by most of their teachers. The nine boys did mention that they sometimes felt invisible. Jared used an interesting example: “Like when they do yearbook surveys,” he explained. “And the favorite magazine is always Sassy or something. You’ve got to do it differently, I think.”

As the only social studies teacher in the eighth grade, Jeanette has considerable latitude in developing curriculum. While she is expected to cover material tested by the state, there is little pressure to cover that material from a particular perspective. The high test scores achieved by her students also insulate her from excessive oversight. Over the years, too, she has built rapport with parents, and that has paid off in support for the social studies program. At SOTA, then, we had a relatively rare opportunity to explore adolescents’ ideas about gender and sexuality in an atmosphere of comparative safety. We recognize that this is not typical. Students in other settings might—indeed, do—respond differently. That SOTA students responded as they did suggests, however, that given similar circumstances, others might as well.

**Perspective: Women Are Not a Single Category**

The labor of women in the house, certainly, enables men to produce more wealth than they otherwise could; and in this way women are economic factors in society. But so are horses.


Back on that energy-charged March morning we passed out copies of a bumper sticker that read, “Well behaved women rarely make history,”(Ulrich, 1976), asked the eighth graders to tell us what it meant, gave them a set of quotations from various antebellum perspectives regarding women’s rights and women’s experiences, and began a wide-ranging conversation that extended over the next two months. While it is not our purpose here to outline all the themes that emerged over that period, the students’ construction of the significance of gender in U.S. history and the contrasts between this public construction and private responses to issues of gender and sexuality are relevant to the discussion that follows. In the context of this study, students identified women’s experiences as historically significant, recognized that women had been left out in previous historical study, admitted that they had not always noticed this omission, and worried about “reverse sexism”—studying women at the expense of men.
New Points of Departure

It was clear from the outset that reversing the traditional point of departure for historical study would generate considerable discussion, not only about the significance of women's experiences, but also about current issues of gender and sexuality. On the one hand, all but two students argued that women's experiences were important enough to warrant at least some separate attention. Even the two who did not think women should be treated separately nonetheless argued for an inclusive study "that wasn't just men or just women, but included everybody." The majority of students also identified women's experiences as historically significant, and made several points in support of their position. Arlene suggested that the gradual change in women's status during the antebellum era made this a period "that totally changed our way of living." She noted that,

around that time women were coming out with things that were uncommon for women to do and women were doing more daring things...out of the ordinary. It was...about change in how women were placed in society. . . . If you took that chunk out, say you took all those years out—you need to look at who it's all led by. It's like a white men powered world. It's all like the white men, they know they're set and if you're a slave, like African American, Native American, or a woman, you have no say and it's all what the men want.

Another student, Karla, suggested that this period marked "the beginning of people thinking about natural rights that humans should have, like basic rights." In addition, "some of [women's] protesting" Cora said, "improved conditions for workers today." Eugenie provided further arguments for the significance of the antebellum period: "It just seems to be a major division between two different eras." Her classmate added that "It kind of opened doors to women," and Eugenie nodded. "It kind of led up to now when women could do things." Jake agreed, adding that "women have always been outside" and without the nineteenth century reform movements women "would be less than they are today." Interestingly, too, each interview group raised the issue of cross-national comparisons. As Ayla described it, recognizing patterns in history helped explain some of what was going on around the world, "if all other countries went through similar things in their time, like undeveloped countries are going through what we have gone through, like their disrespect for women, for instance." Drawing on her previous studies in world history and world geography, Ayla concluded that
Americans were not the only people to struggle with differences. "Differences are something that a culture has to learn to adapt to and to live with and to adjust to and to respect," she explained.

Gender Balanced History

While most of the students hoped that someday schools would present a more "balanced" approach to history, several argued that because "schools don't discuss a lot about women who were heroes" it was well worth spending the time to address women's experiences separately. "This taught me a lot," Maribeth said. "I learned more about what really happened to women." In contrast, others suggested that what was most important about their current study was that it did not focus on a few outstanding women. Instead, they preferred learning about women in different social conditions. "I found out that work was thirteen hours a day, seventy-three hours a week," Kayla said of the millworkers she was investigating. "And I found out," Arlyn said, "that working in a textile mill a child was half as likely to reach twenty years of age as a child working on a farm." Another student explained that women on the frontier "had all these responsibilities...It's like, you finish off the day by having a baby!"

This interest was particularly vivid in their displays. In presenting women in emerging industries, for instance, one group used the image of hands—the hands of a woman mill worker, an economically privileged woman, and an enslaved woman. In each hand they placed symbols of the woman's status—coins representing the salary of a woman mill worker with a graph comparing her income with that of male co-workers, embroidery for the privileged woman, cotton bolls and a hammer for the enslaved woman. The accompanying text described working conditions, social and legal limitations on the activities of each woman, the tools used for the work they did, and reform activities associated with each group. The heading for this display read "New Ages Demand New Wages." In describing the symbology associated with the mill worker, Perry explained, "This girl represents all the girls who worked in the mills. While each girl may not have had every one of these experiences, many girls did, so each display represents one part of mill life, including differential pay based on whether the worker was young, old, or minority."

A second group studying dress reform organized their display to account for women pioneers, enslaved women, and "fashionable" women. After describing the health risks of "long skirts that usually brought in mud and dirt" and corsets that "cut off the supply of oxygen and rearranged their internal organs" they distinguished between women who had choices—corsets or bloomers, for instance—and enslaved women who "were just trying to stay alive and have food, to exist." They also recognized that some women followed husbands in
search of new land while others "wanted to make their own fortune," and headed west on their own. "Women," declared one group, in a telling reversal of traditional interpretations, "were the strength and backbone" of U.S. expansion. They created artifacts to show the differences among American Indian and European American women (but not African American women) on the frontier.

In sum, students provided overwhelming evidence that they understood that "women" did not exist as a single category but as a multiplicity of perspectives. This recognition that women differed by class and within classes proved to be a slippery concept. It coexisted, for instance, with a tendency to overgeneralize about the impact of social and political forces. Despite creating displays that differentiated among the experiences of many women, students sometimes argued that all women were "treated like slaves" or that all men treated women as inherently inferior. Interestingly, however, at other points in their study students cautioned against these statements. In developing questions about women's participation in reform movements, for instance, they asked if "there were places where reform wasn't even discussed," whether "women inside the reform movement all had the same opinions. . .wanted the same rights" or "were some women moderate or right wing within the reform." "How did women in the movement feel about those who were not?" "What percent of the population of women were involved in reform?" They asked about the "sacrifices made in order to achieve reform," the degree of ostracism suffered by reformers, and "at the end, did they lose or gain support?"

Connecting Past and Present

As they spent more time going through primary sources, too, students found further evidence of diversity. One group found "women who were flirtatious, they would try to tilt their skirts so that their ankles and their calf would show. They were called titlers. Very Southern Belle." Another source provoked considerable discussion and debate because "it basically says the purpose of female education is to teach women to be submissive to their husbands and pretend that they like it!" "Like you're trained your whole life," exclaimed Sylvia, "to be submissive and live through him, and not even have your own name. Back in that time period your identity will be erased." Referencing another primary source, Jake explained that it seemed that "women in those times were expected to be like a child. They're not supposed to speak unless spoken to." Ian brought out another source to show Jake. "I read this one account? This family on the trail sent their three daughters out to hunt and their son stayed for some reason. That's proof, I mean women were equal but men just didn't recognize that they were. They didn't always allow them to be." This
pattern of constructing interpretations through competing primary sources extended across much of the students’ initial research.

As they explored primary and secondary sources students began connecting antebellum attitudes to modern ones. In one lengthy discussion, Ayla explained that today there are “women who think men aren’t as equal... and ones who shave their heads, they hate men so much... and some women, just like back then, saw [traditional gender roles] as their role and they were going to go along with it without a fuss, and some wanted it that way.” In response, Jake returned to a slave analogy. “Some slaves were treated horribly and some were treated nice, and some women weren’t allowed to do much of anything at all and some had a say in stuff. Mostly, maybe, they were just expected to do the chores of the house and that was the way it had been and they were just afraid to change it.” This triggered questions about whether husbands forced women to stick to traditional roles. Jake then declared that “you learn history so you don’t make the mistake of putting another religion, race, or gender down... you can’t take control of them.” When asked if there was evidence that people learned this lesson his classmate, Ian, said that “we have progressed in technology but I don’t know how much we’ve progressed in social bonding or communal bonding or however our society is formed.”

An Old Question in a New Context: Where Are the Men?

We invite your attention to the dangers, which at present seem to threaten the female character with wide-spread and permanent injury. The appropriate duties and influence of woman are clearly defined in the New Testament. We appreciate the prayers and efforts of women advancing the cause of religion at home and abroad, but when she assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer, our care and protection of her seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defense against her; she yields the power which God has given her for her protection, and her character becomes unnatural.

Dr. Nehemiah Adams
19th Century Minister

Starting a history unit with women’s perspectives generated a good deal of interest and excitement about women’s historical experiences, but it generated discomfort as well. It was clear to these students that something was missing. Some version of “Where are the men?” came up almost every day and students were clearly conflicted
about the answer to that question. This is interesting on several levels, not least of which is that men's voices were represented in the primary and secondary sources available to the students. The unit did not start with men nor did the culminating project focus on them, but they were there—making laws, working with women in reform movements, leading their families onto the frontier, overseeing the textile mills, enacting laws, and more. But students perceived the shift in emphasis as silencing men. Real historians, Arlene said, would "have gone from the male perspective." She and a core of other students worried that this shift in focus was going too far. "Within the last few years," she said, "women were being treated more equal." "It shouldn't go too far either way," Cora explained. "You want to look at it not from some ratio." Some of the girls worried, too, that such a shift could be perceived as "against men"—a dangerous stance among adolescent girls who spent so much energy on attracting male attention. Others thought it was dangerous to make women a separate category. "Maybe it doesn't need to be separate," Eugenie said. "It should be put into normal everyday curriculum. Women would be emphasized just as much as men are and their roles would be just as equally important as men's are." Jemma agreed, adding that the danger lay in "turning it into this is women's place in history and this is men's place in history and that's like dividing them up." She paused, and ReeJene added that "separating them makes the problem worse." "But," she said, "sometimes it's really hard to blend it altogether because the women and men did have separate lives." Eugenie nodded. "Back then," she said, "it wasn't blended so it's hard to teach it blendedly—I'm making up words—but if you have to teach it the way it was, then it would make more sense to teach it [separately] since... their roles were defined." ReeJene laughed and explained that she thought of it like "your sitcom type mother...I think Pleasantville, you know?" Then, in the 1960s, Jemma added, "women remembered who they were and that they had a voice and they deserved to be heard."

"I Don't Remember Anything about Women": Noticing Women's Perspectives

A second point of interest in regard to students' anxiety about the absence of men is that none of the students could remember asking where women were in any previous classes, even though they agreed that women had hardly ever shown up in social studies classes prior to middle school. "You learned that women did work, but you didn't learn anything beyond that," Kayla said. "And you learned about slaves, and some of them could be women," Joseph added. Jared shook his head, saying "I don't remember anything about women or women's rights coming up until like now." The other members of his interview group agreed. They had learned history from men's perspectives, they
said, recalling that the few women who appeared were associated either with abolition and Civil Rights (Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Sojourner Truth) or the American Revolution (Molly Pitcher). Brook explained that she had discovered that “there were so many different kinds of women . . . but [until middle school] we didn’t really think about women much.”

With three exceptions (all female), students wanted to know more about women’s history. “I’d like to know more about women who were leaders and people looked up to and who were out in the open and did good stuff,” Jemma said. Eugenie wanted to “know more about women in different cultures because we always hear about how women were downtrodden and second class, I mean second rate compared to men. I’d want to know about women in the history of other cultures because in some of them women were first-class and you don’t hear about that.” Interrupting each other in their eagerness to explain the importance of cross-cultural comparison, Reejane and Eugenie described “having knowledge of other cultures and you bring that into play, not just American women. You don’t have to have specifically your own perspective; you can step back and see a big picture so that other people’s ideas, you may not always agree with them, and you can have an intelligent discussion with them while disagreeing, but you can understand what they’re talking about and have a good discussion that involves all sorts of things besides your view and their view and not just like this versus thing.”

“Normal” History: Mainly Focused on the Men

Despite their interest in national and international women’s histories, the eighth graders worried that by pursuing these interests they would fail to “focus on men’s lives”—the actors who had dominated the stage in most of their previous encounters with “normal” history. As they developed questions about reform, westward expansion, and industrialization each class asked about the activities of men. During interviews, too, four students worried with Arlene that “we never really got much of the other side of it. How men felt towards it, like we did know what they thought, but we really didn’t focus on what men’s responses were.” In another interview Jake suggested that they might have gotten some information on women, but “not that we remember. Somebody may have told us—they may have—but we don’t remember!” “Right,” Brook said. “I was mainly focused on the men. It is really amazing to know that women did all this stuff. I guess I thought the women were all alike. In my project I really enjoyed that, like there was the housewives and there was the slaves and there was a mother and they were so different in so many ways, and that was really neat.” Jerrilyn also raised the issue of the vast differences among the women she had studied. “I always thought
they just stayed home and took care of their children and never did anything else, but after we did this project I know that there were so many different kinds of women. Before you just didn’t really think about women much.” Asked why they thought women’s experiences had been left out, the general conclusion was that it was another instance of repressing “bad news.” Kayla explained that it was “a little bit like slavery. We don’t learn a lot about that and there’s only once a year that we get to learn about that and that’s like only 27-28 days and that’s not a lot. And the rest of the school year you learn about men and there’s other cultures we don’t learn about much. It’s like since we’re Americans it seems like that’s the only thing they want us to learn about is American history and it’s like they just tell us the pros and not the cons sometimes. It would be a good thing to know we’re not perfect.” Adrian suggested that some of this was an exercise in power. “They don’t want women knowing about these things.” Asked why not, she replied, “because most men would be embarrassed for everyone to know they aren’t doing anything but getting where they want to be and not helping us any.”

Gender Identification and Fear of Feminism

Towards the end of the first interview two students, Charles and Arlene, complained about the persistence of discrimination. Linda asked them if, given their concern over these issues, they would be comfortable if someone identified them as feminist. Arlene thought a moment. “It depends on how they would say it,” she finally said. “I’m for women, obviously, but I’m not against men or anything.” During each interview Linda asked students this same question. Their responses pointed out a basic contrast between the world students wished for and could describe so articulately—a world of increasing open-mindedness, of cross-cultural understanding, and gender equity—and the social world they inhabited where gender identification was problematic, and labels, including “feminist,” were too often used as weapons.

“People Replace That Word A Lot”: Defining a Feminist

To begin with, students expressed confusion over the term “feminist.” Over the course of the interviews students associated feminism with women’s rights, public protests, homosexuality, hostility towards males, and an inability to “see both sides.” Male students wondered if only women could be feminists. “I think of it as a woman,” Ian said. “I’ve heard the term but when I think of women back in the time when they were going for their rights, the right to vote, the right to have a say, the right to not be aggrieved in the way they were. I think of abolitionists.” “I don’t know if I’d call us feminists,” Jake said. “I think of someone active in public.” “I’ve heard
it used [to imply sexual orientation],” Ian added. “It’s sort of a twentieth century term, I think, and it doesn’t have to imply anything.” “People replace that word a lot, with other kinds of words,” Moira said. Asked if she was referring to sexual orientation, she said yes. Being labeled feminist meant risking being labeled lesbian, a term Moira feared.

In a separate interview a group of three girls argued over what feminism meant. “Feminism, where men are pigs,” Rhoda said, angrily. “We’ve gone from one extreme to another. Before you couldn’t leave your husband, and now kids get the impression that it’s OK just to get divorced.” In the ensuing discussion, these three young women debated whether feminism was wrong when “it comes to the point of ‘don’t pay for my dinner.’” They expressed some concern about confusing gender roles, explaining that sometimes it was nice “to feel protected.” They decided that, over all, they were uncomfortable when men took on traditional women’s roles. “When [Michaela] first said that about a man dreaming of staying home” Kelly said, “I was like ugh. I would think that was weird if you told me that, honestly.” Kelly’s discomfort reminded them of a fourth grade classmate who used to cry. “Everyone made fun of him and they still make fun of him to this day,” Kelly remembered. Michaela nodded. “He was just really sensitive,” she said. “Now he gets mad, hits things and stuff, cause he knows he can’t cry so he tries to demonstrate it in a manly way.” Despite their discomfort with role-bending behaviors, these young women agreed that “the perfect society would be where people do what they want to do, not because they feel pressured. If a woman wants to stay home that should be fine. If a woman wants to go out and work that should be fine. If a man wants to do, well, that’s fine, too.”

