Queeriosity

An LGBTQ Resource Guide for High School Educators

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Introduction

An LGBTQ-Friendly Classroom: Why Should You (an Educator) Care?

Being a young LGBTQ person is exteremely difficult. Data shows that the attempted suicide rate among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth is almost 5 times higher that of the heterosexual youth population. Among transgender youth, the rate is around 6 times higher.[1] Besides navigating traditional adolescent stressors, LGBTQ youth often struggle with additional stressors such as coming out, lack of positive representation in media, and the presence of homophobia and transphobia in their families, friend groups, religious circles, schools, etc. As educators, you are who LGBTQ students are spending most of their day with. They learn not only what you literally teach, but what behaviors you model, what issues you advocate for, and what norms you establish in the classroom. During the approximately 7 hours, 180 days a year that high school students spend at school, LGBTQ students are relying on *you* to make sure that they are in a safe space; that they can express themselves freely without fear of bullying or harassment, have the resources to understand and take pride in their identities, and see themselves represented in the things they are learning.

Simply put, educators have an inherent responsibility to support LGBTQ students. And it is my hope that this guide gives you the tools, understanding, and resources to do so.

A Queer Student's Perspective: Why This Matters to Me

As I reflect back on my high school experience, I can't help but notice how homophobia and transphobia have played a role in shaping the high school culture I spent the last four years learning in. As an LGBTQ student living in the San Francisco Bay Area, there is a basic understanding surrounding the needs of LGBTQ youth in my school and community. That being said, I noticed a disconnect between the general air of acceptance my proximity to San Francisco brought my broader community, and the somewhat homophobic attitudes at my high school. There have been multiple instances of homophobic vandalism found on my campus, and I have heard storires of LGBTQ students harassed in its halls. It is impossible to learn, grow, and express yourself when the environment around you stifles and chokes the parts of you that you most want to explore and be proud of.

The worst part is that I know my school, when compared to the rest of the country, is not an exception. If a high school an hour away from one of the cornerstones of the LGBTQ civil rights movement can experience homophobia and transphobia in unprecedented amounts, then truly no school in the country is safe. Though my tall, redwood-studded, Northern California campus affords me certain safeties that I acknowledge other high schools do not have, what does it mean that, even here, I sometimes do not feel safe? It means *everyone* has work to do. Yes, districts across the country have created non-discrimination policies and gender-neutral bathrooms. But past progress does not minimize the need for future change. And the current

[1] " Suicidal ideation and suicide rates are alarmingly high; national estimates have found that 29.4% of

plight of LGBTQ students, such as myself, tells us that a queer-inclusive future has not yet been realized.

Pronouns and Gender-Affirming Language

Language is a powerful tool. In the single utterance of a word, or a few letters on a page, one can invite people into a space, or exclude them. As a gender non-comforming student, I have no choice to be acutely aware of the language used around me. When a teacher splits the class into boys and girls, I notice. I feel uncomfortable, like I don't fit. I know where I'm "supposed to be", but there are parts of my gender that lie outside those rules and bounds. Though every trans, non-binary, or gender non-conforming student's experience is unique, these moments of gendered language isolate me, adding an extra weight on my shoulders. Is it so much to ask that teachers respect the fact that gender is infinitely complex[2]?

Pronouns

What are pronouns[3]?

We are all familiar with pronouns. He, she, him, her, they, their, we, us- these are all pronouns. However, in the past serveral years, efforts to push gender-affirming language into mainstream culture and society have widened the bounds of pronoun use. Use of the singular "they" has become more widespread, as have potentially unfamiliar sets of neo-pronouns. People are introducing themselves with their pronouns, asking other people for their pronouns when meeting for the first time, and putting their pronouns in their social media bios.

Why are pronouns important?

When you want to refer to someone without using their actual name, you use their pronouns. In that respect, pronouns become a part of one's name, a part of their identity. Therefore, pronouns are an important step in recognizing any person's identity, regardless if they use the pronouns assigned to them at birth, if they've changed their pronouns, or if they use pronouns you don't understand.

Pronouns to Familiarize Yourself With

Part A: He, she, and they

he	him	his	himself
she	her	hers	herself

[2] Even cisgender (people whose gender aligns with their birth sex) people can have a complex understanding of their own gender! If you are interested in exploring your own gender, check out the gender unicorn (x), and see what you learn about yourself and your identity!

[3] "Maybe you've heard the term 'preferred pronouns'. As LGBTQ inclusion became somewhat mainstream in the last several years, 'preferred pronouns' has become a dominant phrase. However, many trans, non-binary, and gender non-comforming activists have raised concerns with the language. After all, their pronouns are not simply a preference, they are something to be respected.

they	them	their	themself

*Note: Some people across genders use multiple sets of pronouns, such as she/they, he/they, or he/she/they. Usually, this means they are comfortable with both sets of pronouns, and would be preferred to be addressed using both sets, interchangeably. Often, the order of the pronoun notes which pronoun they prefer, however, this is not always the case.
EX: Alex uses he/they pronouns. They are a great artist. He's also an excellent chef.

Part B: Neopronouns

Sometimes people who identify outside of the gender binary will choose to use a gender-neutral pronoun besides "they", such as "ze", "sie", or "ey". These pronoun variants are called neopronouns. Though they are less common, it's important to know how to use them when the situation arises. And of course, this is a non-exhaustive list. If you encounter a pronoun you are unfamiliar with, Google is your friend!

he/she	him/her	his/hers	him/herself
sie	sie	hirs	hirself
zie	zim	zirs	zirself
ey	em	eir	emself

Asking for Pronouns

In my experience, asking students for their pronouns is an excellent way to establish that your classroom is a safe space for LGBTQ students. It shows an understanding of gender beyond the binary, and a willingness to accommodate trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming students. Of course, your work in creating an inclusive classroom goes beyond asking for pronouns, but it's a good place to start.

But How Do You Ask for Someone's Pronouns?

When meeting people for the first time, asking for pronouns is a relatively new and unfamiliar practice. It can seem awkward to ask if you think you know the answer (Reminder: you might not! Gender expression, or how one chooses to dress, doesn't necessarily equal gender identity), and some people might not be familiar with the practice. Luckily, the easiest way to ask someone their pronouns is to **share your own**. That way, it sets a precedent in the social interaction, and everyone else will feel motivated to also share their pronouns.

The Academic Value of they/them

I've had countless experiences talking about pronouns with adults, only for them to say,

"They? As a pronoun? But what about grammar? They is a plural pronoun, it can't be used for one person!"