A Feminist by Example: The Search for Agency

In another group, Eugenie, Jemma, and ReeJane approached the question somewhat differently. “I don’t know why,” Eugenie began, “I always like to call myself a feminist.” “I don’t really like to do that,” Jemma responded. “I may say things that are like feminist, like ‘Oh, women are cool’ you know and we need to have more rights and stuff, but when I think about it like that, I think more women and men, you know? When I don’t think of feminist I think of it more as a mix.” All three agreed that the term could be used against them, and they had seen that happen. Eugenie, however, persisted in her defense of feminism. “I don’t consider myself a feminist like I go out in the streets and march with big neon signs saying women are downtrodden...” “I think that’s great,” ReeJane said. “It works.” Eugenie continued, explaining that she was somebody who would “stand up for myself as a woman. . .but I don’t want to bring anyone
else down.” About fifteen minutes later in the interview Eugenie excitedly intervened: “I’ve come up with the type of feminist I want to be. I want to be a feminist by example, that’s what I want to do. I want to be a person who is influential and does good things and is exactly the type of person I want to be and I can do anything I set my mind to, and I want to be recognized as a person who can do anything that she sets her mind to and as a bonus I am a woman who can do that.” In each of the remaining groups students uniformly agreed that the term “feminist” was a problematic and often uncomfortable label. “It can be an insult,” Brook explained. “It means you hate men,” at least one student in all but one group said.

When we asked where they got their ideas about feminists and feminism, the students’ answers were consistent: Forrest Gump and That 70s Show. Three students explained that they acquired some information from their families, but, outside of television and movies, the rest heard the term most often as it was used among their peers—as an accusation and a means to enforce traditional gender roles.

Conclusions

Safe Classrooms; Hostile Hallways

These students’ concerns about gender and sexuality should not be surprising. Each day they balance a classroom culture that explicitly encourages them to think deeply about social issues, to be open-minded, globally minded, and humane, and a peer social system that encourages almost entirely opposite attributes. In the midst of this, they are exploring their own sexuality. Some girls dress to show off newly developing bodies and face mortification when attention is called to the attributes they have put on display. Others actively resist displaying their bodies. Still others struggle with concerns about “coming out” in an essentially hostile atmosphere. Boys struggle to figure out what it means to be “masculine” in an arts environment. They vacillate among macho posturing, downright goofiness, and a surprising degree of sensitivity. As one of them explained, “As soon as I walked in the door some people figured I was gay, just ‘cause I was a guy in an arts school.” Girls, too, worry about being labeled before they have even figured out their sexual orientation for themselves. They tell us that SOTA is a safer place to figure all this out than other schools they have attended. Even so, it is not easy. Yet we find much of their struggle encouraging. They do have a nascent set of standards for judging gender inequities. They are also learning ways to talk about these standards in the context of social studies. They may not always employ these standards in their social relationships out of the classroom, but the consistency with which they look for differing perspectives, argue for open-mindedness, and
express interest in engaging in dialogue with people from vastly different backgrounds at least provides some grounds for analyzing their own and others' behaviors.

**Teaching Matters**

The second encouraging finding is that teaching really does matter. It is clear, for instance, that the "male-stream" curriculum influences students' notions of historical significance. Not surprisingly, they perceive it as "normal." They are so used to males taking the significant roles in history that they find it difficult to think that a different orientation is really history. They are, however, interested in different perspectives and willing to consider them, given the chance. Indeed, the majority of students expressed considerable enthusiasm for this kind of study. In sum, students provided overwhelming evidence that they understood that "women" did not exist as a single category but as a multiplicity of perspectives. This recognition that women differed by class and within classes proved to be a slippery concept. It coexisted, for instance, with a tendency to over-generalize about the impact of social and political forces. Despite creating displays that differentiated among the experiences of many women, students sometimes argued that *all* women were "treated like slaves" or that *all* men treated women as inherently inferior. Interestingly, however, at other points in their study students cautioned against these statements. In developing questions about women's participation in reform movements, for instance, they asked if "there were places where reform wasn't even discussed," whether "women inside the reform movement all had the same opinions...wanted the same rights" or "were some women moderate or right wing within the reform." "How did women in the movement feel about those who were not?" "What percent of the population of women were involved in reform?" They asked about the "sacrifices made in order to achieve reform," the degree of ostracism suffered by reformers, and "at the end, did they lose or gain support?"

**Ordinary Lives; Extraordinary Challenges**

Third, the impact of studying ordinary lives as presented through primary sources was extraordinary. Over and over students explained that they valued this study for what it taught them about the lives of "everyday" people. They were fascinated by the differences among and between women from different classes, races, and situations. Their final displays were particularly rich in this regard. They developed displays introducing women in temperance, abolition, and dress reform movements. They compared the lives of women in different social and economic classes. They read about disagreements among women over all these issues. They engaged in extensive and
enthusiastic discussion of these differences, debated the consequences of acquiescence, reform, and revolution, and compared their own experiences to those of women and men in the past. At least in the context of social studies, they recognized and valued diversity. That they have not managed this feat in their social lives should not be surprising, given the larger contexts in which they move.

Creating Safe Places for Debate and Discussion

What, then, do these findings say to us as educators? We do not present this study as an example of a typical eighth grade experience in social studies. Rather, it is an example of what is possible given certain circumstances—a teacher who establishes an environment where debate and discussion are nurtured, where students can trust the adults in their environment to make classrooms safe and intellectually invigorating places, and where gender is not an "add-on" or "extra" but a fundamental point of analysis. Obviously these conditions do not obtain everywhere. They can, however, develop in more places than is currently the case.

Finally, it is worth considering how important it is to have a relatively safe space where adolescents can discuss and debate the roots of current social and cultural structures. It is clear to us that even a single classroom can serve as a counter-weight for students struggling with the harsh social world of adolescence (Finders, 1997; O'Reilly, 2001). In the context of social studies these children built a vocabulary for discussing human rights, for recognizing multiple perspectives, and for critiquing current practices in regard to gender and sexuality. Lacking this sort of experience, students also lack information about some of the possibilities for their own lives. Equally problematic, they lack information fundamental to a changed social order that does not rely on the domination of one gender over the other, or of limited ways of being "male" or "female." Perhaps if patterns of careful historical analysis persisted, these students would be better prepared to transfer what they have learned into the often homophobic social world they inhabit outside the classroom. In the meantime, they provide us with an example of the complex interface between historical study, current issues, and adolescents' challenging social world.

Notes

1 There are a number of "magnet" schools in this community—traditional, global, Montessori, and the like. Originally intended to provide an opportunity for voluntary integration of schools, the magnets have not fulfilled that purpose and are, as a result, a controversial option within the public system.

2 We recognize that this periodization is, itself, gendered. It is, however, the pattern adopted by multiple assessing agencies from the local educational authority, the state department of education, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. History Assessment Framework for the 1999 National Assessment of Educational Progress, National Assessment Governing Board, Washington, D.C.).
The school’s name and the names of all student participants in the study are pseudonymous.

References


Levstik, L. S. (1999a). The boys we know; the girls in this school. International Journal of Social Studies.


Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Begin interview as follows:

Introduction: These questions are a follow-up to the study you have just completed on antebellum U.S. history. To help me keep track of which projects you worked on, could you start by telling me a bit about the part of the exhibition you worked on. [Thank them and move on]

1 Do you think the part of history you were working on was important? Why?/Why not? [Probe: In what ways might it be important to study women’s activity in history?]

2 When do you think students should learn about it? [Probe: What makes that age/grade important? Or, what makes you think that children at this age/grade are better/less able to handle this kind of history?]

3 If a group of historians were doing this, what do you think might be different about their choices?

4 What are the most important things about women’s history that you’ve learned in school, and why do you think they’re important? What are the least important things you’ve learned about women’s history in school, and why don’t you think they’re as important?

5 What are the most important things about women’s history you’ve learned outside of school? Why do you think they are important?

6 Are you familiar with the term “feminist”? [Ask them to tell you what associations they have for this term]. Would you be comfortable being called a feminist? Why/why not?

7 Are there any other things you would like to say about this unit, or your participation in this study? Anything I should have asked you, but didn’t?

Close: Thank you so much for your time and help with this. You’ve been a pleasure to work with.

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Authors
LINDA LEVSTIK is Professor in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky, Lexington 40506, and JEANETTE GROTH is a teacher for Lutheran Mission, Accra, Ghana.
Investigating the Use of Narrative in Affective Learning on Issues of Social Justice

Nancye McCrary
University of Kentucky

Abstract
Bias and discrimination based on the differences of others is a serious contemporary problem. Biased beliefs often lead to harmful discriminatory action and inhibit emotional and cognitive development. Such beliefs also serve as perceptual screens that constrict imagination, limit experience, and diminish the possibilities of constructing useful meaning regarding difference (Greene, 1995). As barriers to new information, varied perspectives, and construction of meaning, these perceptual screens are particularly restrictive in educational settings. Certain instructional tools and processes, however, have been found to offer significant opportunity for learners to develop empathy, reflect on their own biases, and reconstruct stereotypical stories about the differences of others. This article reports findings from a recent study on the the potential of narrative stimulation to mediate the delivery of information on the effects of human discrimination. It revolves around the use of Jeff’s Story, an instructional multimedia program that addresses contemporary social problems through affective learning and development.

Introduction
Affecting bias and discrimination through instruction requires innovative approaches. The space that often exists between biased beliefs and embracing human differences is not effectively bridged by the delivery of didactic information alone (Browning, 1992; Cole, 1997; Colesante and Biggs, 1999; Cook, 1978; Craig, 1999; Fisher, 1995; Gallagher, 1992; Hatano and Inagaki, 1993; Howard, 1991; Levstik, 1995; McCrary and Mazur, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; Ryan, 1998; Vitz, 1990). It seems that no matter how well didactic information about human differences is organized and presented, biased beliefs remain pivotal in how we view certain others who differ from ourselves in their cultural traditions, economic positions, physical attributes,
religious practices, or sexual orientations. In fact, there may be no more difficult educational undertaking than that of moving learners from attitudes of homophobia, racism, sexism, etc., to embracing human differences. Likewise, given the extraordinarily devastating manifestations of fear and hatred of difference in recent years, there may be no more urgent need than examining our own biases, embracing differences, and learning to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

This article discusses findings from a recent investigation into how sixteen adults used and were affected by their use of Jeff's Story, a narrative simulation that was designed to change biased beliefs about homosexuality. This web-based multimedia program was theoretically informed by an array of perspectives on affective learning and development, including cognitive psychology relative to the use of narrative (e.g., Bruner, 1986, 1996; Cole, 1997; Fisher, 1995; Howard, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986) and situated cognition (e.g., Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Young, 1993). Culture studies, critical social theory (e.g., Ayers, et al., 1998; hooks, 1994; Matsuda, et al., 1993; Merry, 1990; Peshkin, 1991; Rhoades, 1994; Tierney, 1997; Yngvesson, 1993), moral education (e.g., Kegan, 1994; Kohlberg, 1971; Petrovic, 1999; Vitz, 1990), and queer theory (e.g., Capper, 1999; Rhoads, 1994; Tierney, 1997) assisted in framing a sociocultural focus for the investigation. Additionally, certain perspectives on sensory perception and the use of aesthetics (e.g., Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1994; Ent, 1998; Greene, 1995; Latta, 1998) supported the use of abstract imagery and original music to mediate affective learning relative to examination of biased beliefs about differences in sexual orientation.

Program Description

Jeff's Story is an interactive web-based multimedia exercise that takes from 20-45 minutes to complete. The parent and professional version used in this study involves learners in the role of Jeff's parents through questions and response choice options embedded throughout the program. Narrative simulation is used as a strategy to enhance empathy, fuel group discussion, offer opportunity for reconstruction of storied biases, and stimulate self-reflection. Empathy is addressed through the use and adaptation of an unfolding story combined with language that involves learners as actors in sometimes tragic events. Group discussion is fueled by questions arising from dilemmas in the story. For example, one section of Jeff's Story ("Giving-up") reads as follows: "Jeff came home from the hospital and quickly became increasingly depressed. The beatings sent him back to the same place he had fought so hard to get out of. He became suicidal again and
seemed to be giving up.” This story segment is followed by the question: “As Jeff’s parent or guardian, you are now faced with what to do to help your son. How will you proceed?” Learners are asked to answer this question by electronically selecting one of seven response choices or writing their own. The same question is asked again, this time verbally during the group discussion that immediately follows use of the program. Using these decision points from the narrative provides an array of questions about how users view a dilemma and the ways they might resolve it. Such questions assist the researcher in probing the rationales used to support individual perspectives. Additionally, as group discussion centers on particular decision points in Jeff’s Story, individuals hear the perspectives of others and begin a critical and reflective process of comparing those to their own.

As a multimedia program, Jeff’s Story purposefully includes aesthetic, interactive, and didactic elements. The aesthetic components, primarily music, color, and narrative form, serve to encircle the multimedia environment as a theatrical stage, setting the tone and inviting learners to become involved as characters in the story. Interactive components build on the invitation to join the cast by actually involving users in their own movement through the program. Didactic content is presented in a variety of ways and can be accessed either through global navigation links or by selecting a particular response choice. The selection of a response choice takes users to a discussion of that choice, which is followed by additional information. This additional information includes referenced statements by gay teens, parents, and professionals, as well as statistical information. The global links are organized as (a) resources, including lists of books, Internet sites, and organizations related to homosexuality and teen suicide, (b) history, which includes excerpts from historical accounts referenced to books and articles, and (c) headlines, which are linked to full-text news articles. Figure 1 is a sample of the textual content for one “story screen” and the linked “response discussion screen” for one of the response choices.
Figure 1: Sample story and response discussion screens from Jeff's Story in text-only.

The Beginning

Jeff told his parents he was gay when he was 14. He was afraid to tell them because he knew other kids who told their parents and they disowned them or reacted in other ways that were frightening.

Question A: If you were Jeff’s parent or guardian, what would you say to Jeff when he first told you about his sexual orientation?

1. Tell Jeff homosexuality is not normal and to get over it.
2. Tell Jeff how disgusting this is to you.
3. Tell Jeff how proud you are he trusted you enough to tell you and that you love him and will support whatever lifestyle he chooses.
4. Tell Jeff homosexuality is wrong in the eyes of God and he must meet with the minister at your church, synagogue, or other place of religious worship to get help with this moral problem.
5. Tell Jeff as long as he never actually has sexual relations with other males it will be OK.
6. Tell Jeff young men are sometimes afraid that they don’t know what to do when it comes to sex and having a sexual experience with an experienced female may be helpful.
7. Tell Jeff you are very surprised and confused about this news and you don’t know what to say.
8. Ask Jeff what makes him think he is gay.
9: Other:

This could be a hurtful response. Jeff is already feeling isolated. Try thinking about how you define “normal”. What stories have you heard that help shape your definition of “normal”?

Perspectives

“...heterosexism means a belief in the inherent superiority of demonstrating love only toward members of the opposite sex, and therefore a belief in the right to dominate others and set societal standards and norms.”

Theoretical Foundations

Narrative

Psychologists have come to realize that empathy, or the ability to understand or feel another’s situation and emotions, as well as interpersonal interaction, personal character, and personality are significant factors in human development and can be affected by narrative. Bruner (1986), Sarbin (1986), and Spence (1982) insist that narrative thought is a major form of cognition that is qualitatively different from abstract propositional or scientific thinking. In fact, in a recent comparison study on teaching tolerance through propositional reasoning or through narrative thinking, Colesante and Briggs (1999) found that narrative prompted more affective responses, resulting in greater attitudes of tolerance toward difference. While propositional reasoning is helpful in teaching students to determine choice of action
based on principles, fairness, or rationality, the use of narrative goes further in promoting empathic understanding.

Narrative is a linguistic way of representing real or imagined past experiences (Traugott and Pratt, 1980). Many psychologists associate the development of identity with “life-story” construction; psychopathology as instances of life stories gone awry; and psychotherapy as exercises in story repair (Howard, 1991, p. 187). In this sense narration is a conceptual frame that is intrinsic to human nature (Fisher, 1995). Narrative thinking involves knowing through storied constructions that frame who we are in relation to our social contexts. Attitudes, beliefs, goals, knowledge, and plans are influenced by the stories we hold in mind and express in words and actions (Cole, 1993). Narrative includes not only written accounts, but also ways of telling and remembering events that are meaningful and lead to outcomes or conclusions. To the extent that we view our narratives as malleable, we are able to change how they end or the outcomes that follow causally from storied events. Likewise, when we view our stories as rigid representations of fact, our narratives become fixed. Stories about difference can become fixed as facts and generalized to entire groups of people.