Even throughout my high school experience, I remember lessons on academic writing that said the same thing, emphasizing that one should use "him/her" instead of "they". Though unintentional, these outdated grammar conventions uphold the gender binary in academic spaces, suggesting that non-binary genders aren't compatible with education. This suggestion has powerful repercussions; by eliminating the non-binary voice in academics, it maintains the idea that trans, non-binary, and gender non-comforming people are a trend or invalid. By isolating the non-binary voice from its rightful place among gender studies, literature, history, etc., academica erases the proof, history, and studies of non-binary identities. However, things have changed! **The Ninth Edition MLA Style Guide and Seventh Edition APA Style Guide both endorse the use of the singular they.**

As a teacher, encourage the use of "they" in the classroom. Not only for people who use they/them pronouns, but as an term for discussing a group of people. The more practice you and your students have with navigating the various uses of "they" in today's lexicon, the more comfortable everyone will become with using they/them pronouns, and using language that includes people of all genders.

Gender-Affirming Language

Why Use Gender-Affirming Language?

As I discuss in the opening of this section, gendered language can be isolating to those outside the binary. Therefore, the best way to avoid those feelings among trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming students is to avoid gendered language all together! With the absence of gendered language, people of all genders can see themselves in the content discussed. If you think about it, modern language has been slowly rewriting itself to be more gender inclusive. Instead of fireman or policeman, we now use the terms firefighter or police officer. Gender-affirming language pushes that idea one step further, eliminating gender as a factor to respect the multitudes of gender identities.

Common gender-neutral classroom greetings

- Students
- Class
- Folks
- Y'all
- Everybody
- Friends

Approaching Sex and Gender in a Gender-Affirming Context

Throughout education and the high school experience, there are spaces where sex, as a concept different from gender, is established. Whether it be standards in physical education differing by sex, discussion of sexual anatomy in health and biology classes, or analyzing reproductive rights in government, there are times and places where sex will share a space with gender identity.

Sex vs. Gender

Sex is biological. It's dependent on criteria such as chromosomes and reproductive anatomy. People are either biologically female (ovaries, a uterus, etc.), biological male (penis, testes, etc.), or intersex (a combination of female and male anatomy).

Gender is social. It's dependent on an individual's perception of themselves and how that relates to norms in their community.

The concept of gender was established in the 1950s by psychoendocrinologist John Money, while doing research with intersex people. It functioned as a tool to understand his patients identity in lieu of the sexual anatomy that defined whether someone was male or female at the time. The concept was then co-opted by feminist scholars, bringing forth the idea that **gender is a social construct** and revolutionizing our understanding of the body in society. If you really want to get into it, theorists like Judith Butler and Anne Fausto-Sterling also claim that *sex* is a social construct. It's the sort of theory that melts your brain, so for the purpose of this section, I won't go into it.

How to Navigate Sex in a Gender-Affirming Space

Step back. Does the conversation/activity need to be sexed?

The gender binary is pervasive, and has infiltrated almost every part of our life. This includes educational structure. Think about times you have split the class into boys and girls, said things like "girls do/are_____" and "boys do/are _____".Was isolating gender pertinent to teaching your students? Did you *really* need to partner people of the opposite gender for an assignment? No shame if the answer is no, we are all learning! Next time, think about other ways to organize a partnership or subdivide a classroom (alphabetical, birthdays, etc.). But if the answer is yes, let's continue…

Clarity is key.

There will be moments in a classroom where sex needs to be established seperate from gender. Anatomy, childbirth, and safe sex are all discussions that require an understanding of the body beyond a gender identity context. When you approach a concept or lesson that involves discussion of sex as opposed to gender, make sure to establish that. Telling your students that "This refers to sex, not gender" not only sets their expectations accordingly, but also makes space to demonstrate an understanding of sex and gender as seperate entities, and opens up an opportunity for students to clarify their understandings of such.

Language that Discusses Sex in a Gender-Affirming Way:

- AFAB (Assigned Female at Birth) and AMAB (Assigned Male at Birth): I find these phrases extremely useful in talking about the sexed body in a gender inclusive way. In the place of "man" or "woman", these terms allow you to be specific while remaining gender inclusive. After all, not everyone who is assigned female/male at birth still identifies as such.
    - Example: if you were talking about reproductive rights in government class, you might say "Roe v. Wade expanded access to reproductive health services for those assigned female at birth.".
- Physiology over gender: As a way to differentiate between sex and gender, use descriptions of physiology instead of gender (this is especially relevant to discussions of reproduction and sexual health). Though it might be uncomfortable at first, referring to what you might consider to be women as "people with a vulva" and what you might consider to be men as "people with a penis" includes varied configurations of sexual anatomy and gender identity.

Use Your Resources

It's hard for me to anticipate every potential scenario where discussions of sexed bodies occur in the classroom. It is up to teachers to examine and change their language, and while I have some of the answers, I certainly don't have them all. If you are teaching a subject that deals with sexed bodies (or any topic), and are unsure how to approach classroom language in a gender-affirming language, the internet is your friend. From biology to marching band, there are countless resources that examine gender-affirming language in any given field.

The internet is an overwhelmingly vast pool of information. Unsure where you want to start? Try these sentence frames:

- "Gender-affirming ways of talking about _____"
- Trans/non-binary inclusion in _____"
- Gender-neutral terms in ____"

Next Steps

1. Ask students for their pronouns!
   Whether you have them fill out a Google form or create a name-tag for their desk, make sure pronouns are a part of that process. *Tip: When creating any form that asks for pronouns, make sure to provide options for students to write their own, in case their specific pronouns aren't listed.*
2. Examine your use of gendered language in the classroom.
   How can you make that language more inclusive? I've provided lots of suggestions, but ultimately, it is up to **you** to make sure that gender-affirming language makes its way into your classroom.

Social-Emotional Support of LGBTQ Students

When I look at the landscape of LGBTQ inclusion and acceptance over the past several years, I am acutely aware of the incredible change that has been made over the course of my lifetime. I was born in 2002, which means that homosexuality was still criminalized under sodomy laws (this changed in the 2003 Supreme Court case, *Lawrence v. Texas*). However, by the time I made it to high school, a cultural and political metamorphosis of LGBTQ rights occurred and continues to occur. Gen Z is the first generation to experience a queer coming-of-age in an America where same-sex marriage is legal in all fifty states. Media is slowly, but surely, starting to represent our stories. And though I have not been around to experience it, education has experienced a similar transformation. All the teachers I interviewed for this project expressed that things had changed; they were teaching in less homophobic and transphobic environments. However, the students I interviewed still expressed fears of being targetted due to their gender and/or sexuality. Though the needle on LGBTQ issues has shifted, this is evidence that there is always more to do and more to learn.