The power of narrative lies in the way information is processed (Anderson, 1990). Information is committed to memory through a process of elaboration that draws on preexisting associated meanings held in mind in storied form. “Storied beliefs” are externalized as attitudes and evidenced in the ways we express ourselves in public conversation. For example, after the well-publicized death of Matthew Shepard in 1998, public discourse included discussions about whether he was complicit in his own murder by having made sexual advances to heterosexual men (Brooke, 1998). After he was tortured, beaten, and left tied to a fence to die, public debate ensued as to whether homosexuality is a choice or a predisposed genetic condition. Public reaction to this tragedy included demonstrations condoning such punishment for homosexuals, humorous effigies of Shepard, and the posting on an Internet site of a photograph of Shepard surrounded by animated flames and showing the number of days he continued to burn in hell for his sin of same-sex orientation (Westboro Baptist Church, 1999). All of these manifestations of homophobic attitudes served, for some Americans, to obscure the fact that a young man’s life was taken by other young men because of his sexual orientation. These responses, as well as many other similar reactions to violence toward gays, indicate that open expressions of homophobic attitudes abound, offering access to the examination of storied beliefs about the differences of others (Rhoades, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Tierney, 1993a, 1993b, 1997).
Dissonance and Schema Theory

Dissonance between individual stories about groups of others has the potential to contradict what we hold in mind as fact. Such contradiction creates an internal imbalance that causes learners to seek new understandings as a way to restore cognitive equilibrium (Festinger, 1957; Piaget, 1970). These newly acquired understandings can be seen as objects of expanded potential in individual mental processing (Zinchenko, 1997). For instance, if someone believes all homosexuals to be sinful anomalies in society, the story of Jeff, portraying a relatively typical young teen, challenges this construction. Additionally, Jeff's suicide is especially disturbing because, despite all efforts to support and encourage him, Jeff's parents were unable to prevent his death. Learners, in the simulated role of Jeff's parents, were left to struggle with what they themselves might have done differently. Such a disturbing ending stimulated reflection beyond the actual instructional environment. In this way, the instructional experience set the stage for new mental activity (Zinchenko, 1997). In other words, the instructional experience personalized the problem through role simulation and dialogic interaction with others who also used the program.

As human beings make meaning of the events in their lives by associating those events with existing understandings, they build schemas that become dominant mechanisms for restructuring memory. As a result, recall is often distorted to fit existing schema (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996). In sum, the activity of making meaning is constrained by previously associated meanings that are held in mind (Polkinghorne, 1988). For example, adult siblings sometimes tell very different stories of mutually experienced childhood events. They remember these events according to individual schemas, and the telling of these stories is itself an act of reconstruction in the sense that making meaning of events remembered depends on finding congruence between memories and individual schema (Howard, 1991). Until these stories are told and heard, however, we may remain unaware of how our perspectives differ. Expressing what is remembered through conversation is a powerful vehicle for affecting consciousness of the dissonance that exists between the varied ways we remember identical events. When the stories we tell about our beliefs regarding the differences of others are similar, those beliefs are often reinforced as truth. When they differ, however, we are more likely to invest energy in making sense of the contradictions. Instruction to change biased beliefs about difference, therefore, must include discussion and interaction to bring individual beliefs to consciousness and evaluate them relative to the beliefs of others.

Hatano and Inagaki (1993) emphasize dialogical interaction in reporting the results of a series of experiments with young children.
involving motivational conditions that enhance construction of conceptual knowledge. These researchers found that the act of stating ideas to others “helps one recognize the inadequacy of his or her [own] comprehension” (p. 127). Such recognition results from making explicit what has been known only implicitly, in an effort to structure thought for the purpose of teaching or convincing others, as well as through the mental activity of incorporating opposing ideas. Furthermore, Hatano and Inagaki (1993) indicate that procedural knowledge alone does not motivate one to commit the mental energy required to understand or form concepts. They conclude that even though human beings are intrinsically motivated to understand, they will not always try to do so when procedural knowledge alone is sufficient to perform the task at hand.

Aesthetic Mediation

Aesthetic mediation in instruction offers opportunities for learners to employ sensory as well as cognitive capacities in developing new conceptual models. Some believe that aesthetic mediation in activities of learning facilitates assimilation, internalization, and integration of thoughts (Ent, 1998; Latta, 1998). Eisner (1998) and others (e.g., Greene, 1995) insist that the forms in which events and experiences are represented have a profound influence on what is conveyed, how it is interpreted, and what is actually understood. The integration of aesthetic elements extends the possibilities for feeling, perceiving, and thinking about the effects of bias and discrimination (McCrary & Mazur, 1999). Using a “real story,” along with original imagery and music, serve to engage the senses, enhance interactivity, and promote personal connection. Narrative, as an aesthetic mediator, bridges the unfamiliar in ways that personalize information, involving learners in self-reflection and critical thinking. It provides space for the unexpected and increases the possibility for new understandings, thus enhancing the ability to take wisdom from difference and change.

Transformational Learning

Kegan (1994) contrasts procedural learning that is context specific with what he terms transformational education, which supports a more gradual development and the evolution of consciousness. Transformational learning is reflective and expansive, according to Kegan, reaching beyond compliance in an effort to affect consciousness. It leads out and offers potential for generating new ideas for new conditions and reaches beyond simple tolerance of difference, suggesting instead that the differences we perceive in others are largely “differences we create by viewing the other according to the rightness of our own preferences” (Kegan, 1994, p. 232). From this perspective, the problem in America is not a lack of diversity. Rather,
it is the silence required of those excluded from power by those who exercise power. Essentially, the human propensity for believing in the rightness of our own ways interferes with our ability to learn from other ways. Whether such “rightness” is assigned to Christianity, heterosexuality, maleness, or whiteness, it seeks homogeneity in a heterogeneous society. Preference for homogeneity serves to exclude those who are rapidly becoming the majority and limits individuals’ ability to tolerate difference and to contend with the unexpected (Greene, 1995). The problem of biased attitudes expressed both in contemptuous language and hate crimes may, however, be mediated through instructional tools designed to transform consciousness and raise awareness of the contribution human diversity makes to our lives.

Context for the Study

Sixteen adults were recruited through a “network” or “snowball” technique (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) that included university faculty, staff, and graduate students, as well as members of the local community who were business owners, ministers, church leaders, hairdressers, postal workers, and social service professionals. Thirty-two individuals who volunteered to participate were selected on the basis of their status as parents, and/or the likelihood that they would work with adolescents and families in their job settings. Half (16) of those actually showed up for the first session and participated in the entire study, which included (a) working through Jeff’s Story, (b) participating in a small group discussion, and (c) participating in an individual interview four weeks later, as well as completing and returning a follow-up survey eight to twelve weeks after the initial session. Participants met in groups ranging from two to four individuals in a university computer lab, worked through the simulation individually, and participated in a group discussion immediately following their completion of Jeff’s Story. Completing the instructional program took an average of thirty minutes, and the group discussions lasted up to ninety minutes. Individual interview times varied considerably according to the stories participants told about their own experiences, where their beliefs about homosexuals originated, and how they identified with the characters in Jeff’s Story. All individual interviews took at least an hour; the longest session lasted an entire afternoon.

Interview Protocols

Group Discussions

Based on the protocol as shown in Figure 2, the group discussions, immediately following use of the program, were
emotionally charged. These discussions often culminated in participants expressing a variety of personal connections to Jeff’s Story through telling stories of their own. They expressed their emotional affect using terms and phrases such as angry, emotionally involved, injustices, outright hate, shameful, sheer hatred, struggled, very personal, and very sad.

Figure 2. Interview question protocol for group discussions immediately following the use of the instructional program.
1. Whom did you identify with most in Jeff’s Story? And why?
2. What could have been done differently that might have been helpful to Jeff?
3. How could Jeff’s suicide have been prevented?
4. What was unrealistic about Jeff’s Story?
5. What was most disturbing about Jeff’s Story?
6. Describe a story that helps shape your beliefs about homosexuals.

Individual Interviews
Based on the protocol as shown in Figure 3, the individual interviews took place wherever participants indicated that it would be most comfortable for them. Some were in my office, and others were in the work environments of the participants. I met with them in apartment complex offices, businesses, and community centers.

Figure 3. Individual interview question protocol.
1. Describe how you are feeling about your experience with the Jeff’s Story simulation.
2. Have you thought of any ways things in Jeff’s Story could have been handled differently that might have prevented his suicide?
3. Please describe your understanding of the meaning of the terms homosexuality and homophobia.
4. How did the group discussion that followed the simulation experience affect your thinking and beliefs?
5. Describe ways you feel differently or have new perspectives, as a result of your experience working through Jeff’s Story.
6. What remains most disturbing to you about Jeff’s Story?
7. How would you retell the story about homosexuals that you shared with the group?

Description of Participants
The participants in this study were diverse in terms of age, computer skill, and family or partnership situation. Since the instructional intervention took place in a single location, all participants were either life-long residents of the particular geographical region or those who had chosen to live in the area for various reasons. I mention this because socially constructed beliefs about difference may vary considerably by geographical region and exposure to varying amounts of cultural diversity. In terms of culture, race, and socioeconomic status,
most of the participants in this study were similar to each other. Figure 4 illustrates a summary of the demographics for the sixteen participants in the study.

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<td>25%</td>
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**Findings**

**Travelers**

Thinking of Jeff’s Story as a planned instructional trip, mapped out by extensive formative review and evaluation, and including theoretically informed learning destinations, assists in framing the findings of this study. I use the concept of movement from one place to another to include such things as thoughts moving through minds, beliefs moving through social contexts, and learners moving through instructional programs. The sixteen participants in this study were equally split in the ways they traveled through the program.

Electronic tracking records returned detailed information on the ways participants traveled through Jeff’s Story. These records provided the sequence of program screens accessed and the amount of time spent on each screen, in seconds. Participants were free to travel anywhere, return to previously visited screens, and take as much time as they wished to complete the exercise. The ways they traveled, including preconceived notions about the study, distances covered, patterns of time spent on each screen, and scenery perceived along the way all reflect the places they arrived in individual consciousness.
For instance, those who came to the instructional setting with the idea of it being a “test” of their own levels of bias proceeded as though their goal was to choose the “right” responses to the questions that were embedded throughout the simulation. As a result, their paths were more linear than those who arrived with notions about contributing to understanding and eliminating discrimination. In general, these participants spent less time working through the simulation and chose fewer electronic actions than the other participants. Some of them accounted for this method of travel by saying they sometimes struggled to find the “right” response, or they asked in the individual interview if they “passed the test.” Those moving through the program in linear ways were somewhat similar in the stories they told, the time they spent on various story screens, and the ways they described personal involvement in the story. These “direct flyers” typically expressed more discomfort with the topic of homosexuality than participants who took non-linear paths, or those I characterize as “curious voyagers.”

Stories We Tell Ourselves

Most participants responded to their experiences with Jeff’s Story by alluding to or actually telling stories of their own when interviewed. The stories they told can be categorized as (a) “tales untold” or those mentioned, but not actually explicated, (b) “stories about their own differences,” (c) exemption stories or those designed to exempt themselves from having biased beliefs about homosexuality, and (d) Bible stories or those referencing Biblical passages or Christian doctrine to explain their perspectives on homosexuality. Whether “direct flyers” or “curious voyagers,” all participants told some form of “exemption stories.” For example, those who appeared to struggle with the topic of homosexuality often said things such as, “I’m not homophobic myself. I believe God created us all equal. I wouldn’t even mind if a gay person taught my son [a kindergarten student] just as long as there was no touching.” Other participants who seemed to explore the program freely (in non-linear ways) and appeared not to struggle with the topic of homosexuality offered disclaimers such as, “I have no problem with gays but when my friends tell gay jokes or make fun of a gay person, I will usually laugh or sometimes I just don’t say anything, try to ignore them.”

In contrast to the exemption stories, another quite common response was to tell one’s own personal story, often have nothing to do with homosexuality or teen suicide, as a way to demonstrate empathy or understanding for the characters in Jeff’s Story. Although these stories about their own differences varied a great deal, most focused on the participants themselves as targets of ridicule or victims of discrimination and exclusion. Many said Jeff’s Story moved them
to remember difficult things in their own lives that they had not thought of in many years.

**Dialogic Interaction**

Given that negotiating our views is an important part of how we construct identity in social and cultural contexts, the inclusion of group discussion is quite helpful to affective learning. Participants here spoke about their group experiences as enlightening, not only with regard to what they or others contributed, but also in the sense that they became more aware of some of their own internal conflicts. Many indicated they were hesitant to share their feelings and perspectives until they heard those of others. Additionally, the group discussion provided an opportunity for participants to speak about discrimination, sexual orientation, and suicide, which are topics often silenced in public arenas. Without opportunity for public discourse on these difficult topics, we are often left only to hear the sounds of stereotypical jokes or insulting remarks. We are left either to join in the display of stereotypes or to remain silent, not knowing how to speak about such things. Group discussion in this case provided the opportunity for participants to practice “putting into words” that which caused them to feel conflicted.

Designing instruction to include space, time, and stimulus to express and hear personal views is particularly significant for education in the United States, in that participation is fundamental to our system of democracy, which is based on ideals of freedom and equality. As the population of the United States becomes more diverse, the extent to which full participation can be realized depends on hearing and understanding multiple perspectives. Instruction that includes interaction and discussion among learners provides an opportunity to practice our lines and refine our roles as members of a participatory democracy.

Naming our internal constructions of those who are different from us serves several important functions in an instructional environment. It allows us to form words that represent the ways we think, as well as hear ourselves and evaluate how we express internal representations of others. Naming our beliefs and telling our stories also offers the opportunity to witness how they affect others. Whether others agree or disagree with our verbal representations, we are afforded the opportunity to make our thoughts public and negotiate between internal, external, and social lives. Such negotiation is practice for contending with difference and change.

**Personal Connections**

The personal connections that participants made during the instructional experience are reflected in the following excerpts from
transcripts of the group discussions:

I found that I got a little attached [and] put myself in the role as a parent. I found myself being a little protective of him.

I have a friend who’s like totally going through this right now and I see how she has to deal with all of her expectations for her children.

I just felt really sad about the whole scenario. I have two children and I don’t think a lot in terms of who they should be as adults...I guess I want them to be happy and responsible and have a nice life. I don’t think of it too much in terms of grandchildren or that kind of thing...but what’s always hardest for me is the idea of losing one of them...whether it was to suicide or the idea that they beat that young man was just very painful to me...so putting myself in the parent role, that someone would hurt my child or that my child would feel so desperate that he would become suicidal or commit suicide, it’s just really a painful idea to me.

I think for me, checking in with my own beliefs and...having gay friends that have committed suicide...What it really shows me...is the threat of violence that people live under. I always thought it was just a sexual preference, you know it just never crossed my mind that somebody would be killed or beaten. Discriminated against, yeah, you know ‘we don’t [want] you to have this apartment’...I have a friend whose daughter is gay and her fear is that she’s going to be hurt because of her sexual orientation...it’s kind of scary...some of my gay friends have some real fears about where they go and what they do and I’m noticing why now.

*Emotional Engagement*

As a means of comparison, part of the follow-up questionnaire mirrored the program evaluation that appeared at the end of the multimedia program. One of the most striking comparisons between immediate selections and those four to six weeks later had to do with terms selected in response to a question asking how participants felt about the experience of working through Jeff’s Story. As shown in Figure
most participants felt quite unsettled immediately following the
direct experience and much less so after time for reflection. The number of
participants who indicated that they felt more informed about the
topics in the program increased after reflection. Combined with data
from group discussions and individual interviews, I interpret this to
indicate that the instructional program engaged the majority of
participants on an emotional level and ultimately led to a sense of
being better informed about some of the issues faced by gay youth,
primarily homophobia, depression, and suicide. Such emotional
engagement was a result of using simulation methods to involve users
as characters in an unfolding tale with a high degree of fidelity to a
“real world” story, as well as including aesthetic elements as a
backdrop for the narrative. Users largely interpreted the abstract
images and original music in Jeff’s Story as illustrating the mood or
tone of the story. They often said these aesthetic elements caused them
to feel more as the characters in the story felt.