Coming Out

Teachers are important mentors and support systems for all students, and being part of one's coming out journey[4] fits comfortably under that job description. However, when the time comes for a student to come out to you, it is completely understandable if you feel lost or unsure of what to say next. Every student's coming out will look different, and it is impossible for me to anticipate every poential scenario or question. Therefore, I'm referring to a trusted soruce, and heavily adapting this section from GLSEN's blog post for National Coming Out Day.

What Not To Do/Say

It's easiest to approach responses to a student's coming out by starting with some boundaries. Here are some phrases you should avoid when a student comes out to you:

- "I knew it"- Being told that you are easily identifiable as LGBTQ is an uncomfortable experience for several reasons. First of all, "knowing" when someone is LGBTQ (often referred to as "gaydar") is ultimately a skill surrounding practices of othering and stereotyping. Being told you fit into a mold, and that straight/cisgender people can visibly spot your queerness implies that you are a target, that you are clearly different, and otherwise do not fit in with the rest of society. As a young queer person, being told you are visbily different is scary, especially considering that bullying and harassment towards LGBTQ youth is still present in high school cultures. Additionally, when one's queerness is a newfound realization, being told someone else "knew" before you did is off-putting,

[4] And coming out is 100% a journey! You have to come out to every new person you meet (only if you want to, of course), and all the people who already know you. Haven't seen your great aunt in five years and she missed the whole "I'm gay" conversation at family dinner? Go to your high school reunion with a new name and set of pronouns? These are all hypotheticals, but they reinforce that coming out is a **continuous process.**

to say the least. It's hard to articulate, but it's very uncomfortable. Even if the student coming out to you is every stereotype of an LGBTQ person, it's best to keep it quiet.

- "It's just a phase"- This phrase is commonly heard among LGBTQ youth, as adults in their life misinterpret coming out as LGBTQ as "trendy" or another phase in their adolescent life. However, it's important to understand that LGBTQ identity isn't a phase or trend, and people have experienced same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity since the beginning of time. And even if the student, after exploring their identity, comes to the conclusion that they are straight or cisgender, that time learning about themselves and how to express themselves still is a valuable part of growing up.
- "You can't be _____, you've _____"- The primary example being "You can't be gay, you've dated someone of the opposite gender", any statement expressing conditions to one's sexuality and gender is insensitive and inappropriate. There are plenty of reasons why a closeted queer person would date someone of the opposite gender, from compulsory heterosexuality (the idea that a heterosexual relationship is necessary for a fulfilling life), not being aware of one's identity, or they are attracted to more than one gender.

What You Can Do

Ultimately, each coming out is an experience unique to the student. It's impossible to give specific advice that will apply to every coming out that you, as a teacher, will encounter. That being said, there are some general suggestions that can apply to all sorts of coming out situations.

- **Listen:** Every student will approach coming out differently, and you will be best suited to respond by matching the tone and energy they bring to the encounter. If the student seems especially nervous or scared, making an effort to respond with care and compassion could go a long way. However, if the student seems more nonchalant about the whole affair, they might not want you to make a big deal out of it.
- **Confidentiality is key:** Any student who is coming out to you trusts you as a teacher and mentor. In order to cement that trust, it is imperative that you keep the student's identity confidential unless the student states otherwise. One's sexuality and gender identity is sensitive information (especially in a high school setting) and one of the best things you can do to support a student is to understand that their identity is not your information to share. Of course, teachers are mandated reporters. If during the student's coming out conversation, they express that they are a danger to themselves or others, then it is crucial to their safety that you get other people involved.
- **Appreciate the courage it takes to come out:** Even if a student is certain that you will respond positively, coming out is still an incredibly scary and vulnerable experience. Acknowledging this is one way to support the student coming out to you.
- **Remember that the student has not changed**: Keep in mind that underneath the student's newfound sense of identity, they are still the same person they were before coming out to you.

- **Offer support, but don't assume the student needs help:** Asking if a student needs any help from you, or if they have come out to anyone else they are close to, is a good way to show you can sympahtize with the challenges surrounding coming out and exploring one's identity. However, not every student will take you up on that offer. As I've said many times before, every student's coming out is different.
- **Be ready to offer resources:** If a student does express interest in your help, be ready to direct them to places they can find information and support. Information about your school's GSA or a local LGBTQ Resource Center (if you have one nearby) are great places to start. If none of these groups are readily available at your high school, the Trevor Project has 24/7 support for LGBTQ youth in crisis, as well as other resources to help students through understanding their identity, coming out, sexual health, and much more.

Supporting a student's gender transition

If/when a student comes out to you as transgender or non-binary, you might have more questions than a student coming out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. Here are some things to check-in with your student about as it relates to transitioning.

- **Ask for a new name/pronouns:** If a student is coming out to you as trans, it is likely that they will have a set of pronouns that they now use or want to use, or a new chosen name. Asking for that new name or pronouns is one way to help affirm their gender in an educational context.
- **Ask if they want other people to know:** If a student has chosen a new name or a new set of pronouns, they might want your help in correcting other staff members. After all, coming out to one teacher is scary. Coming out to six or seven is an inconceivable amount of pressure. However, don't be surprised if a student wants their new name or pronouns to stay confidential, for now. This includes talking to a student's parents/guardians.
- **Understand that any change requires adjustment:** If a student wants you to use a new name or pronouns, it's completely reasonable that you slip up and use their deadname[5] instead. When you do slip up, quickly apologize and correct yourself, then move on! It's an understandable mistake, but apologizing profusely can only bring discomfort to the student in question.

Harassment and Discrimintaion

According to GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey, 98.8% of LGBTQ students heard the word "gay" used in a negative context, 95.2% of LGBTQ students heard slurs used, 68.7% of LGBTQ students experienced verbal harassment based on their sexuality, and 56.9% of LGBTQ students experienced verbal barassment based on their gender expression. These statistics show a clear picture of national school climate; one where, despite all the change

[5] A deadname is a trans person's name before they came out or transitioned.

that has been made in the last several decades, LGBTQ students are still threatened on their school campuses.

Microaggressions

Most of the verbal harassment described in the 2019 National School Climate Survey data falls under the category of a **microaggression.**

Microaggressions are (often brief) verbal or behavioral encounters that, whether intentionally or not, communicate hostile, derogatory, or insulting views towards a group. They can be divided into three subcategories:

1. Microassaults
2. Microinsults
3. Microinvalidations

Microassaults

Microassaults are "conscious, deliberate forms of discriminatory practice that are intended to harm" (American Psychological Association of Graduate Students' Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity). Slurs ("dyke", "faggot", "tranny", etc.) and other abusive language fall under the category of microassaults, as well as any restrictive action (such as restricting a trans person's access to the bathroom of their gender).