Aesthetic Experience

The use of aesthetic elements in Jeff’s Story extended the
learning experience for participants in this study by stimulating
emotion and imagination. According to Bruner (1996), “…our most
cherished beliefs” are framed “in story form.” He emphasizes that “it
is not just the ‘content’ of these stories that grip us, but their narrative
artifice” (p.41). The aesthetic power of narrative is evidenced in the
way it stimulates feelings, extends perception, and enhances
imagination. The aesthetic tools employed in the design of Jeff’s Story
deepened involvement and inspired connections to personal stories.
Once participants became conscious of these connections with their
own stories, new potential for agency existed. Once told and heard,
their stories, especially those that drive assumptions about what is
normal, were available for closer examination and alteration. This
potential, according to Zinchenko (1997), is a new mental object or
“neomorph” that is likely to affect subsequent mental activity. It is
rooted in Vygotsky’s notion of the “zone of proximal development”
in children. When applied to adult learners, viewing human potential
as flexible space that expands as learning occurs is helpful in offering
a way to conceptualize instructional goals and evaluate learning
outcomes without resorting to behavioral or normative measures.
Instructional goals can then be defined as learning activities that
expand the potential for change. Whether and to what extent such
learning activities occurred was evaluated through interview, focused
discussion, observation, and written responses.

Focusing on imagination, Greene (1995) speaks of combating
“life’s anesthetics” (p. 30) through encounters with art that open
dimensions unattainable through other experiences. In a variety of
ways, participants in this study indicated that the aesthetic elements of *Jeff’s Story* stimulated interest, inspired motivation, and sparked imagination. Sparking imagination is important for instruction to affect biased beliefs about difference in light of what some theorists suggest is the capacity of imagination to allow us “to experience empathy with different points of view” (Green, 1995, p. 31).

Another important finding regarding the use of aesthetic tools in affective instruction is how such tools trigger reflection. Participants suggested that the use of imagery, music, and narrative stimulated imagination, deepened involvement, and decreased the distance between the self and the instructional story. These aesthetic elements extended the involvement of participants as characters in the unfolding story, which was initiated by the use of simulation. Shifting emphasis from learning outcomes as measurable levels of performance or the extent of recall to broader concepts of internal and external activities of understanding highlights the value of employing sensory as well as cognitive processes.

**Generative Learning**

The ways *Jeff’s Story* mediated generative learning activities that resulted in new potential for reconstructing storied beliefs about others offer insight into the tendency to distance ourselves from attitudes that we view as undesirable. For example, participants in this study distanced themselves from biased beliefs by prefacing their discussions with statements about personally having no problem with people who are same-sex oriented. They recognized and described the homophobic attitudes of others and denied being biased themselves. The ways these individuals articulated their separation from the homophobia of others indicated that they viewed homophobia as undesirable. Yet, my analysis of the narratives they used to distance themselves from the homophobia of others provided evidence that many of them did, in fact, hold stereotypical views of homosexuals. The patterns of their discussions of homophobia began with assertions of not being biased, continued with statements that provided evidence for their assertions, and in many cases concluded with exceptions to their non-biased stances. The juxtaposition of believing biased attitudes to be undesirable and oneself to be unbiased, while subsequently articulating exceptions based on stereotypical representations, is an important dynamic in otherwise balanced compositions of beliefs, identity, and morality. Awareness of such internal inconsistencies has the potential to initiate self-reflection that is necessary for reconstructing beliefs. Expression mediates reflection, and reflection seeks consistency between how we view the world, how we speak about those views, and how we interact with others relative to our beliefs. If we believe in the “rightness” of our own ways and
are unable to see the differences of others as equally “right,” it is important that we materialize those beliefs, assume responsibility for them, and negotiate how we act relative to such constructions. Assuming responsibility and negotiating action may not be possible as long as our views remain internal and we cannot see how they take shape in material expression (Eisner, 1990; Green, 1995; Wertsch, 1998). The dissonance that results from a desire to be unbiased and a consciousness of our own internal stereotypical representations compels us to accept and justify our beliefs or to change them. Such consciousness, while often initially disturbing, is transforming in the sense that it demonstrates the possibility that we remain unconscious of an array of other biases. We are changed by this activity in more generative ways than we are by the process of incorporating new information about that which is external to ourselves. Changing stereotypical attitudes about others requires instructional tools and strategies that generate awareness of our proximity to positions we view as distant and undesirable. In this case, learning to exhibit socially acceptable behaviors can reinforce for us that our perspectives are correct, offering little motivation for expanding the way we view ourselves in relation to others.

**Summary**

The findings of this study support the idea that consciousness is a prerequisite to agency. The power to effect change requires awareness of the need for change, which seems to depend on the extent to which we are involved in experiences that promote discourse and reflection. Witnessing the dilemmas of others from a distant perspective (outside ourselves) can inspire sympathy, but the ability to feel *with* or *as* the other (empathy) is prompted by connections made internally. The extent to which we are able to internalize another’s situation depends on the extent to which we can relate to or imagine their condition. Most participants in this study recalled and readily articulated personal experiences that bridged the gap between themselves and the characters in *Jeff's Story*. In fact, some of them seemed to expend considerable energy building these bridges. This not only supports the need to incorporate elements that are familiar to learners, it also suggests that some amount of intrinsic motivation may exist for human beings to search for personal connections to experiences that are initially unfamiliar. Learners are more willing than not to expend the energy to identify with another’s situation when they can find even slight connections to themselves. The participants here, without being directed to do so, reached into memories of childhood, experiences with friends, and some of their own cultural conventions to find personal meaning in *Jeff's Story*. The extent to which
they were able to identify personally with Jeff's Story mirrored the extent to which they said they felt empathy for Jeff or his parents. Such empathy resulted in claims of having strong feelings of anger or sadness, which in turn triggered statements indicating new feelings of agency or the ability to “speak up” in situations in which they previously had remained silent. Thus, instructional elements that mediate personal connection can lead to consciousness that enhances a new sense of agency.

Notes

1 Homophobia has been defined as “irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex (Pharr, 1988, p. 1).” Comparisons have been drawn between homophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism in terms of discrimination that includes verbal and physical violence (Pharr, 1988).

2 http://members.tripod.com/~claytoly/Bill's_Story

References


**Author**

NANCYE MCCRARY is Assistant Professor in the College of Fine Arts at the University of Kentucky, Lexington 40506.

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Rethinking Homophobia: Interrogating Heteronormativity in an Urban School

Kevin C. Franck
Teachers College, Columbia University

Abstract
This article challenges the reader to think of homophobia as a negative social force affecting all members of an urban school community. The author argues that homophobia can only be undone if it is attacked at the intersection of race, class, and gender. A description of an anti-homophobia plan for an urban high school follows a brief discussion of interlaying systems of oppression and privilege associated with being a member of a dominant group.

I over heard Sade call her best friend a “homo” in a class I was covering for another teacher. Fighting my instincts to shout her down and call her out in front of the whole class, I calmly walked over to her and asked her why she felt comfortable shouting out a hate word. Since her school has a firm commitment to teaching for social justice, she would not be permitted to shout out kike, spic, nigger, or any other number of hate words. So, I wondered, how did she judge that she would not be reprimanded for the outright use of a homophobic slur? Sade’s response was that she was talking to her best friend, whom she considered family, and that she was just joking around. I told her that I did not think it was appropriate for her to use a homophobic word as either a hate-word or in jest. Facetiously, I asked her if she would mind if I jokingly called my students, whom I consider family, niggers and spics. She laughed.

“Don’t even pull that Mister,” she said. “There aren’t any homos here.”

“How can you be so sure?” I asked, smiling.

“Because this is the Hood, and you better watch out talking that shit around here too.”
Sade’s candor struck me. At the time of this interaction, I was planning the series of anti-homophobia workshops detailed later in the article. Frankly, I was terrified that my plan of lessening homophobia in this school would meet too much resistance to be fruitful. It was my second month at The School for Justice (TSJ) in East Harlem, a thousand miles from where I grew up, and I believed Sade when she told me I would need to watch my back if I starting talking about gay and lesbian issues in the “hood.” In my execution of the series of workshops, entitled “Homo 101,” I found, however, that students at this school had a unique ability to understand concepts of oppression and inequality, due largely to the emphasis placed on engaging social stratification at TSJ. Many students who participated in the workshops, contrary to Sade’s warning, turned out to be aggressive in their critique of enforced heteronormativity.

The School

The School for Justice is a public portfolio-based alternative school in East Harlem. Sometimes known simply as El Barrio, East Harlem is a culturally intense section of upper Manhattan comprising mostly Puerto Rican, Dominican, Caribbean, and African-American neighborhoods. People in the surrounding neighborhoods generally share a low socio-economic status. The recent revitalization effort in Harlem, hallmarked by President Clinton’s decision to set up an office there, has stopped well short of the area surrounding TSJ. Unkempt streets, early-morning drunks, and high-rise housing projects surround the school building itself.

Even though TSJ, as an alternative school, can recruit students from all over the city, most students come from East Harlem and the nearby South Bronx, an area with similar racial and economic demographics. All of the nearly three hundred fifty students are of color, while over half of the teachers are white. Normally the physical and demographic description of an urban school such as the one above is followed by a heart-breaking description of a desperate lack of resources, student engagement, and qualified, caring teachers. TSJ does not have nearly enough space or supplies for its students, but what students and teachers lack in resources they more than make up for in hard work. I know very few students at TSJ who lack direction. Students and teachers are committed to the idea that education is an act of social change. The reason most students at TSJ have a sense of ownership of their education is that they do not see learning as a passive, non-controversial process. Nonetheless, the topic of homophobia, apart from a few additive mentions during ‘diversity’ discussions, loomed large as an avoided area of controversy at TSJ.
A Call to Action

Earlier in the year, our school's crisis counselor had spoken in our daily meeting about the need to protect gay and lesbian students in our school from harassment. In fact, she said she was currently working with two students who were being targeted and abused because they appeared gay. I had done anti-homophobia work in high schools before, and I offered to lead some workshops in hopes of lessening anti-gay harassment at the school. Officially, the counselor and I began planning a series of workshops and other activities that would make our school "safer" for and more "tolerant" of gay and lesbian students.

School safety and "tolerance" were not the focus of my activities. Discussions of safety for gay and lesbian youth inevitably focus on hallways and locker rooms, where teachers cannot monitor the actions of students (Human Rights Watch, 2001). I was more interested in how homophobia manifests itself in the classroom, where too often teachers refuse to see the connection between curricular content and social behavior. Moreover, I was not interested in simply raising the level of "tolerance" for gay and lesbian students in the school. To simply tolerate a group of people whose struggles for recognition and visibility have been long and bloody is perhaps the opposite of encouraging diversity. To encourage students to tolerate gays and lesbians, the same way one is encouraged to tolerate crazy people on the subway, is to teach young people that different people can and should live together in ignorant bliss. Homophobia and heterosexism can only be undone when students and teachers are asked to examine heteronormativity at the intersection of race, class, and gender. To me, the offer to develop a series of workshops on homophobia was an opportunity to discuss the effects of interlaying systems of oppression on every member of our school community.

My interaction with Sade made me realize that homophobia and heterosexism had a detrimental effect on all students in that school. Sade could not even fathom that there were gay people in her neighborhood because of the racist misconception that being gay and dealing with homophobia are "white issues" (Carlson, 1997; Monteiro & Fuqua, 1994). In fact, it is the very separation of these two forms of oppression, racism and homophobia, that strengthens the power structure and encourages the practice of piggybacking oppression. The dominant sources of inequality that teachers who teach for justice seek to challenge - racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia - can only be dealt with at their intersection. Fortunately, at my school the students are already accustomed to engaging -isms. As urban youth, my students have deep emotional understandings of the effects of oppression and injustice, and as students in an academically rigorous
alternative high school, they have the academic skills to interrogate social practices and customs that reinforce and reproduce systems of inequality.

This essay is an attempt to outline a practical program for combating homophobia and heterosexism by attacking the intersection of overlapping oppressions. It is my hope that educators from primary schools through institutions of higher learning can use this piece as a springboard from which they can develop anti-homophobia programs that meet the needs of their school. Since addressing sexual identity and homophobia issues in independent schools has been shown to be effective, I also attempt to make the point that engaging students in challenging heteronormativity is possible and fruitful in urban public schools (Riddle, 1996).

**Homophobia**  
*see Homosexual*

I see the label *homophobia* as a misnomer. Psychologists categorize *phobias* as irrational fears of subjects ranging from enclosed spaces to falling satellites. As a claustrophobic, I can tell you that that is a truly irrational fear. I have no logical reason to assume that I may meet my death in an elevator or be buried alive, but that fear is certainly real. Homophobia is not irrational; it is the result of social forces of domination that have created a categorical minority deemed as weak and deviant in order to maintain the dominance of the power elite in our society (Elia, 1993). Some societies, including some indigenous peoples, actually celebrate homosexuals and transgender persons (referred to as two-spirited persons) (Williams, 1992).

According to one definition, a person’s own insecurities can make him or her homophobic. In this view, homophobia can grow from one’s repression of his or her own homosexual desires and the desire to maintain a public image of straightness. Yet homophobia is not something that exists and develops solely on an individual level; it is a social construction. The effects of socially-constructed homophobia on gay and lesbian young people are well documented; suffice it to say that homophobia has been shown to have negative consequences for them in terms of psycho-social development, physical safety in schools, academic development, access to health care and other areas (Elia, 1993). Educators certainly must be reminded that homophobia on a societal level can even kill young people. Gay youth are three times more likely to commit suicide than straight teens (Gibson, 1989). When they do try to fight against their own oppression, they may be further victimized by the failure of federal, state, and local governments to protect them (Human Rights Watch, 2002). To say that homophobia is a social disease that infects the hearts and
minds of everyone in our society is not an attempt to ignore the personal suffering of gay and lesbian youth from the effects of homophobia, rather it is an attempt to treat the disease instead of the symptoms. Also, focusing simply on the effects of homophobia on gay and lesbian youth fails to acknowledge three truths of the struggle against homophobia.

First, gays and lesbians are not victims of homophobia; they are survivors of it. Any gay youth who has made it through high school has something to brag about. The startling statistics about the violence they endure may help to convince “straight” youth of what they already know - that being a gay teen requires a strong sense of self, a thick skin, and a clear conviction. Once released from the throes of adolescence, gays and lesbians likely have already experienced enough hatred to embitter them, yet it is interesting that many of them as adults choose service-oriented careers such as social work and teaching - perhaps because of the hate they faced growing up.

Second, focusing solely on the lives of gays and lesbians in discussing homophobia links the roots of a system of oppression inextricably and unfairly to the group it targets. It becomes the job of gays to eradicate homophobia while simultaneously continuing to suffer the effects of homophobia. In researching this article, I was disturbed to find that in the indices of many volumes on homophobia and teaching for social justice, Homophobia is often listed under Homosexuality. This is emblematic of how we view homophobia: as a problem of the homosexual. Homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality are dangerous and detrimental to ‘straight’ society as well. The silence around homosexuality inhibits students’ ability to learn from and question people who are not like them. A truly diverse classroom is one in which all students and teachers can problematize their own identity and interrogate that of another. However, within the silence that looms over any discussion of sexuality in the classroom, even straight students are not free to question their own sexuality because to do so could have serious negative consequences. A straight student who interrogates the concept of hetero-dominance may unintentionally open herself up to homophobic attack. Discussions of homophobia and problematizing heterosexuality are assumed to be the work of gays only. Therefore, without the ability to engage freely in discussion of other’s and their own identity, members of a classroom community cannot develop a common set of concerns or a common plan of action.

To Dewey, shared concerns in the classroom come about from the communication of rich personal diversity in a public space (Greene, 1998). Each of us carries our own “ID card” of multiple identities. Through sharing our own identities and understanding those of others, we develop in the classroom - or anywhere else - a shared
consciousness, which seems essential to the functioning of a democratic society. To deny students the ability to think critically about themselves, to share their concerns and to question the identity of others, prevents them from acquiring the tools necessary to enact social change within a democratic framework.

Third, failure to address homophobia in the classroom and school environment not only inhibits students' ability to join together to fight homophobia, it encourages the growth of it. Clearly, the first step in addressing the issue is for males, as well as whites of both sexes, to acknowledge their own privileged positions as members of a majority group. Undoing homophobia also requires us to acknowledge that we have all been raised in a homophobic society and that we have all learned to acknowledge and enforce a heteronormative structure in which normal (heterosexuality) is rewarded and deviant (homo-, bi-, trans-, non-straight sexuality) is punished. Obviously, acknowledging privilege is difficult; refusing it (or using it to benefit non-privileged groups) requires soul-searching, deliberation, and a thoughtful plan of action. To ask students and teachers to question and dismantle their own privilege requires adapting an entirely new framework of viewing the world. It is understandable that students and educators may be unwilling to give up their place in a power structure that fosters their growth, but in an alternative power-sharing structure where strength is derived from diversity and concern for the well being of others, oppression and hatred can be recognized as detrimental to the common good.

Switching the Frame of Otherness

Students at TSJ are used to being considered the "other." They are young people of color from a generally low socioeconomic background, and a majority of them are female. They are the opposite of what has been constructed as ideal or normal: white, middle-class, male. In his polemic Orientalism, Said (1978) argues that western culture is built on the concepts of the binary opposites, normal and other. Normal derives its legitimacy only in contradiction to other. My students, then, occupy a space in the social stratification directly opposite those in the dominant classes. On a daily basis, teachers and students lead discussions on educational disparity, police brutality, and racial discrimination, all products of "otherness," engaging the concepts and arguing the sufficiency of their own identities.

TSJ was founded in large part to save our students from the effects of otherness in education; the curriculum is student-centered, giving students a voice in their own education and allowing them to take ownership and direction of their own education. In the matter of sexuality, though, my students are agents of heteronormalization. As
a mostly straight school community, TSJ generally ignores homophobia in discussions of oppression and, until recently, provided few services to gay students, fostering the idea that TSJ had none. Because the only discussions of sexuality, either in classrooms or in the hallway, are about straight sexuality, heterosexuality is reified as the normal pattern of behavior in the TSJ community. Although TSJ is a school community founded on the principles of equality and justice, and on the idea of dismantling systems of oppression, the students are not as committed to ending homophobia as they are to fighting racism because they fail to see the effects of one form of hatred on another. From their position as the racial other, students have a sense of immediacy in fighting racism, but because they occupy the vantage point of the privileged group in terms of sexual identity, they see less of an application to their lives when it comes to homophobia.

It is necessary to switch the frame of otherness so that students can see issues of oppression and dominance from all sides. Members of the school community must be able to view issues critically, including the ability to examine issues of dominance and privilege form the point of view of the other. The students at TSJ have a unique ability to engage homophobia in this way because they have experience living and thinking as members of groups labeled as other. These students do not need to develop a lens through which to view the effects of otherness on an oppressed group; they just need to point the lens in the opposite direction. Later in this essay, in the discussion of the Homo-101 workshop, I will discuss techniques for helping students to switch the frame of otherness.

Although it is not common to speak of urban youth as privileged, in the sense that straight students at TSJ still have the privilege to legal and social recognition of their relationship, the freedom to express their romantic and sexual desire to their family and friends, and the freedom from fear of rejection by family and friends, they do possess a uniquely heterosexual privilege. To use and abuse these privileges without serious consideration of their effects only works to reinforce and reify their underlying assumptions.

A School-Wide Plan to Fight Homophobia

An approach to undoing homophobia in a school community cannot be complete unless it is targeted to reach all members of that community. This plan of action started with in-service workshops for faculty and staff, included a series of workshops that many students in the school participated in, and hopefully will reach fruition in the future with the development of an inclusive curriculum.
The program to fight homophobia at TSJ began with a mandatory in-service training for teachers and staff. No such plan can work in a school community without the support of the faculty (Minnesota Department of Education, 1994), and it was agreed that teachers must work together to prevent homophobic harassment and reinforce the lessons detailed below in a series of workshops for students. Undoubtedly, some teachers will not feel comfortable addressing issues of homophobia in class. However, if every staff member is encouraged to act together with regard to homophobia, then faculty members may feel less at risk. It should be noted that the faculty at TSJ were highly open to the idea of this project; they already had a commitment to teaching for social justice, but they simply lacked the specific knowledge and skills they needed to deal with homophobia.

The TSJ faculty explored a three-step approach to dealing with homophobic slurs and other anti-gay hate language in schools. First, teachers were asked to acknowledge to students that they were hearing such language and to make their presence known to the students involved - in other words, to get past their habit, as a matter of convenience, of using “selective hearing,” pretending not to notice foul language deemed trivial and reserving action for the worst offenses. They discussed the idea that ignoring such language sends a message to straight students that it is acceptable to use anti-gay language, and to gay students that teachers do not care to stop such behavior.

Second, teachers discussed how to educate students involved in displays of homophobia about the meaning and weight of their words. Some students, unfortunately, do not think through the meanings of anti-gay words they use all too often. Teachers talked about how they could turn a piece of hate speech into an opportunity to discuss the derivations of words like ‘faggot’ and ‘dyke’ (Gordon, 1994). Certainly, some students do not realize the homophobia inherent in derogatory speech, such as the use of the word ‘gay’ as a synonym for something ‘bad’ or ‘weird.’

Third, teachers and staff discussed the need to continue the conversation with the students involved, recognizing that acknowledging an incident and chastising a student for using foul language will only force the student’s attitude underground and leave it unchanged. They agreed that educators should not be afraid to take a moment or two from class time to discuss the ramifications of the free use of hate language in a school community.

Teachers were also given a brief outline of the history of the modern gay rights struggle, starting with the formation of the Matachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, with the assumption
that teachers may be willing to incorporate gay history into their curriculum but may lack the background knowledge to do so. Historical events were not discussed in great depth; however some lively discussion and insights arose from conversation surrounding the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969.

**Student-Centered Workshops**

All ninth and tenth grade students participated in the “Homo 101” workshop during their advisory period. Twice a week students met with an advisor for an hour at a time. The usual size of each workshop was twenty to thirty students, and they were conducted in various classrooms with various teachers.

Each workshop began with an ice-breaking activity designed to get students talking about homophobia and to gauge their everyday saturation of anti-gay hate language. Two lists were written on the board - one for gay men, one for lesbians. Students were instructed to list every hate word they could think of for each category. This introductory exercise encouraged open participation and demonstrated to the students that the teacher/presenter was comfortable hearing negative commentary (Lipkin, 1992). As expected, each class was able to furnish a lengthy list of terms, with words in several languages. When it was evident that a bit of levity was needed, I even often offered prizes for the most imaginative epithets.

After the boards were filled with slurs, the class was asked to group the words into any categories that seemed evident. Most students could group all words and phrases that described the perceived sexual activities of homosexuals (e.g., cocksucker, carpet-muncher). But because students were generally shy about discussing these sets of words, the teacher had to set the example in order to have an informed academic discussion about anti-gay language. The second grouping of anti-gay words, which were not so evident, comprised words and phrases that indicated the portrayal of traits considered to be those of the opposite sex (e.g., sissy, butch).

At this point in the workshop, most students were engaged and seemed to feel comfortable contributing. Each time I conducted this workshop at TSJ, though, a dynamic developed in which one to three rowdy boys continued to make inappropriate comments for the duration of the workshop. Their comments, which ranged from whimsical to offensive, were almost always met with a stern reply from another member of the class, usually a girl. These groups of boys were far from a majority in the classes, and their comments actually provided an opportunity for more fair-minded members of the class to voice their opinions.

After an initial discussion, students were asked to list stereotypes of gay men and lesbians. In this teacher-led activity,
students described everything from style of dress and body posture to favorite television shows and occupations. Some students felt comfortable listing stereotypes on the chalkboard, while others expressed concern that some members of the class might think all of these descriptions where true. After compiling two sizable lists of stereotypes, I asked the class if these stereotypes were, in fact, true. Some students discussed people whom they knew who fit these stereotypes.

I then asked students to list several stereotypes of African-Americans and Latinos, and asked if those stereotypes were also true. To play devil’s advocate, I would often ask if anyone knew a lazy, criminally inclined African-American male or a Latino who ate beans and rice everyday. Some students in every class answered that they did know people who fit the stereotypes. In each class, I asked the students to come up with a list of why, if there were obviously some truths in them, the stereotypes were harmful to minorities. Generally, the discussion led to four main points:

1. Stereotypes are harmful because someone in a minority group is assumed to have certain negative characteristics (criminality, low intelligence, inclination toward child abuse).
2. In the case of gay and other stereotypes, displaying these characteristics can lead to harassment and violence.
3. Stereotypes dehumanize people and make it easy to oppress them.
4. Stereotypes seem only to carry negative consequences when they are about a minority group (white men can’t jump, but African-Americans deal drugs and gay men molest children).

A mini-lesson in gay history was presented about midway through each workshop. Depending on the maturity and age of the class, topics included the Stonewall Rebellion and gay artists and writers. Students usually knew of some famous gay people, but surprisingly often, they mentioned names of actors, singers, and other celebrities who were not gay. However, this was the least interesting section of the workshop for students, partly because at this point in the session they had plenty of questions of their own to discuss.

Around one third of the total time of the workshop was reserved for open, honest, and respectful discussion. Usually students were prompted with questions: Is TSJ a safe school for gay students? Would you mind having an out gay teacher? Is it all right to hate gay people if you do not act on it? The discussions were the most rewarding
part of the workshop for me, because the more open-minded students often dominated the conversation - so much so, that a few times I had to stop the conversation to make sure that people who had reservations about homosexuality felt comfortable sharing their thoughts.

During about half of the workshops I conducted, I came out as a Queer man. Except for one time, students began respectfully questioning me about the trials and tribulations of growing up homosexual and my dating life. None of this made me uncomfortable, but I was concerned that the conversations ceased to be about our school and the students’ lives and started being about me. I was essentialized as the representative of Queerness, instead of being seen as one Queer adult in their lives. In the workshops in which I did not come out, the conversations stayed focused on the topic, and students worked through the issues of homophobia in their own lives. It is crucial that students, heterosexual and homosexual, have openly gay adult role models in their lives, but it is hard to say whether this workshop was the best place for me to come out.

**Future Considerations**

The classroom is the piazza of any school community, the place where institutional culture, curriculum, students, and teachers all meet. The classroom is not merely a spatial designation; it is a laboratory for thinking in which students and teachers can experiment with knowledge and ideas. It is in the classroom that any substantive progress towards ending homophobia must take place. Students will begin to see gays and lesbians as people deserving of equality and dignity when they are treated as such in our history textbooks and discussions, which may be the final stage in undoing homophobia in schools, as well as the most elusive.

Most teachers and curricula ignore gayness altogether, failing to note the contributions of homosexuals to society or issues specific to sexuality. If gays and lesbians are brought into the curriculum, it is often in a purely additive way. A teacher might mention, after studying the patriotism in Whitman’s poetry, that the poet was a gay man. Similarly, a discussion of Eleanor Roosevelt’s vision in shaping the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights might include mentions of her lesbianism and her long-term affair with a White House reporter. While this is an improvement from complete omission from social studies curricula, this approach only mentions sexuality as a coincidence.

As an identity, homosexuality shapes perceptions and often determines the character of famous historical figures. Whitman’s verse praising Lincoln may have nothing to do with his identity as a
homosexual, but many of his poems are markedly homoerotic, and these can be discussed in the classroom. We would hardly think to discuss the body of work that came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance without examining the way in which the art, music, and writing of that period reflects a shared consciousness of African Americans that was formed in the constant struggle against oppression. Similarly, no unit on Reconstruction would be complete without study of the formation of the Ku Klux Klan and the increase in lynching as a response to increased freedom enjoyed by blacks. Lessons on the Holocaust, however, often fail to mention that thousands of homosexuals were persecuted after enjoying great freedoms in the Weimar Republic.

For any marginalized group, the path to full humanity lies in the recognition of the struggle for freedom and the sense of community that forms in response to systems of oppression. No student should lose the opportunity to learn about a community of people who are everywhere in our society. Workshops, in-service training, and other “undoing homophobia” activities are essential to moving a school community from complacency about sexual identity issues to a willingness to seek social justice for those who have been denied it. And once that willingness is achieved, the social studies curriculum must be the place where we begin.

Notes

1 Pseudonym

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**Author**

KEVIN C. FRANK is a masters student in the Social Studies Education program at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York 10027.
"Outing" Social Justice: Transforming Civic Education Within the Challenges of Heteronormativity, Heterosexism, and Homophobia

Heather Oesterreich
Teachers College, Columbia University

Abstract
Civic education and its call for social studies to prepare students for citizenship in a participatory democracy have been limited to the political domain and touted as participation with the already existing political domain. This paper is a reflection of how engaging with and challenging heterosexism, homophobia, and heteronormativity in a Diversity in Social Studies Course taught in a large university in New York City can create a "disruptive voice" to challenge the hegemonic discourse of democratic citizenship. This type of challenge provides the space for preservice and in-service teachers to reconceptualize participation in democratic citizenship as social justice to fight for human rights and equality by changing the existing political domain rather than just participating within it.

Given the generally accepted statistics that every 1 in 10 people in the general population is lesbian or gay, the lives and experiences of each person in society are certainly connected to someone who is gay, lesbian, transgender, or bisexual. Some of these familiar figures are in the national spotlight, while others are obscure mentions on the dockets of an overbooked courtroom or participants in a localized movement whose struggle for gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual rights can change conceptions of democratic citizenship through the teaching and interrogation of social studies (Collins, 2000; Jennings, 1994; Woog, 1999).
Civic Education as Social Justice

Education for democratic citizenship was one of the founding objectives for all education at the beginning of the republic and remains essential for the 21st century (American Political Science Association [APSA], 2002; Crocco and Davis, 1999; Kliebard, 1995; Rousmaniere, 1997; Tyack, 1974). Civic education study, however, became formally situated in the social studies curriculum, and civic engagement became a critical focus of civic education. Defined by the APSA as “an understanding of the workings of the national and local government as the subject of a secondary school course suited as training for citizenship” (APSA, 2002), the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) includes civic education in its mission statement: “Social studies educators teach students the content knowledge, intellectual skills, and civic values necessary for fulfilling the duties of citizenship in a participatory democracy” (NCSS, 2001).

Nowhere in the call for citizenship in a participatory democracy, however, are discussions about the risk and reward involved in participating in acts of social justice. Social justice is intricately connected to human rights, which are about having the opportunity to live as one would choose to live, without gross interference or violation, and having the reasonable means to do so (Bunch, 1990). Moreover, social justice is not solely individual. It must deal with issues of legal, moral, and economic obligation and responsibility to the collective good (Eisen & Kenatta, 1996; hooks, 1994; Collins, 2000). Additionally, a social justice framework challenges the frequently taken-for-granted assumption that all people are treated as citizens and addresses the question of who is truly able to participate in democratic citizenship.

Barriers and Building Blocks to Civic Education as Social Justice

Homophobia and heterosexism can be serious barriers to a definition of citizenship that provides for the recognition, protection, and participation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals in the society in which they live. Homophobia has been defined as “a terror surrounding feelings of love for members of the same sex and thereby a hatred of those feelings in others” (Lorde, 1988, p. 321). Heterosexism has been defined as “a belief in the inherent superiority of one form of loving over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (Lorde, 1988, p. 321). Both create the heteronormativity that pervades our lives and culture in the pictures we see, the conversations in which we engage, and the dominant notions of who and what counts in society. Heteronormativity is the idea that society and political economy presuppose the consistent pairing of women
and men. Consequently, the way our society is structured—everything from gender roles to job categories to standards of dress—reflects and extends the assumption that men and women will pair off, reproduce, and grow old together. Consequently, heteronormativity inherently limits who is counted as a citizen and the ways in which a citizen can participate in democratic citizenship (Blumenfeld, 1992). For instance, gay and lesbian couples cannot marry and cannot file their taxes together with their government. If they want to join any of the armed forces, they are forced into secrecy about their identity.

Social studies and other fields of teacher education often have conspicuously ignored the position of lesbian and gay citizens, particularly the roles of teachers and students (Clift, 1988; Wallace, 2000; Khayatt, 1992; Rensenbrink, 1996; Rofes, 1995; Mathison, 1998). Thus, this paper focuses on how engaging with and challenging heterosexism, homophobia, and heteronormativity by teaching as an out lesbian in a Diversity in Social Studies Course taught in a large college located in New York City can create a “disruptive voice” to challenge the hegemonic discourse of democratic citizenship and provide the space for preservice teachers to reconceptualize participation in democratic citizenship as social justice (Fine 1992; see also Wallace, 2000; Blinick, 1994; Adams & Emery, 1994).

Using a feminist critical framework both in pedagogy and in the writing of this paper, I seek to expand what is studied in academic discourse by including issues of sexuality in relation to civic education (Marshall, 1999). I also examine issues of equity, access, and visibility of sexuality as a social construct that shifts power dynamics and blurs public and private spaces as discussion of sexuality interacts with people’s lived realities in the context of the diversity course (Collins, 2000; Marshall, 1999; Khayatt, 1992). These constructs of homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity challenge teachers’ beliefs and notions of how civic responsibility relates to social justice and how what they do and believe are intricately related to how they understand, represent, and live civic responsibility in their classrooms, their curriculum, and their everyday lives.