Microinsults

Microinsults are more subtle forms of microaggressions, referring to offensive offhand comments and gestures. Examples of microinsults are using gay as an insult, asking a trans person what their deadname (name before transitioning) or whether they have "gotten the surgery", asking a same-sex couple "who is the man/woman" in their relationship, or referring to sexuality as "a choice".

Microinvalidations

Microinvalidations seek to exclude or negate someone's lived experience. Though rarely ill-intentioned, assumptions, such as asking someone who presents as female if they have a male partner (and vice versa), and tokenism[6] are considered microinvalidations. Microinvalidations, essentially, attempt to erase an individual's experience by substituting with a perception of the collective's.

Note on Intersectionality

When researching data to highlight for this project, I came across a study on LGBTQ health in schools that discussed how GSAs are less likely to be considered protective to students of color, as opposed to white students[7]. It is important to point out that each part of our identity does not exist in a vacuum, they are all central to who we are and how we are perceived by others. In that respect, understanding how to support all LGBTQ students means you must

[6] See section 5 for more information on tokenism

[7] "LGBTQ students of color, however, attend GSAs significantly less frequently than White youth,70 and when they do attend, GSAs appear to be less protective for LGBTQ students of color than for those who identify as White." (Johns, Poteat, Horns, and Kosciw)

understand the interlocking nature of oppressions. As the data above (and a rich history of BIPOC[8] LGBTQ existence) suggests, there is valuable work to be done in supporting LGBTQ students of color. Thus, understanding intersectionality, white privilege, and systemic racism is an important part in creating a safe classroom environment for all LGBTQ students, as sexuality and gender identity does not negate the lived experience of students of color.

LGBTQ Students in Physical Education and Athletics

Physical education and athletics provide an especially difficult landscape for LGBTQ students to navigate; the hyper-masculinity of men's athletics, locker rooms, and the gendered nature of most sports creates a breeding ground for homophobia and transphobia. As part of my research for this guide, I interviewed several LGBTQ students about their experience; discussions of PE and sports came up somewhat frequently. One student mentioned how slurs, unwanted sexual advances, and forms of verbal harassment often came from boy's sports teams members. Another student mentioned her fear of coming out as a lesbian to her teammates because she didn't want them to feel uncomfortable around her in the locker room. Furthermore, athletics has become the backdrop for severe anti-trans sentiment and legislation, with cisgender elected officials fearing the presence of transgender girls and women in sports. On March 30th, 2021, Arkansas state legislature passed a bill that banned trans youth from participating in sports that align with their gender identity, as well as making access to trans-affirming healthcare illegal for minors under 18. Keeping both legislative action and the lived experiences of LGBTQ students in mind, it is pivotal that I address ways to make physical education and athletics accessible and inclusive for all students. Here are some recommendations from GLSEN's Guide to Gender Affirming and Inclusive Athletics Participation:

- Students have the right to participate in athletics consistent to their gender identity, regardless of whether that matches the sex listed on their birth certificate
- School administration/athletics department will work with trans, non-binary, and gender non-comforming students to ensure an affirming athletics experience.
- Trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming students can use the locker rooms and restrooms that align with their gender identity or expression, or wherever they feel most safe. Private spaces will be made available for any LGBTQ student who feels unsafe in a locker room.

Next Steps

1. **Be prepared to call out homophobia and transphobia when you hear it.** A common thread in student narratives I heard was that teachers and administration do not take proper action when homophobic/transphobia sentiment is expressed. Even if the situation is isolated or a one-off occurrence, proper disciplinary action will make LGBTQ students feel safer and educate the student who expressed harmful views.

[8] BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

2. **Reflect on your role as a supportive educator**. What did you learn in this section? How does it apply to your classroom? What might you want to learn more about?
3. **Take Action!** As of April 2021, anti-trans bills have been introduced in at least 20 states. TransAthlete has compiled all bills currently moving through state legislatures and ways (email writing, phone calls, etc.) to fight back. Go to https://www.transathlete.com/take-action for more information.

LGBTQ Inclusion in Academics

As an LGBTQ student, there is nothing more empowering than seeing yourself reflected in the faces of history. My personal favorite example of this is when I stumbled across Sappho. Though I was a sixteen-year-old with little knowledge of the classics, and Sappho was an archaic Greek poet whose work today consists of several dozen fragments of poems lost to time, her work resonated with me. As I read Sappho's descriptions of finding another woman so beautiful it feels like she is dying, I saw my sexuality reflected in a way it had never been approached in the classroom, if it had been discussed at all. It was fully ingrained in the words and culture of the past, undeniable proof that LGBTQ existence is far from the phase some make it out to be. After this experience, I began to seek out books, histories, podcasts, anything that chronicled the rich LGBTQ history that was mostly absent from my high school experience. That is the extent of my knowledge on LGBTQ history, literature, and theory; it is entirely self-taught. I find that important to mention because, in the next section, I will make suggestions on ways, as a student, I see LGBTQ experiences fitting in with existing curricula. I do not have the breadth of knowledge an LGBTQ studies professor has to offer, nor do I have the expertise to write countless lesson plans. To supplement that knowledge, I provide more resources than in previous sections, demonstrating and utilizing the vast collections of existing materials for educators.

English

Queer/Gender Theory in the High School Classroom?

Queer/gender theory is a critical lens and body of thought that seeks to explore sexuality, gender, relationships, power structures, and marginalized groups. It has its ties in feminist studies, as well as post-structuralism. Gender studies, in particular, presents the idea that gender is socially constructed, as opposed to being predetermined and/or based on physical anatomy. In all honesty, queer theory and gender theory are very confusing. As a high school senior whose senior project is all about gender and gender theory, I can confidently say that I struggle through it, not without the help of SparkNotes and Wikipedia. It is a vague lens, and intentionally so, as queer/gender theory's emphasis on deconstructing sex/gender/sexuality binaries yields a body of thought that is fluid and broad by nature and design. So why am I suggesting educators attempt to bring queer/gender theory into the classroom? As a gender non-comforming student, I have found a certain comfort in a body of work that explores gender variance as a valid part of the human experience. By bringing queer theory and gender theory into the classroom, I believe it demonstrates the validity of gender non-conformity and self-expression.

How to incorporate queer/gender theory into the classroom?

It is unreasonable to assign Focault or Leslie Feinberg as reading in your average high school English class. However, there are ways to lay the groundwork to an understanding of gender theory through classroom discussion. In most high school literature, issues surrounding gender and the treatment of women are present, and are often discussed in the classroom.