The Course

The Diversity in Social Studies Course is one of the courses a student may choose to take to meet the requirement of the social studies department of completing a diversity course. Despite its social studies focus, the course brings in students from other disciplines as well. In the past two years I have taught the course, students from the Deaf Education Program, English Education, Anthropology and Education, Curriculum and Teaching, Bilingual Education, and Transcultural/International Education have enrolled. While the student population
in the course is predominantly White and female, the class is far from homogeneous, containing self-identified Indian, African American and White biracial, Jewish, Catholic, Christian, gay, Nigerian, Puerto Rican, Mormon, Queer, Trinidadian, Russian, Taiwanese, Korean, bisexual, Shiite-Christian, Black, African American, and Hindu students.

In seeking to challenge traditional, perhaps unexamined conceptions of socially constructed classrooms, I try to restructure power relationships by “disruptive teaching,” which transgresses an organizational structure of curriculum and pedagogy that perpetuates inequities in society (Stone, 1998; see also Luke & Gore, 1992). To create a more inclusive curriculum, I began by including scholarship that addresses inequities of class, gender, spirituality, sexuality, race, and disability. Additionally, to interrupt the asymmetrical relationships and practices of professor-as-expert, the class incorporated both written and lived text grounded in the realities of the students’ experiences and identities in their schools and communities (Freire, 1989; Collins, 2000). Students were responsible for leading different class meetings, and they were able to engage each other in critical dialogue through on-line journals as well as through critiquing each other’s presentations. Students also created and enacted a social action project designed to address a particular inequity in society (Luke and Gore, 1992; Knight, 2000).

Teacher Identity and the Teacher As Text

In the context of a feminist critical framework, identity and power are at the crux of my interactions with my students, my institutions, and my society (Truame, 1994; Luke and Gore, 1992; Resenbrink, 1996). As a teacher and within the larger world, I identify myself as a White, lesbian, Christian, middle-class female, and the intersections of all those identities are not entirely invisible as I walk through the door of the classroom to teach this diversity course. As is the case with most racial identifiers, my students immediately construct me as White when I enter the classroom or perhaps do not even notice my race because they, too, live within the privilege of Whiteness and have never specifically identified White as a race (Mazzei, 1993). In one sense, I belong to a culture of power that exists in the academy, where both students of color and faculty of color exist in small numbers (hooks, 1994; davenport, 1994). However, my Christianity, middle-class identity, and lesbianism are left open to speculation.

The Act of Coming Out

Determining the appropriate moment and manner in which to say ‘I am a Lesbian’ to a captive audience
gathered to hear a lecture on dependent class or bell curves or the American Revolution—or anything other than what they might understandably think of as their instructor’s “sex” life—is something else again (Adams & Emery, 1994, p. 27).

“Coming out” to my students takes only a moment in a discussion or a response to a student inquiry. “Teaching out,” in a way that challenges heteronormativity and heterosexism, requires critical reflection to assess what impact it has on the lesbian, heterosexual, gay, Queer, and bisexual students in the class. In a course on issues of diversity that is designed to examine the contexts of power, privilege, oppression, and social justice, the space for revealing my lesbianism is easily negotiated in conversation within the context of the course. My coming out is typically met with little reaction and initially stays within the silence of the public space of the classroom (Fisher, 2001; Adams & Emery, 1994; Beck, 1994; Khayatt, 1992).

On the other hand, making the decision to teach out requires reflection on certain questions. First, do I risk the possibility that in me my students will see all lesbians, and thus, create an essentialized identity of lesbian? As Adams and Emery (1994) suggest, it is easy to fall into the “native informant” trap. Women of color have long written about the fact that when anything comes up in the classroom regarding race, and they are the singular person of color, the students and the teachers, who are usually all White, will turn their eyes to them, waiting to hear if what was written about African Americans or Puerto Ricans or Chinese is actually true. Or, the other students will wait when something offensive is said about people of color to see if the person of color in class will respond, as if the sole responsibility for defending the race or ethnicity lies with the one person in the class who is of that race or ethnicity. Second, could I lose my job or risk my future employment (Rofes, 1995; Klages, 1994)? Third, might I be accused of pushing my agenda, recruiting for my people, or favoring gays and lesbians in the class (Fisher, 2001)?

My decision to come out is as political as it is personal—and in critical feminism the two are not separate (Fisher, 2001; Marshall, 1999; Ramos, 1994). What we do in our everyday living is a political act. If I did not come out to my classes, that would also be a political act—one that adheres to the (un)examined dominance of heterosexism. My decision to come out is not for me about choice, but about responsibility—that is, understanding what civic responsibility means in terms of accountability to others (Collins, 2000; Eisen & Kenatta, 1996; Blinick, 1994; Ramos, 1994).

The question “Does being a lesbian teacher matter?” has been answered in a multitude of ways in literature and in day-to-day
interactions in classrooms around the world. Kissen (1998) and Khayatt (1992) argue that the structures of heterosexism and homophobia that permeate our schools forbid gay and lesbian teachers from caring in the same way as a heterosexual teacher. They must think consciously about being in a room alone with a student because of the fear of molestation charges; they cannot share personal experiences as freely or openly for fear of being fired; they cannot bring their partners to dances or faculty parties or extracurricular events without masking them as a “friend.” Rofes (1995) and Jennings (1994) call for teachers to come out in their classrooms so that their visibility can help to meet the educational needs of gay and lesbian youth, but not without understanding the risks involved.

While many gay and lesbian teachers speak to their intentionality of coming out as a way to “create safety” so that “no one can hurt anyone else” (Resenbrinck, 1996, p. 265; see also Khayatt 1992; Rofes, 1995; Jennings, 1994), I do not operate in the language of safety. Epistemologies emerging from feminists of color such as Henry (1993) assert that some topics in and of themselves preclude safety. “The classroom is not a safe place. Teaching and learning about race/ethnicity, culture, religion, language, socioeconomic background, gender, sexuality, and able-bodiedness are difficult” (Henry, 1993, p. 2). In her call for lesbians to be out in their classrooms as role models for high school students, Pollack (1994) also suggests “there is no safety net” (p. 132). I do not teach out to promote safety; I do it to create challenge so that all of us in the classroom can grow in our consciousness around not only heterosexism, but also racism, classism, ableism, sexism, and linguistics. As soon as I speak the word lesbian in the classroom, notions of safety ooze out under the crack in the door, and we are all left to negotiate the ambiguity of identities, ideologies, theories, and practices; moreover, we are accountable to those ambiguities as they relate to our pedagogies (Knight & Oesterreich, 1999).

I teach out so that students who are accustomed to the heteronormative assumption that all teachers and all students are heterosexual have those thoughts disrupted. Something that has long been relegated to invisibility in education suddenly becomes visible as soon as I say, “I am a lesbian” or “As a lesbian” (Fisher, 2001). And, when the initial silence wears off, in both classes an interesting phenomenon occurs—that is, in the multicultural mantra of race, class, and gender, suddenly sexuality is consistently mentioned. As students critique books and articles, they start to speak about how sexuality is treated as only heterosexual, or about how the authors do not acknowledge anything but heterosexuality in the formation of identity. Interestingly, when students have the opportunity to choose from a plethora of articles that address identity construction across race, class,
ethnicity, disability, spirituality and sexuality, the numbers tell a story. In an on-line journal question, I asked students to reflect upon which articles they did not choose, thus encouraging them to look at their own personal silences. While the reality is that some students admit to choosing the shortest articles, most answer the question regarding the articles they did choose, which often largely deal with issues related to African American students and Latino students because this material will help them with the students they teach. When I do a tally of the number of students who chose which articles, the articles on White privilege of teachers, African American ethics of care, and critical Latino educators are always at the forefront. Out of a class of over 20 students, never have more than three students chosen an article that addressed teacher and student identity around sexuality. When I ask students what the silence reveals, it becomes increasingly clear that they do not think about seeing any of their students as gay or lesbian in their classrooms and schools.

When we begin to discuss teacher identity and its impact on student learning, again, the right of gay and lesbian teachers to be public about their identities is challenged by statements such as, "That’s their personal life, so they should keep it to themselves," or "It is not appropriate for teachers to speak about their sex lives.” When challenged by other students that heterosexuals do not have to keep their sexuality to themselves, several students have argued that while this may be true, what goes on in a person’s bedroom is private—thus, the homosexual is characterized and identified by those with whom they share their sexual activity (Khayatt, 1992).

This narrow view of homosexuality and bisexuality as strictly about sex keeps the conversation from moving to issues of human rights, citizenship, and the multi-faceted natures of homosexuals and bisexuals, who have identities other than sexual ones (Blumenfeld, 1992). Citizens may be allowed to be homosexuals, but they are to participate in democracy by keeping this identity silenced. If part of citizenship education is to understand that groups and coalitions have different agendas, and if part of democracy involves working to address the demands of multiple agendas, then a view of homosexuality as a private issue relegated to the bedroom limits the possibilities it might raise for challenging participatory democracy as a site for social justice.

The Diversity Course: Interrupting the Silences

In the Diversity and Social Studies Course, frequently the right to freedom of speech is constructed within the ideals of individualism rather than collective movements for social change. In a particular critical incident in the course last year, one of the students, in leading
the class discussion, opted to give the other students various scenarios in small groups and ask them to think about how they would handle them in their classroom after reading *A Light in Their Eyes* by Sonia Nieto. One of the scenarios read:

You live in a small town where a recent letter to the editor has been printed denouncing Gay and Lesbian people. The letter is the buzz of the community and the school because it included the words ‘fags’ and ‘dykes’ and included horrific remarks about where they belonged. The letter was unsigned, and it had not typically been the policy of the newspaper to allow anonymous letters into the paper. How do you choose to bring this up in class?

The small group went immediately to the issues of freedom of speech and press. Most said they would talk about the letter if the students brought it up. One person said she would view this as a lesson to demonstrate how the Bill of Rights protects freedom of speech. When asked by the student facilitator if they would read the letter to the class, several responded that they would, if they used it at all, because all of their students would need to be “in the same space” in understanding the letter’s contents.

Two questions from outside the small group were asked. The first concerned how a gay or lesbian student might feel about having to hear the letter read in class. The small group responded that if it were the talk of the town, then they probably had already read it. Then another student, a self-identified White, heterosexual female posed the challenge: “I hear people talking about the freedoms and the rights of the anonymous writer, but not once have I heard someone speak about the rights of the gay and lesbian community members.” The students in the small group became somewhat defensive, replying that just because they had not said it did not mean they did not think it. The female student persisted by asking, “But why didn’t you say it? You spent ten minutes discussing the right of the anonymous author to print his or her views.” One of the male small group participants said that a gay or lesbian person could write a letter in response if he or she chose to do so. Another observer asked why it had to be a gay or lesbian person who wrote a response, wondering why a social studies teacher could not model for his or her students what participatory democracy looked like by writing a letter? One of the females in the group said that she had meant that everyone had individual rights, including gays and lesbians, and she was certain she had made that point clear. Another student outside the small group, however, asserted that at no point in the small group discussion.
had the perspective of gays or lesbians in the community been explored. Then, with the time nearing an end, one of the student facilitators said that perhaps this was a good place to stop and that we should all think about what the silences had meant, including the fact that no one in the small group had said that the letter was wrong.

Two group presentations later, the conversation shifted when a self-identified White, heterosexual male student said that what had happened earlier in our class was a big misunderstanding. I challenged him on whether it was a misunderstanding, or rather a silence that called for close analysis and reflection by all of us on what happens within the construction of our arguments for freedom of speech. The student reiterated his view that it was a misunderstanding and that perhaps I was overly sensitive because I was a lesbian. I then articulated my concern that in society we give certain messages to students about which identities are protected by the right to speech, that where we stand as teachers is intricately connected to our social identities, and that as teachers we cannot allow hate language to go unchecked in the classroom.

This incident illustrates how language and the lack of it can become a site of struggle where positionality and consciousness are produced. The silences around the rights of gays and lesbians, as well as the lack of a teacher stance on the subject and content of the letter rather than the theoretical principles of rights to freedom of speech, were “complex conjectures of histories, identities, ideologies, local, national, and international events and relations” (Orner, 1992, p. 82). Weedon (1987) explains that discussions such as the one described above “represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power” (p. 41). The political interests demonstrated in this exchange do not disrupt the status quo or power of heteronormativity but almost seem to reify it.

Following this class meeting, students were required to participate in an on-line journal response to the meeting. The discussion was lively, demonstrating that critical interaction and reflection around heteronormativity can, indeed, challenge a teacher’s position on civic responsibility and democratic participation. One of the women who felt she had been misunderstood in the previous discussion wrote that much of her reaction had initially been defensive about being accused of heterosexism, which made her a part of oppression rather than a fighter of it. She had taken time to think about what had occurred in class and reflected on the power of the silence. She explained, now, how she would handle the letter to the editor differently, including a critical discussion of whose rights are protected when we talk about freedom of speech, who gets to speak, and who has to defend his or her right to speak.
Alliance Building

Whether it is identified as alliance building (Ozawa, 1996; Human Rights Watch, 2000) or coalition building (Matsuda, 1991; Johnson, 1983), the act of working across oppressions in a world of practical politics where women, gays and lesbians, people of color, and people with disabilities are often less visible in the arena of policy formation creates a definition of participatory citizenship as a vehicle for fighting across oppressions in order to end them all. Ozawa (1996) identifies alliance building as “learning how to be an advocate for oneself and other people with whom one does not necessarily identify” (p. 12). While this definition ignores the power dynamics of engaging in coalition and alliance building, it provides an understanding that citizenship is not based in individualism—again it calls for advocating for “oneself and other people.” Matsuda (1991), in speaking about the writings of Sharon Parker, asks some difficult questions and then tries to answer them by explicating the strategies of coalition building:

If it is so hard to work together, if the gulfs in experience are so wide, if the false universals of the modern age are truly bankrupt, what needs to bind us? What justifies unity in our quest [for social justice]? My answer is that we cannot, at this point in history, engage in coalition without coming out of separate places to meet one another across all positions of privilege and subordination that we hold in relation to one another (p. 118).

Part of my decision to teach out is to begin to understand that homosexuality can operate within the privilege of choosing “to pass” for heterosexual or to remain invisible, a privilege that I hold in relation to other colleagues who cannot in any multitude of ways “pass”—for example, people of color and people with disabilities (Khayatt, 1992). I view coming out as an act of coalition building with those who do not get to choose safety or silence in their classroom identities. I do not go into coalition building because I like it (Reagon, 1983), or even because people of color, people with disabilities, or women have asked me to coalesce in this way. Furthermore, coalition building is not easy. Some of my colleagues of color do not agree that ours are similar battles or ones that can be connected. Several have explained to me that my oppression stems from the choice I have made to be lesbian and not from something into which I was born. Others have rejected my stance as oppressed because my “lifestyle” is sinful. Still, although no one ever said that coalition building is easy, it is about “coming together to see what you can do about shouldering up all of our energies so
that you and your kind can survive” and help others survive (Johnson, 1983, p. 358; Matsuda, 1991; Lorde, 1988).

It can also be considered coalition building when students begin to understand how citizenship in a participatory democracy might require standing up for people who differ from them but are nonetheless citizens also and therefore have a right to benefit fully from the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. After the discussion in my class about whose rights were defended and whose were silenced, a self-identified heterosexual female wrote an entry in her on-line journal wondering if what had occurred in class was actually related to the fact that I was a lesbian and that students were allowing their homophobia and unchecked stereotypes of lesbians as man-haters to drive their arguments. Then, she engaged in a kind of coalition-building with me, exploring how that particular stereotype was related to the sexism she often faced in class, in her family, and in her relationships because she was a strong female unafraid to speak up or challenge other people but often told to “act more like a lady.”

In another incident, a White, heterosexual female who had been arguing that homosexuality was about sex, and therefore should not be shared with students, spent an extended period of time in class listening to other students explain how heteronormativity upholds male/female pairing that includes living in a family, having children, and having sex, but is not reduced to sexual activity. By contrast, homosexuality is viewed as only about sex. She had never thought of homosexuality as an identity, but only as a sex act. She stayed after class for a long time to explore these ideas, and as she left, she remarked that she intended to start saying things in her classroom that made her heterosexuality visible in language in the same way her gay and lesbian colleagues had to make the decision to come out. The students described above have begun to demonstrate how citizenship in a participatory democracy can build coalitions that confront the relationship between power and oppression and help people to use their power and privilege to combat oppression.

Role Models

While I would never argue that only gay and lesbian teachers should teach gay and lesbian students, I would suggest that when one has seen his or her reflection only in one-dimensional television characters, bars, pride parades, or images in the aftermath of hate crimes, one wants to call for all gay, lesbian, and bisexual teachers to coalesce in order to bring the complexity of their identities to our public spaces. Teaching out serves not only gays and lesbians, but heterosexuals as well. Most people emerge from 12 to 16 years of schooling without an understanding that gays and lesbians are
teachers, veterinarians, politicians, astronauts, college professors, dog walkers, cable layers, stock market traders, airline pilots, or holders of numerous jobs and positions (Pollack, 1994).

I do want to be visible for other gay and lesbian students. However, I am not a representative of all lesbians and would not currently identify myself as Queer, a descriptor that more and more homosexual people are using. I recognize that even my definitions of lesbianism and the identities that I associate with them are fluid, as are the social representations with which others label me (Khayatt, 1992). Seven years ago I could barely say the word "lesbian," much less claim my identity forcefully.

Regardless, I am a lesbian—a visible lesbian in a teaching position. What type of environment that creates for gay, lesbian, and Queer students is difficult to assess. Last year, however, one self-identified gay male spoke freely about his sexuality in the class and created his social action project by choosing to send out a resume to prospective employers with the intent of revealing his sexual identity. Eight students openly self identified as bisexual. This year I have one student who openly identifies as Queer. While these statistics would not meet the theoretical 1 in 10, as each class has at least 20 students, it is notable that in past years when the class was taught by a heterosexual female teacher, no students ever came out.

Conclusion

Civic education and its call for social studies to prepare students for citizenship in a participatory democracy have been limited to the political domain and touted as participation within that political domain (Shinew, 2001). This view concentrates on a climate that perpetuates the status quo and ignores the contributions, risks, and rewards of participation for social justice. Although civic education is being challenged on some fronts, the pervasive rhetoric is still bound up in the "persistence and exacerbation of a culture of individualism, disconnection, and domination at the expense of community, connectedness, and equality" (Houser & Kuzmic, 2001, p. 441).

What the examination of heterosexuality, homophobia, and heteronormativity in the context of civic education can do is to promote a social justice framework that moves toward "community, connectedness, and equality." A more robust conception of participatory democracy challenges the idea that some citizens can claim their full array of human rights, while others must fight for theirs. Viewing civic education as a form of social justice that challenges heteronormativity, heterosexism, and homophobia—whether one is an out lesbian, gay, heterosexual, or bisexual—creates classroom spaces for teachers and preservice teachers to embrace the risk that
participatory democracy offers as they promote the idea that citizenship rights can and must be extended to all people.

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Author

HEATHER OESTERREICH is Technical Associate in the Center for Technology and School Change at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.
Teaching About Homophobia in a High School Civics Course

Brian K. Marchman
P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School

Abstract

"Homophobia Prevention" is a two-week social studies mini-unit. The purpose of this mini-unit is to raise awareness and understanding levels surrounding heterosexism and heterosexual privilege. Additional student goals for the mini-unit include forming connections between heterosexism and other forms of oppression, as well as identifying homophobia as an issue of social justice. Through the mini-unit, students come to understand prejudgments about homosexuality and the historical context of present day homophobia, and they gain an understanding of the destructive consequences of homophobia. Lessons include a reflective writing assignment, a class dialogue, relevant video programs, selected readings, and other student activities. A list of "Homophobia Prevention" mini-unit instructional resources is also provided.

"My dad says he cannot stand gay people. He says God didn’t make a guy for a guy or a girl for a girl. To me, thinking about homosexuals is just disgusting."
—9th grade Civics student

"I asked my mom what gay was, and she told me that it was people of the same sex who loved each other. She didn’t make a big deal of it, so I never have."
—another 9th grade Civics student

I teach high school Civics at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School, the K-12 laboratory school of nearly 1,100 students in the University of Florida’s College of Education. P.K. Yonge is a school of choice, mandated by the state of Florida to reflect the demographics of the state in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic
status. The Civics course in my school is required for graduation, non-tracked, and predominantly composed of ninth graders.

As a component of a nine-week unit on Tolerance & Diversity in the Civics course, I teach a two-week mini-unit entitled “Homophobia Prevention.” The purpose of this mini-unit is to raise awareness and levels of understanding surrounding heterosexism and heterosexual privilege. Another goal I have established is for my students to make connections between heterosexism and other forms of oppression. Most important, I hope that my students will, through engaging with the lesson content, begin to envision a society in which homophobia does not exist and identify personal actions they can take to address homophobia, as well as to see the problem as an issue of social justice.

I have planned the mini-unit with the assumption that the Civics course comprises a variety of students who are largely unaware of the meaning of the word homophobia; thus, I introduce the unit by posting a definition of homophobia on the board. I then present students with a series of reflective writing questions:

a. When was the first time you remember knowing that there was a sexual orientation other than heterosexual? Describe the situation.

b. What do you remember learning about people who are gay/lesbian or bisexual, and from what source did you learn this information?

c. How did you learn that you were expected to be heterosexual in our culture/society?

d. How does our culture/society establish expected gender roles/sexual orientation? (Griffin and Haro, 1997).

The purpose of this initial exercise is for my students to begin to understand that they all have gotten particular messages and have formed preconceived notions about homosexuality. At this juncture, I encourage students to engage in a class dialogue about possible prejudices, determine whether differences in messages are linked to cultural background, and analyze what factors may account for both prejudices and cultural differences. This dialogue, however, occurs only after I have established guidelines for appropriate class discussion, grounded in students’ respect for one another as individual, independent thinkers.
Subsequently, in order for my students to understand the historical context of present day homophobia, as well as gain an understanding of its destructive consequences, I show the PBS “Frontline” video program Assault on Gay America: The Life and Death of Billy Jack Gaither. My students also read “A Rose for Charlie” from Us and Them, a compilation of short stories on intolerance in America from Teaching Tolerance/The Southern Poverty Law Center. Assault on Gay America provides my students with a basis for understanding both the historical context of, and scientific explanations for, homophobia. This hour-long “Frontline” program documents the killing of a gay man in Sylacauga, Alabama, as well as offers explanations for why such homophobic behavior persists in our society. “A Rose for Charlie” is the story of Charlie Howard, a gay teenager from Bangor, Maine, who endures a lifetime of harassment and is eventually killed by a group of homophobic peers. I assign this reading so that my students begin to develop a sense of empathy for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgendered people (GLBT) who have been victims of discrimination.

The next lesson I present involves students working in small groups after having read School’s Out, a piece by Tim Walker from the Spring 2002 Teaching Tolerance magazine. I ask the student groups to use the ideas presented in School’s Out, as well as their own, to design strategies for schools to create safe environments for GLBT students. In the five years I have taught this mini-unit, I have found that involving my students in working on solutions to homophobia within the context of the school community is the most effective technique for empowering them to think critically about their own predispositions regarding homophobia.

Another way I seek to counter homophobic attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors is through having my students view Philadelphia (1993), the first Hollywood studio picture aimed at a mainstream audience to take AIDS and homophobia as its primary subjects. I instruct my students to carefully follow the striking character transformation of Joe Miller, an attorney played by Denzel Washington, who serves as the mainstream audience surrogate. In the film, the initially homophobic Miller reluctantly accepts the discrimination/wrongful termination case of Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks) and learns to overcome his misconceptions about those who have contracted AIDS, as well as gay people in general.

I conclude the mini-unit with a homework activity in which I have students choose stickers labeled with “I Support Gay Rights,” “Straight But Not Narrow,” “Queer,” “Bisexual Pride,” “Dyke,” “Value All Families,” “Lesbian Power,” and “Gay is Beautiful” to wear until the next class period (Griffin and Haro, 1997). I decided to conclude the unit with this exercise because I viewed it not only as an authentic
learning activity, but also as the riskiest endeavor in the mini-unit. Now armed with more information about homophobia and how to prevent it, students at this point have an increased level of knowledge and confidence about the topic. I allow students to choose their own labels; the stickers represent a broad array of risks, some obviously too threatening for fourteen and fifteen year olds. I also ask students to be conscious of where they feel comfortable wearing the sticker. At the last class meeting, my students and I conclude the mini-unit by sharing our reflective writing pieces about the label activity.

"Homophobia Prevention" seems to my students and me to be a unit worth teaching and learning, in that it fosters a greater awareness among my Civics students about the destructive consequences of homophobia. But much like other units in this course where future social and political activism in the name of social justice is the desired result, the lives of my students and the quality of the positive changes they seek to make in their communities will ultimately determine the unit’s effectiveness.

Homophobia Prevention “Mini-Unit” Instructional Resource References

Author
BRIAN K. MARCHMAN is Assistant University School Professor at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School at the University of Florida, Gainesville 32611.
Masculinity and Schooling


Reviewed by KEITH C. BARTON, Division of Teacher Education, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0002

Over the past fifteen years, increasing attention has been devoted to analyzing men’s lives as men. Of course, most traditional scholarship in the social sciences and humanities has always focused on men, but it has done so without treating men or masculinity as distinct conceptual categories; men were simply regarded as synonymous with humanity generally. It remained for feminist scholars to point out that generalizations purporting to describe historical trends or contemporary societal patterns too often omitted women’s experiences. As more attention was devoted to analyzing the lives of women, it became clear that much received academic wisdom would have to be significantly modified. Women’s perspectives, circumstances, and behaviors have not always mirrored those of men, nor can they simply be dismissed as “special cases,” variations on the dominant trends derived from male thought and action. This focus on women’s experiences as a critical aspect of societal analysis has enriched not only academic scholarship, but also social life in general.

Given this progress in both popular and scholarly efforts to examine and explain the lives of women, it was inevitable that the potential benefits of focusing on men, in terms of their unique experiences as men, would also become apparent. If focusing on
women and their roles in society could improve our understanding of social relations—and spur interest in such scholarship among a broader public—then a focus on men and their roles might well do the same. Instead of treating men as generic and genderless beings, we might benefit from looking at how masculinity itself affects their attitudes and behaviors. The difficulty, however, lies in determining just what "masculinity itself" is. Masculinity has been conceptualized in at least three distinct ways, and each has its own implications for theory and practice.

The first approach to masculinity has been elaborated primarily within the venues of popular culture. Sometimes described as the "mythopoetic" view of masculinity, it posits a universal and unchanging male essence, a distinct set of personality traits and behaviors that stretches back to prehistoric times. Suggesting that these primal traits have been neglected or suppressed in modern society, this approach advocates a kind of consciousness-raising in which men get in touch with and affirm their "true" selves. Both the secular bonding of the "men's movement" and the religious precepts of the Christian "Promisekeepers" reflect this essentially backward-looking perspective on masculinity.

The second approach also posits a universal and largely invariant conception of maleness, but it grounds the essence of manhood in biology. According to this view, differences in men's and women's ways of thinking and behaving can be explained by differences in brain structure, hormone levels, or other chemical and biological determinants. Although more rooted in empirical research than the mythopoetic movement, this perspective on masculinity (and femininity) also has achieved prominence primarily through popular culture. Scientific studies with limited generalizability and few clear implications are picked up by the media or popular authors and used as the basis for sweeping conclusions about the "scientifically proven" natures of men and women. Interestingly, such conclusions almost always confirm that the social arrangements of contemporary, middle-class, Western society are the very patterns that nature intended.

The third way of conceptualizing masculinity, and the one that informs the three books reviewed here, is more directly an outgrowth of feminist scholarship. It is based on the assumption that masculinity is neither universal nor unchanging, but rather is a social construct that varies across time and place. As such, masculinity does not refer to a transcultural essence that inhabits men's biological or existential selves, but to a pattern of social relations—a set of roles, expectations, and behaviors in which men (or women) participate as members of society. Within this tradition, a fair amount of consensus has developed around three further assumptions. First, any modern society is characterized not by a single form of masculinity, but several. There
are always alternative sets of masculinity practices within which individuals can situate themselves, and these varied masculinities have been the subject of much of the recent scholarly literature within the field.

Second, out of the varied masculinities available, one form typically will be hegemonic: One way of being male will have higher status within a culture (or sub-culture), and those individuals who adopt this version of maleness will have greater access to power and prestige. At the same time, those who can master this hegemonic masculinity will have a vested interested in perpetuating its dominance, and therefore certain aspects of masculinity will always work to maintain their position at the expense of alternatives. To take just one example: The hegemonic form of masculinity in most arenas of modern U.S. society is heterosexual, and therefore heterosexual men who wish to retain their privileged positions have a vested interest in perpetuating the perceived normalcy of their own sexual orientation and suppressing the legitimacy of bisexuality or homosexuality.

Finally, individuals do not “have” masculinity in the form of a stable personality trait or pattern of behavioral characteristics. Rather, masculinity is something one “does”—masculinity must continually be established through practices that establish one’s place in the set of social relations that defines the concept in a given setting. This is potentially one of the most powerful insights of scholarship on masculinity, because it calls attention to ongoing practices that can be affirmed, modified, or rejected. This leads to more productive scholarship, with more practical implications, than perspectives that locate masculinity within the inner recesses of personality or biology.

Each of these assumptions has been developed in detail in the work of R. W. Connell, one of the most important scholars working in the area of masculinity. Connell (1995, 1996, 2000), whose early scholarship focused on children’s political socialization, has written a number of works synthesizing international theory and research in the field, including its application to educational settings. Many scholars consider schools to be particularly important locations for research into masculinity, both because they are a place where children’s developing attempts to locate themselves with reference to masculine practices are played out, and because the institutional context of schooling establishes or reinforces many of the social relations that characterize masculinity, particularly in its hegemonic forms. At school, children both learn what it means to be male and have a chance to practice masculinity among their peers. Meanwhile, scholars oriented toward the advocacy of alternative forms of masculinity see schools as places where students can be exposed to such alternatives and where they can reflect on the societal consequences of dominant masculinities.
An early and important treatment of masculinity and schooling is Ma'irti'n Mac an Ghaill's *The making of men: Masculinities, sexualities, and schooling*, an ethnographic study of an English secondary school. Based on extensive observations and interviews, Mac an Ghaill examined how the school—through commitment of resources, curricular offerings, and discursive practices of teachers and administrators—provided students a variety of masculine positions that they could "inhabit." Macho Lads, for example, who filled the lowest tracks, emphasized physical activity (notably, "fighting, fucking, and football"), rejected the authority of teachers, and associated academic work with effeminacy. On the other hand, New Enterprisers, who enrolled in newly prestigious courses in technology and commercial subjects, accepted the associated values of rationality, instrumentalism, long-range planning, and careerism. (Other forms of masculinity included Academic Achievers and Real Englishmen.) Like most scholars in this field, Mac an Ghaill aims not simply to describe masculinity, but to critique it: He argues that despite these variations on maleness, dominant forms of masculinity at the school shared a reliance on heterosexuality, misogyny, and homophobia. He examines the process by which consent for these masculine practices was developed, as well as the ways in which they were interpreted—and sometimes resisted—by gay male students, students of color, and girls. This work may seem somewhat inaccessible to readers unfamiliar with English secondary schooling (and more specifically, the changes in education brought about by the last Conservative government in Britain), but it stands as a clear example of an attempt to apply contemporary theories of masculinity to concrete school settings.

If Mac an Ghaill's study had been followed by more ethnographies, in a variety of settings, we might be further along in our understanding of masculinity and schooling. Unfortunately, research continues to be "sporadic, but growing," as Rob Gilbert and Pam Gilbert (p. 111) put it, and such work has been spread out over (most notably) Australia, England, and the U.S. Both their *Masculinity Goes to School* and Nancy Lesko's *Masculinities at School* survey representative work in the area. Gilbert and Gilbert begin by discussing issues of popular concern—such as boys' poor performance in some subject areas, and their involvement in violence and aggression—that have promoted interest in "boys' issues," particularly in Australia. They consider the relative merits of competing frameworks (such as the mythopoetic and biological determinist views) and reject these essentialist positions in favor of a perspective that emphasizes "the performance of a set of gender relations in a context where one set of storylines and repertoires of action is culturally dominant and socially powerful" (p. 51). The authors then consider how boys develop expectations about masculinity within the context of contemporary
Gilbert and Gilbert then turn more directly to how masculinity plays out within school contexts. They review research from Australia and other English-speaking countries, and at some points they supplement their review with reports of data from their own studies. Like Mac an Ghaill, they identify the impact of teachers, curriculum, and school organization on students' construction of gender, and they examine research on boys' school culture. Separate chapters deal with more specific issues, including marginalized masculinities (particularly those revolving around ethnicity and sexual orientation), violence and discipline, and boys' literacy. Also like Mac an Ghaill, the authors are concerned not merely with describing masculinity but with changing it, and they conclude with a chapter that focuses on strategies for broadening students' understanding of acceptable forms of masculinity, and for "reforming the anti-social and anti-educational aspects of dominant masculinity" (p. 223). This final chapter, with its consideration of the pros and cons of differing approaches to addressing such deeply ingrained practices, should be of particular interest to social educators.