Encourage students to expand on those ideas, considering what various characters and their interactions with others demonstrate about femininity, masculinity, and/or gender as a whole. Other things to discuss are:

- How does a character's understanding of gender reveal itself? How might that be different from other characters' understandings of gender? What does it mean that different people can have different understandings of gender?
- How do characters of different genders interact with each other? What, if anything, do characters assume about each other based on their genders?
- How does a character's gender manifest itself in society? How does the society they operate in define different genders? How is that the same/different from the way your community understands gender?

For an example of this questioning in action, let's take the classic high school novel *Lord of the Flies,* by William Golding. After all, an island full of young boys provides an excellent case study in examining ideas of masculinity. Applying the lens of gender theory would perhaps yield a class discussion on how ideas of manliness inform the ways the boys interact with each other, how gender influences violence, or the relationship between masculinity and power in society.

By discussing gender theory and examining the way society informs our views on gender, it opens an avenue for students and educators to deconstruct gender and gender roles. And for students questioning their gender identity or expression, it allows them to see their evolving identity and questions about gender roles, masculinity, and femininity fit into the academic discussion.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Literature

Another pivotal way LGBTQ youth have always seen themselves represented is in novels. I, and many other LGBTQ youth, can remember the first books with queer content they ever read. However, getting books changed and circulated out of high school curriculums is a difficult feat, and often one that varies by school, district, and state. If your school is considering changing titles to create a more inclusive curriculum, consider this booklist curated by Learning for Justice (formly Teaching for Tolerance):
https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/publications/best-practices-for-serving-lgbtq-students/appendix-a-lgbtq-books-characters#high-school

Most of the books on that list are YA, coming-of-age, or otherwise recent titles. If you are looking for more historical LGBTQ literature to replace a dated text, there is no shortage of booklists of famous LGBTQ literature, such as this one from the National Writing Project:
https://lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/an-lgbt-bibliography-for-high-school-teachers/
Though not on that specific list, I would also personally recommend Virgina Woolf's *Orlando*. Following the life of a weathy man who turns into a woman, it explores the difference and similarities between genders in an entertaining and thought provoking way.

Additionally, as I did my research, I stumbled across a student's doctorate dissertation where she successfully leads a LGBTQ literature class at a local high school. It includes the

content of the course, as well as lesson materials and guidance for educators on teaching LGBTQ issues and social justice as a whole. Scrolling through the table of context and subsequent chapters of interest, I found it supplemented my rethinking of English curricula to be more with knowledge that, as a student, I am unable to offer.
https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1369&context=dissertations_2

United States History

Teaching the Road to LGBTQ Civil Rights

When did the LGBTQ rights movement start?

Over the past several years, the Stonewall Riots have risen to fame as the start of the LGBTQ civil rights movement. However, LGBTQ activism had been present in the United States decades before Stonewall. One of the earliest pre-Stonewall activism groups was the Mattachine Society, a social, educational, and eventually, activist group for gay men founded by Henry Hay in 1950. A few years later, the Daughters of Bilitis, a similar group for lesbians, was founded in 1955. Both of these early groups had the goal of assimilating LGBTQ individuals into mainstream society, working to destigmatize queer relationships and attempting to aschew the narrative that same-sex desire was an illness. This lesson plan, from UCLA's History Geography project, explores the goals of pre-Stonewall activist (often referred to as the homophile movement) vs. post-Stonewall gay liberation activists: http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/how-did-the-movement-for-lgbt-equality-go-from-assimilation-to-coming-out-in-the-1950s-1970s/

Two years before the Stonewall Riots, as the clock struck midnight on New Year's Eve 1967, police raided the Black Cat Tavern in Los Angeles. The Black Cat was a gay bar, and as same-sex couples kissed to ring in the new year, plainclothes officers revealed themselves and attempted to arrest those who committed "indecent behavoir" (same-sex affection was still criminalized). Similarly to the events at the Stonewall, patrons of the bar fought back. Protests and demonstrations against police brutality were held at the Black Cat Tavern in the weeks following the riot, and they would become one of the earliest examples of LGBTQ activism and demonstration. A sample lesson plan examining the causes of the Black Cat Riots can be found here: http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/what-caused-the-black-cat-tavern-riots/

The Stonewall Riots: An Inflection Point

The riots at Stonewall on June 28th, 1969 were the catalyst for the gay liberation movement, which would become the LGBTQ rights movement we are familiar with today. Police raids, such as the one at the Black Cat Tavern two years prior, were a common occurrence as homosexual behavior and cross-dressing were both crimes. But unlike the average police raid, patrons at the Stonewall Inn fought against the police, starting a riot that would last at least two nights. In the months following the riots, prominent early LGBTQ rights group, the Gay Liberation Front, was born. On the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, the first pride parade (named "Christopher Street Liberation Day") was held.

Out of any of the early moments in the LGBTQ civil rights movement, the Stonewall Riots are likely the ones most mentioned in textbooks. If you are a US History teacher that

discusses LGBTQ history in the classroom, you are likely already familiar with Stonewall as the beginning of the LGBTQ civil rights movement. For teachers who want to learn more about the Stonewall Riots, or are interested in incorporating discussions of such into their classrooms, there are a few lesson materials available; the Stanford History Education Group has a curated list of materials (requires creation of a free account) http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/stonewall-riots/ and the Center on Colfax's Colorado LGBTQ History Project created a free lesson plan that celebrates Stonewall's 50th anniversary by examining its legacy in the movement http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/stonewall-50/. Additionally, non-profit History Unerased provides a collection of primary sources about the Stonewall Riots as a part of their *Intersections and Connections* curriculum (there is an option to schedule a virtual demo of the curriculum, though I assume that the full curriculum costs money) https://unerased.org/resource/curriculum.

Black LGBTQ Identity in American History

With the idea of intersectionality in mind, it is important to diversify the narrative of LGBTQ civil rights and activism by discussing the contributions of Black LGBTQ activists, writers, artists, etc.

The Harlem Renaissance

Besides being an influential moment in Black culture in America, the Harlem Renaissance had an LGBTQ subculture as well. Many big names in the movement, such as Langston Huges and Zora Neale Hurston, were LGBTQ, and quite a few of the women involved in the blues scene (namely Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Gladys Bently, and Ethel Waters) were lesbian and bisexual. Dr. Rob Darrow and members of the Safe Schools Project created an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum for 11th grade US History teachers, which includes a unit titled "Harlem Renaissance: As Gay as it was Black". The full guide (available here http://queerhistory.pbworks.com/w/page/111419680/bookinfo) costs $40, though there is a free draft guide with talking points, lesson plans, and resources for the Harlem Renaissance unit (and many other topics!) under the "Sample 11th" heading.

Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement

As LGBTQ history is becoming more and more celebrated, Bayard Rustin's life and legacy have been unerased. Though he helped Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. plan the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and was the chief organizer of the March on Washington, he was later isolated from the movement due to the potential blackmail threat he posed as a gay man, communist, and pacificist. Recent attempts to repopularize and understand Rustin's contributions to the movement have led to the creation of many classroom materials about his legacy. Some useful sample materials (among dozens results for a Google search of "Bayard Rustin lesson plans") include a discussion of how Bayard Rustin's identity and values informed his work (http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/how-did-bayard-rustins-identity-shape-his-beliefs-and-actions/), a Learning for Justice lesson plan on his contributions to his civil rights movement https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/bayard-rustin-the-fight-for-civil-

and-gay-rights , and at least two discussions of Rustin and his work in the History Unerased curriculum (https://unerased.org/resource/intersections-and-connections-instructional-resources).

Audre Lorde and Intersectionality

Audre Lorde, Black lesbian poet and feminist writer, published *Sister Outsider: Essays and Writings* in 1984. This collection of Lorde's writings explores the intersection of race, sexuality, gender, class, and politics. Specifically, her speech "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" examines intersectional identity. A sample lesson using "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" can be found here: http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/through-analyzing-audre-lordes-essay-on-multiple-identities-and-systems-of-oppression-how-do-power-and-privilege-impact-the-relationships-people-have-with-each-other-as-well-as-with-institut-2/. Though a less obvious integration in American history, discussion of Lorde's work also provides a critique of the majority white, heterosexual, and middle class leaders of second wave feminism in the 60s and 70s.

The Lavender Scare

The Lavender Scare of the 1950s barred any "suspected homosexual" from working in a position for the federal government, out of fear that their sexuality led them to be a more suspetible target of Soviet blackmailing. It saw LGBTQ people fired from their jobs and proliferation of the idea that LGTBQ people were "sick" and/or "perverted". Discussion of the Lavender Scare is an important angle to consider when examining McCarthyism, the Red Scare, and anti-Communist sentiment in the United States, as it explores the struggle for LGBTQ civil rights in a side of history not known to most students. It exposes the beginning of prevailing sentiment that LGBTQ identity is a "sickness" and that same-sex relationships are innately perverse, two sentiments that still cling to society today. UC Berkeley's History-Social Science Project created a lesson plan that contextualizes the Lavender Scare and McCarthyism with an emphasis on attitudes towards the LGBTQ community (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cH58S0hMuKseK3rm2jVyhobdvavDo1dl/view). It won the 2019 Don Romesburg Prize for a K-12 Lesson Plan on LGBT History. Additionally, UCLA's History Geography Project put together a document-based lesson plan examining to what extent the 1950s were a dark age for LGBTQ Americans. (http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/were-the-1950s-truly-the-dark-ages-for-gay-americans-as-some-historians-have-claimed/), and a different lesson plan examining the treatment of LGBTQ federal employees under McCarthyism http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/how-were-gays-and-lesbians-viewed-and-treated-by-the-u-s-government/.

The AIDS Crisis

The AIDS crisis is a key event in modern LGBTQ history in the United States. It shaped a generation of young queer people; restigmatizing same-sex male relationships while sowing death and illness. The AIDs crisis is a big topic. It's charged with stigma and assumptions around HIV/AIDS and it deals with the tragic loss of life of countless young people. It's old enough to

be considered history as opposed to current events, but recent enough to be sidelined in most history classes as the chronology of a history curriculum collides with the end of the school year. That being said, I think it is important to learn about. The AIDS crisis is a critical part of the LGBTQ community's collective conciousness- a generation of queer elders lost to government negilligence. That being said, there is a lot of material to cover.
Sample material discussing the government response to AIDS can be found here (http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/aids-crisis-government-role-part-i/) and as a part of the History Unerased curriculum. Sample material discussing activists' response to AIDS can be found here (http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/aids-activism-part-ii/) and here (http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/why-and-how-did-activists-respond-to-the-aids-crisis-of-the-1980s-2/). There are additional narratives on the AIDS crisis in Dr. Rob Darrow's queer history curriculum for 11th grade (though they are only in the full, $40 version found here http://queerhistory.pbworks.com/w/page/111419680/bookinfo).
One aspect of the AIDS crisis left unexplored in many of these resources is its connection to culture today, especially in media. As a student, most of my knowledge of the lived experiences of those impacted by the AIDS epidemic doesn't come from the classroom, but rather from the critically acclaimed FX series "Pose". If you are a teacher who enjoys supplementing classroom material with outside media, I would highly recommend pairing lessons on the AIDS crisis with Season 2, Episode 1 of "Pose", as it navigates the lived experience, as well as the historic ACT/UP die-ins, with honesty.

World History

Colonialism as an Importer of Cisheteronormativity

Though the category of world history is very broad, one theme in respect to LGBTQ inclusion in the subject is how colonialism and empire served as an importer of homophobia and transphobia in pre-existing cultures that contained diverse sexualities and genders. Whether it be the mistreatment of those of Two-Spirit identity in the Americas or the criminalization of cross-dressing across the world, the juxtaposition of colonial and indigenous understandings of gender and sexaulity demonstrate how Euro-centric ideals of such have erased a global gender and sexuality variance that has existed far longer than the constructs that attempted to eradicate it.

The "berdache" in the Spanish Americas

When Spanish colonial forces arrived in the Americas, they encountered a diverse range of genders and gender roles that were incompatible with the Western framework of binary sex. "Sexual behaviors that they percieved as homosexual were labeled sinful; cross-gender dress and work were criticized as inferior and evidence of weakness as well as decadence." (McNabb 35). To label these supposedly sinful and inferior behaviors and identities, colonial writers coined the term "berdache". Coming from the Arabic word *bardag* and the Persian word *bardaj*, both meaning prisoner, the word came to refer to the passive role in homosexual sex, a role widely considered inferior and immoral by the heavily Catholic and patriarchal Spanish culture.

“In the colonial imagination, the berdache was a male who dressed a woman, performed women’s labor, and served a prostitutional role to preserve young girls' chastity and marriageability….Shocked missionaries claimed that these poor souls were ‘selected’ (in other words, coerced) as children to be raised as girls and then prostituted.” (McNabb 35).
With this view of indigenous people as primitive, colonial powers sought to convert them both to Christainity and the “correct” cisheteronormative binary system.
If discussing enforcement of colonial gender roles on indigenous people in the classroom, remember to emphasize the following:

1. Though “berdache” is the term used by colonial powers, it is considered offensive, inappropriate, and rooted in masculinity.
2. The colonial interpretation of the berdache is incorrect. The berdache is actually an alternative gender role that both men and women could occupy; “it was widespread… a person became a berdache either due to childhood interests or a vision experience… and berdaches were respected and held a special social and often religious role in their communities.” (McNabb 37).