Lesko's Masculinities at School covers many of the same issues, but in the form of an edited volume in which the authors share a rejection of essentialized visions of masculinity and instead focus on "masculinities as historically contextualized, dynamic, and collectively produced" (p. xii). The book is divided into sections on elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools, as well as a collection of miscellaneous chapters on "pedagogies, policies, and leadership." The content of individual chapters ranges widely across school-related topics, including African-centered schools, male teachers in early childhood, military education, gay identities, sports, and technology. Authors range from graduate students to widely known scholars (such as John Willinsky, Michael S. Kimmel, and Mac an Ghaill). Some chapters report empirical research, while others are theoretical treatments, policy recommendations, or personal reflections. With this variety of approaches, the overall contribution of the volume is difficult to assess, but it seems unlikely that many people will find each chapter equally interesting or useful. Readers will most likely focus solely on the topics closest to their own work. From my perspective as a social studies educator and researcher, I find two chapters especially compelling.

The first, "Heterosexism in middle schools" (pp. 75-103), by Laurie Mandel and Charol Shakeshaft, reports findings from a study of middle school students' conceptions of femininity and masculinity.
Immediately striking is the methodological problem the researchers faced:

When we asked students how they define their masculinity and femininity, girls were rather quick to respond (i.e., I can wear dresses and I like sports); boys nearly choked in response to the question. They were either offended or became hostile over the question (p. 79).

As a result, Mandel and Shakeshaft devised a series of less-threatening written surveys and essays to investigate students' ideas, and they combined these with interviews and observations. They found that when boys and some girls talked about femininity, they conceptualized it solely in terms of appearance and affiliation with boys; other girls, though, described a kind of “mascufemininity” (a student's term), in which they identified themselves as both feminine and masculine, while still others held to an independent model of femininity that countered rigid ideals of conventional femininity and gender stereotypes. But in contrast to the varied femininities identified by girls, both boys and girls described masculinity in simple and universal terms: “Masculinity was largely antifeminine and characterized by the extent of a boy’s machismo, athletic, and (hetero)sexual statuses” (p. 87)—a clear example of how certain forms of masculinity have achieved hegemonic status, so that alternative ways of being male appear less than fully masculine. This study seems particularly important because helping students understand why people think, believe, and act as they do (both now and in the past) is at the heart of the social studies, and this necessarily means addressing the impact of gender expectations—and if we hope to build on and expand students' understanding of such expectations, we need research into their pre-existing ideas on the subject. This study makes it clear that middle school students have already developed clear ideas about how gender affects behavior.

Jeffrey Kuzmic's chapter on “Textbooks, knowledge, and masculinity: Examining patriarchy from within” (pp. 105-126) also reports research that is especially relevant to social studies education. Kuzmic examines the representation of masculinity in secondary U.S. history textbooks and finds that masculinity as a conceptual category is invisible; although the texts focus almost entirely on men and their actions, none indexes terms such as masculinity, men, or patriarchy. As a result of this invisibility, students have no opportunity to consider the role of masculinity in history. At the same time, and despite its invisibility, a particular conception of hegemonic masculinity pervades the texts—namely, one that emphasizes the ability to take action, to
impose men’s will on others, to exercise power, and to participate in the public sphere. At the same time these texts promote and implicitly justify a dominant form of masculinity, they hide their own assumptions and thereby insulate them from analysis, debate, or reconceptualization. Kuzmic’s treatment adds another dimension to our understanding of how the history curriculum is socially and culturally situated, and how it limits our understanding of human thought and action. Indeed, this chapter serves as a concise example of what is best in each of these three works, and in the broader body of scholarship of which they are a part: Using masculinity as a conceptual lens can highlight practices that are powerful and pervasive but that traditionally have been either hidden from sight or taken for granted. And once such practices are brought into view, their role in promoting or hindering more just and equitable social relations can be evaluated, and strategies for change can be developed.

References
THEORY & RESEARCH IN SOCIAL EDUCATION

Book Review

Straight Talk in the Classroom: Discussing Lesbian and Gay Issues in School


Review by NINA ASHER, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803

Drawing on a postcolonial and feminist framework (see Asher & Crocco, 2001), I emphasize in my undergraduate and graduate “multicultural” education classes that teachers, at all levels of schooling, need to consider the intersections of race gender-culture-language-history-and-geography. I also emphasize that if teachers are to embrace all their students, they need to “work the hyphens” (Fine, 1994) between Self-and-Other as they encounter difference in the classroom. Typically, I find that most of my students are aware of issues related to race and culture; a handful is familiar with Title IX. At the same time, not surprisingly, I find that, typically, students do not raise issues related to gender/ sexuality/ sexual orientation unless they occur in the “curriculum.” Therefore, I work to ensure that they do.

One source on which I have drawn consistently as I have taught “multicultural” education courses in the Northeast and now in the Deep South is *Rethinking our classrooms: Teaching for equity and justice.* The first volume of *Rethinking* was published in 1994 and the second one in 2001. Each of these is an excellent collection of writings, mostly by practitioners, bringing critical perspectives to bear on the praxis of addressing race-class-gender-culture in K-12 classrooms. Each of the *Rethinking* volumes includes articles that focus on sexuality/ sexual orientation. Over the last two years, it is in conjunction with these that I have used the video *It's elementary: Talking about gay issues*
in schools in my classes. I find that when I assign texts that address concerns related specifically to lesbian and gay students (bisexual, transgendered, and questioning students still remain absent for the most part), I can facilitate the introduction and discussion of issues related to sexuality in the teacher education classroom. Although in the rest of this review I refer to “lesbian and gay” issues, I note here that, in addressing sexuality, it is just as necessary to speak to issues confronting bisexual, transgendered, and questioning youth.

Of the two resources I have reviewed below, It’s elementary has been developed specifically for K-12 teachers and teacher educators to use in classrooms. By contrast, Two teenagers in 20: Writings by gay and lesbian youth, a collection of autobiographical writings by lesbian and gay teens, is most useful as a resource for middle/ junior high/ high school students who are beginning to explore and define their own sexuality and/or may have peers, friends, or siblings who are doing so. Each of these resources deals with issues of safety and silencing, negotiating the process of coming out, and the related power struggles at the individual and institutional levels. Each makes a thoughtful and thought-provoking contribution in terms of raising the complex struggles that lesbian and gay youth and families encounter in homophobic contexts of school and society today.

The video, It’s elementary, is structured in a series of “vignettes” that feature schoolteachers or guest presenters discussing lesbian and gay issues at different grade levels in different school contexts. The teachers and presenters lead discussions with the students in which they attempt to draw out stereotypes and identify their sources, clarify issues and concerns, and create spaces for interrogating assumptions regarding lesbian and gay students and families. For instance, in the opening vignette, a white, straight, male 8th grade social studies teacher points out that he is often construed as gay because he makes it a point to address homosexuality in his classes. He makes the critical point that addressing homosexuality requires more than simply teaching about lesbians and gays — it also entails a process of confronting and deconstructing stereotypes. To this end, we see this teacher engaging his students in a reflective writing exercise, followed by a class discussion, that allows students to begin expressing their assumptions and questions. For instance, one of the students recognizes that he needs to reexamine his belief that “gay men molest children.” Further, this teacher also articulates the need to address manifestations of homophobic oppression within the context of the school. For instance, he points out that the word “faggot” is the curse-word of choice in schools today (a fact also reported by preservice students in my classes) and that teachers have a responsibility to check such language.
Indeed, in another vignette, when a teacher is leading a discussion with a third/fourth grade class in relation to that particular school’s Pride Day, a student states that she has heard the words “fag” or “faggot” and such comments as “Are you gay or something?!?” a number of times at the school. Further, this young student notes that it is “amazing how teachers don’t notice all the stuff that’s going on” and when they do nothing to stop it (homophobic slurs/language), she continues, it “makes you feel, like, weird in your stomach.”

In addition to dialogue, the teachers use a number of specific teaching strategies such as brainstorming, reflection, writing exercises, readings, creating exhibits, guest presenters, and parental involvement to address issues related to sexuality and sexual orientation within their schools. For instance, a fourth grade female teacher has her students generate a list of words/meanings they associate with the words “gay” and “lesbian.” The remarkably extensive list that the students generate includes such words as: “sick,” “gross,” “pervert,” “peep shows,” “25¢,” “bed” and “naked.” Then the teacher asks her students to reflect on the sources of their associations. She prompts them, “I am curious about where you get your thoughts, ideas, images from,” in order to enable them to recognize the sources of their internalized stereotypes. TV talk shows and popular films, as well as messages absorbed from parents and other family members, emerged as leading sources of misinformation and stereotypes. Interestingly, in this dialogical process, one young student evokes the film *Jungle Fever* as “gay.” When the teacher asks him to elaborate, the student talks about how an interracial relationship (in this case between a Black man and a White woman) is not the norm. Without quite being aware of it, this young fourth-grader had recognized that both interraciality and homosexuality may be viewed as “abnormal.” Towards the conclusion of this vignette, the teacher seeks to clarify that addressing lesbian and gay issues in schools does not imply a focus on lesbian and gay sex but rather on the bias and discrimination directed towards homosexuals.

*It’s elementary* also addresses the issue of teachers’ own struggles with addressing homosexuality in the classroom. For instance, a veteran fifth grade teacher at a school that organized a photography exhibit on gay and lesbian families entitled, “Love Makes a Family: Living in Lesbian and Gay Families,” admits that he feared that the exhibit was a “tempest that was brewing” and it was “one more thing that the school did not need.” However, after experiencing the exhibit, he says he realizes that the students were “ready for a lot more” than he had thought they were. At another school, we witness a faculty meeting in progress in which different faculty members discuss their support of or reservations toward organizing a gay and lesbian pride day in the school. The discussion focuses on the role and
responsibility of schools and teachers in educating students to accept differences and balancing that with respecting the particular beliefs/perspectives of individual students and teachers. In another instance, a first/second grade, female Puerto Rican teacher, reading a story about a lesbian family, struggles candidly with the tension she experiences between her own beliefs and her desire to be there for all her students. Even as she says, "My culture taught me that to be gay or lesbian was wrong; it was tabooed," she asserts that she knows from experience what it is like not to be affirmed as a young person.

An instance in which *It's elementary* addresses the intersection of race and sexuality more directly is a vignette in which two guest presenters — a lesbian and a gay man — from a community organization invite eighth graders to ask them questions. When the male guest presenter introduces himself, he states that he is from a "mixed heritage," part Puerto Rican, part Mexican, and he adds that he grew up in a religious context because his father was a clergyman. The guest presenters' openness to students' questions frees the students up to raise and interrogate stereotypes. Some of the key issues that emerge here are that homosexuality is often construed as a "white" phenomenon, that it is generally perceived as pertaining to sex rather than to community, and that violence against homosexuals is often directed toward those who "look" gay.

Overall, *It's elementary* is a valuable resource for teachers and teacher educators. It presents a number of key issues pertaining to how to address homosexuality in schools as well as specific strategies for teachers to use. This video also is effective in terms of presenting the complexities and contradictions inherent in change efforts and speaking to the intersections of race, culture, and sexuality. However, although this video deals well with issues related to lesbian and gay families, an additional useful component would be perspectives of homosexual and heterosexual parents, teachers, and administrators in relation to schooling. Other possible considerations for developing this work further include issues of class and sexual identity, the contrasting experiences of lesbians as compared to gays in schools (after all, even the title of this excellent video can be interpreted as having a male bias), and the particular struggles of bisexual, transgendered, and questioning students. *It's elementary* could serve as an excellent springboard for such efforts.

Although not specifically written for educators and students, *Two teenagers in 20: Writings by gay and lesbian youth*, published by Alyson Books, is a useful resource for young people who may be struggling with or attempting to clarify their sexual identity. This 182-page compilation presents about 40 autobiographical narratives by young women and men from various parts of the United States and 1 from Canada. The writings address various struggles related to coming
out, seeking support, and living as lesbians and gays. In particular, the young authors discuss the conflicts, contradictions, threats, and fears that they encounter at home, at school, among friends, in the larger social world, and also within themselves as they struggle to define and claim their sexual identities.

One theme that emerges very clearly through these writings is the range of conflicting, often painful emotions that young people experience in the process of coming out. Although there are a few positive experiences, fear, anger, hurt, insecurity, depression, and the need to hide one's true self are far more common. In attempting to come to terms with his homosexuality, one young man writes, "I wanted to strangle the entire straight world for making adolescence, which is hard enough for most people anyway, so much harder for people like me" (p. 139). Another states, "I fell apart during my freshman year of high school. I sank into a deep depression, and at times was very suicidal" (p. 115). And according to one young woman, "I didn't know what the closet was at the time, but when I found it, I went deep inside and locked the door behind me. I hid what I felt from the world, because I knew people would think that I was sick and that I needed help. SHAME. FAILURE. These words passed through my head every day . . . along with others that weren't so pleasant" (p. 146).

Another related issue that several of the authors raise is how they find themselves trying to conform, to please others, to be "normal" as they grapple with the "difference" of their homosexuality and the oppressions they encounter. They find that they have to negotiate parental expectations of "normalcy," discrimination from peers, and even public hostility. One girl notes, "I wanted to fit in so badly that I went out with guys. I was trying to please everyone but myself" (p. 114). Another writes, "I succeeded in my efforts to be as perfect a daughter as I could be, but I also managed to be brainwashed in the process . . . My parents found out that I was a lesbian and sent me to a psychologist to be 'cured' . . . In my attempt to be perfect, arguing was not part of the program. The easiest solution to disagreements was essentially to agree with them" (p. 42). And one boy states, "I would see people protesting and shouting things like 'queers,' 'fags,' 'dykes,' and 'homos.' It really hurt and scared me to see people preaching hate like that. They just assumed that if you're gay you must be a pervert or some kind of sexual deviant. From then on, I knew to keep my sexuality a secret" (p. 115).

At the same time, a number of the young authors clearly articulate their own internal struggles as they seek safe spaces in which to come out to themselves and to society. Their stories convey to the reader a sense of the painful process of working through feelings of alienation and isolation, and of dealing with the approach-avoidance
inherent in coming to terms with one's "difference" as homosexual. They also reflect the fact that, more often than not, the onus is on the lesbian/gay teenager to prepare herself or himself to handle the reactions of parents, friends, peers, and so on. Several suggest contacting lesbian and gay organizations, bookstores, and publishers for support and information. For instance, one young man notes that he wrote to the Hetrick Martin Institute in New York for information, and a Canadian young woman talks about summoning up the courage to approach GATE (Gay Alliance Towards Equality). Another author asserts that she has begun to educate herself on homosexuality by reading books about gay and lesbian teens as one way to counter the sense of alienation she experiences.

Finally, the writings convey how the process of accepting oneself as homosexual is personally, psychically, and emotionally demanding. As one author writes, "The process of coming out to yourself and eventually to others is scary. I know. I've been there. I'm nineteen, and it still scares the heck out of me sometimes. You've gotten this far, and that took guts. You should be proud of yourself. By all means, keep going. Don't even think about giving up. The rest of us are rooting for you. Hang in there" (p. 67).

Although this compilation does not focus on the different experiences of lesbian and gay teenagers from specific racial, class, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, at least one contribution speaks to each of the following issues: bisexuality, race, religion, disability, incest, and suicide. It is also important to note that this collection does include a few writings that present positive, supportive experiences the authors had in the process of coming out to their families and friends. Finally, the book includes a useful annotated bibliography of over thirty additional works of fiction and non-fiction that address lesbian and gay issues. Certainly, this book is a helpful resource not only for young people but also for teachers who introduce issues related to sexuality in their classrooms. Again, I would recommend building on this good work by inviting stories from lesbian, gay, and transgendered youth from diverse racial, cultural, class, and linguistic backgrounds. As Audre Lorde (1984) has pointed out, we need to recognize that various forms of oppression are interconnected. Only by becoming aware of this interconnectedness and developing shared goals will we move from viewing difference as a threat to drawing on difference as a strengthening, dynamic force and a "springboard for creative change within our lives" (Lorde, 1984, pp. 115-116).

Notes

1 This video was produced by Women's Educational Media, 2180 Bryant Street, Suite 203, San Francisco, CA 94110, USA. Telephone: (415) 641-4616. E-mail: wemfilms@womedia.org It is distributed by New Day films. Telephone: (201) 652-6590. www.newday.com
"Kate Lyman's article, "Teaching the whole story: One school's struggle toward gay and lesbian inclusion," in Rethinking, Volume 2 discusses the process of creating such an exhibit.

References
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*Theory and Research in Social Education* is designed to stimulate and communicate systematic research and thinking in social education. Its purpose is to foster the creation and exchange of ideas and research findings that will expand knowledge and understanding of the purposes, conditions, and effects of schooling and education about society and social relations. Manuscripts reporting conceptual or empirical studies of social education are welcomed.

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