The Hijra in Colonial India

The *hijra* is a third gender in India that has been present in written records since the 8th century BCE. It can be roughly translated in English as “eunuch” or “intersex”. Though *hijra* go through ritual castration to “rid the hijra of her maleness and allow her to become a vehicle for the goddess” (McNabb 46), their role and identity transcends that described in the English translation. “Hijras are assigned male at birth (or, rarely, intersex), and dress and behave as women do. However, despite using female names, kinship terms, and pronouns, hijra do not identity as women. They are culturally recognized as neither man nor woman but a third gender” (McNabb 46). They have special culture, social, and spiritual roles in India and the Hindu religion. However, when British colonial forces arrived in India, they sought to eradicate the hijra and other sexual and gender identities unique to Indian culture and the Hindu religion. When the 1864 “Buggery Act” was enacted in India, its ban of non-procreative sexualities implicated the hijra (and criminalized homosexuality), while the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act criminalized “eunuchs”, which the British believed the hijra were. These laws had a significant impact on hijras and other gender and sexual minorities in India, as the “Buggery Act” was not repealed in India until 2018, demonstrating the hold that Euro-centric standards of heterosexuality and binary gender had on colonized nations.

Lasting Impacts of Colonialism on Gender and Sexuality

As mentioned above, Euro-centric values of purity and cisheteronormative structures of identity and relationships had impacts on places of colonial rule far after the Western forces have vacated. Notably, over half of the countries that criminalize homosexuality today were former British colonies (A.L.). Many of those places have thriving examples of LGBTQ existence in traditional folklore and/or religion, which have been suppressed. When examining colonialism and its impacts on world culture, consider discussing how colonial forces have left a legacy of supressing LGBTQ identity.

NOTE: When discussing the prevalence anti-LGBTQ legislation in formerly colonized nations, be careful to not employ ideas of white saviorism. Avoid implicating that Western countries are more "civilized" for their treatment of LGBTQ issues, or that non-Western countries are somehow innately lesser than for their homophobic legislation. Understanding that homophobic laws are a product of empire and colonialism exposes how Western countries are partially responsible for the anti-LGBTQ outlook in these places.

Culturally Specific Genders by Region[9]

First Nations (Canada) and Native Americans (United States)

- *Mixu'ga* ("moon-instructed"): third gender identity in the Osage nation
- *Winkte* ("would-be women"): third gender in the Lakota language
- *Lila witkowin* ("crazy woman"): fourth gender in the Lakota language
- *Keknatsa'nxwix* ("part woman"): third gender in the Quinault nation
- *Tawkxwa'nsix* ("man-acting"): fourth gender in the Quinault nation

Mexico, Central, and South America

- *Muxe*: an identity pertaining to biological males in Juchitán de Zaragoza, Mexico. Muxe have both masculine and feminine characteristics, and can marry women or partner with men. They are categorized as neither male nor female, nor are they considered homosexual men.
- *Biza'ah*: an identity similar to muxe found in Teotitlán de Valle, Mexico. Biza'ah are assigned male at birth, but have both masculine and feminine aspects.
- *Travesti*: a gender variant for "passive" gay men found in Brazil. They dress femininely and receive hormones and plastic surgery, and occupy a female sexual role. Despite having feminine names and pronouns, they do not identify as women. Nor are they men, because manhood in post-colonial Brazilian culture is largely defined by sexual roles.

Polynesia and the Pacific Islands

- *Māhū*: A gender identity available for both biological males and females found in Tahiti and Hawaii. Māhū blend traditional masculine and feminine dress, often serve as adoptive parents to young relatives, and are prominent in the arts.
- *Fa'afafine* ("like a woman"): similar to māhū, biological males who identify as fa'afafine serve a caretaker role to children and aging relatives. They can dress in masculine or feminine clothing, as well as a combination of the two. Fa'afafine are heavily involved in the performing arts, and traditionally, they live together in a tight-knit community.

India

- *Hijra*: A gender identity for those assigned male at birth who dress and behave femininely, as well as having feminine names and pronouns. They undergo ritual castration to gain favor with their goddess, the Bahuchara Mata, and bless the family in

[9] This is by no means a comprehensive list! Countless cultures across the globe have third gender and sex varients. Check out this interactive map of gender diverse cultures (x) for more examples!

the name of their goddess in important rituals at weddings and after childbirth. Despite their feminine appearance, the hijra are recognized as a third gender.

- *Sādhin:* A voluntary gender role that those assigned female at birth enter during puberty. The sādhin dresses in men's clothing, cuts her hair masculinely, and renounces sexuality. Despite the retention of a female name and pronouns, a sādhin is viewed to be free of gender, and may work in male or female occupations and take part in male or female ritual behaviors.
- *Devadasi*: A gender role given to biological females whose parents dedicate her to the goddess Yellamma. Once a child is given, she is dedicated to Yellamma via ritual marriage and is trained as a priest. Devadasis perform rituals for their communities and communicate between devotees and Yellamma. Additionally, their spiritual marriage grants them privileges such as land ownership and inheritance.

Southeast Asia

- *Waria*: A combination of the Indonesian words for woman (*wanita)* and man (*pria*), waria are a third gender that wear makeup, feminine clothing, and have traditional feminine mannerisms. However, they do not identify as women, and are said to be even stronger than men. Waria are visible in Indonesian culture, and well-represented in television and film.
- *Bayot/bantut/bakla*: A third gender identity found in the Philippines. Though gender diversity is prominent in this region (third gender deities and figures are prevalent in traditional narratives), the multiple colonial presences in the Philippines have impacted these traditional understandings of gender variance.
- *Kathoey*: The third gender in Thai oral tradition. Kathoey could be biologically male, female, or intersex, and occupied roles seperate from men or women. Today, the kathoey identity seems to only apply to those assigned male at birth, who often self-identify as *ying prophet sorng* ("a second type of woman") or *nang-fa jam-laeng* ("a transformed goddess"). They usually dress feminine, sometimes pursue hormone therapy or plastic surgery, and partner with masculine, heterosexual men.

Weimar Germany and the LGBTQ Community

Compared to the viciously repressive era that succeeded it, Weimar Germany had incredibly tolerant and progressive views on sexuality. Berlin was especially known for its thriving gay subculture, with gay bars, activism, and arts. At the head of that movement was Magnus Hirshfeld, a gay Jewish socialist whose work on sexuality was a progressive look into sexuality and gender. He formed the Institute of Sexual Sciences, which provided resources (birth control, gender-affirming surgeries, etc.) and research for people of every imaginable sexuality and gender. He co-wrote the film *Anders Als die Andern* (Different From the Others), which featured a same-sex relationship, and was an advocate for gay civil rights. However, most of his work, and the Institute of Sexual Sciences was burned by the Nazis. Discussing Magnus Hirschfeld's work, as well as the accepting climate of Weimar Berlin, illustrate the vast amount

of change inacted by the Nazi regime. It demonstrates a tolerance some might find surprising in any era except the present, and Hirschfeld's work exposes the power of education as a mode of acceptance for the LGBTQ community. Sample classroom materials discussing Hirschfeld's advocacy can be found here: http://www.lgbtqhistory.org/lesson/how-did-magnus-hirschfeld-support-and-advocate-for-lgbt-people/

Health

Emphasizing LGBTQ Identity

I remember the day my health class talked about LGBTQ identity. My teacher walked us through some terminology surrounding sexuality and gender, and we watched a short documentary about third gender identities in Hawaii. As a closeted queer person, I found it somewhat useful to talk about my burgeoning sexual and gender identity. However, I don't remember LGBTQ people or identities being discussed in places besides that one lesson. It felt isolating to see my identity confined to a specific class period. After all, I'm queer every single day, not just the one day where it's part of the lesson. When approaching health and sex education, consider places where LGBTQ voices can be addressed beyond the context of identity. Is there a place to dispel myths about trans athletes in an exercise and nutrition unit?[10] Could you incorporate learning about the AIDS crisis[11] into a diseases unit? LGBTQ identity exists in every corner of our lives, and seeing ourselves represented beyond the one day we are discussed reinforces that notion.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Sex Education

Many of the students I interviewed for this project mentioned that they did not feel themselves represented in the sex education curriculum. Though there were lessons on identity, LGBTQ voices and experiences were not present in discussions of healthy relationships and safe sex. It's **vital** that LGBTQ-inclusive sex education is available for all students. Here's what I think that might look like:

1. **Remember that abuse is not a gendered concept:** People of all genders can experience relationship abuse. I remember my health class reinforcing the notion that men were more likely to be abusive towards their female partners than vice versa. Though that *is* true, think about what it tells young LGBTQ students about queer relationships. The heteronormative nature of the conversation leaves queer relationships out of the discussion surrounding relationship abuse. By leaving out discussion of same-sex relationships, it stigmatizes the idea of relationship abuse and unhealthy relationships in non-heterosexual partnerships. The conversation is only addressing and spreading awareness to those in heterosexual relationships, when in reality, everyone (regardless of gender or sexuality) could find themselves in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. When

[10] See the section on Gender and Sexuality in Athletics for resources surrounding trans athletes
[11] See the previous section for historical background about the AIDS crisis

giving hypothetical scenarios around unhealthy traits in a relationship, make sure to include partnerships of all sorts of gender and sexuality configurations. (This could also be a chance to expose students to different sets of pronouns[12]). However, also make sure to demonstrate loving and supportive queer relationships. After all, despite countless media depictions of queer love as fraught with drama and emotional turmoil (*Love*, *Simon*, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, *Brokeback Mountain*, etc.) LGBTQ relationships can also be healthy and positive partnerships!

2. **Talk about safe queer sex**: Most of the sex education I've recieved has come from a heterosexual lens. Though perhaps more uncomfortable to talk about than heterosexual sex, young LGBTQ people deserve to be educated about the types of sex that are most pertinent to them. This means discussing types of sex beyond procreative vaginal sex, and how people can safely partake in them. If you feel uncomfortable or unqualified to teach about safe queer sex (or LGBTQ identity), consider outsourcing! Many places have local LGBTQ resource centers who might be willing to come in and talk to your students about safe queer sex and LGBTQ identity. Additional resources for LGBTQ-inclusive sex eduaction can be found here: https://www.glsen.org/sexed
3. **Give updated and safe information about HIV/AIDS:** There is a specific stigma surrounding discussion of HIV/AIDS. Whether it be the loss of life often associated with the disease, or its association with substance use and sexual intercourse, HIV/AIDS treatment is often not discussed in sex education curricula. Two important things to emphasize when talking about HIV/AIDS are:
    a. **It is treatable!** Though there is no cure, medication such as Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) can prevent contracting HIV up to 72 hours after potential exposure, and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) can prevent the risk of contracting HIV by up to 99% (The Trevor Project).
    b. **HIV/AIDS can impact anyone:** Despite stereotypes of HIV/AIDS being the "gay disease", anyone can contract it if safe sex measures aren't taken. However, communities such as gay and bisexual people assignmed male at birth and trans women are more at risk.

[12] See Section 2

Teaching Gender Transitions

Currently, there are countless myths in circulation regarding gender transitions. There are rumors that people have died from hormone therapy, or that children are regretting their gender transition. These rumors harm trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people, as gender transitions are a critical part of trans-inclusive healthcare and overall well-being. Personally, I see the health classroom as a potential place to combat those myths.

Transition Basics

Transitioning is the process by which trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people make change the way they look, and how people treat them, in order to better reflect their gender identity. There are two types of transitions: social and medication transitions, and every trans person chooses to transition differently. Some might only choose to socially transition, while others might choose to fully transition medically, while others might choose any combination of the two. Most importantly, every trans person is deserving of respect, regardless of what types of transition they choose.

Social transition includes:

- Coming out as transgender
- Changing your name and pronouns
- Presenting in ways that match your gender identity
- Changing the gender marker on identification

Medical Transition includes:

- **Hormone therapy:** taking estrogen/testosterone to create desired body characteristics
- **Puberty blockers:** Puberty blockers block the release of hormones- either estrogen or testosterone- that lead to puberty-related changes (growing of facial hair, breasts, or starting a period) from occurring. Young trans, non-binary, or gender non-conforming people who have not started puberty can go on blockers after parental consent and consent from a nurse or doctor. They also often require a certain amount of time spent with a therapist discussing gender identity.
- **"Top" surgery:** Breast augmentation (implants) or male chest reconstruction
- **"Bottom" surgery:** orchiectomy (removal of testes), hysterectomy (removal of internal female reproductive organs such as the ovaries and uterus), phalloplasty (construction of a penis using skin from other parts of your body), metoidioplasty (causes your clitoris to work more like a penis, along with hormone treatment to make your clitoris grow larger), penile inversion vaginoplasty (creation of a vagina by inverting penile skin) (Planned Parenthood).
- Various other aesthetic surgeries such as facial feminization surgery or laser hair removal.

How to Teach LGBTQ Content

Despite what the title may suggest, there is no one way to teach LGBTQ topics or incorperate them into the classroom. There are countless ways to talk about identity or history, depending on the subject, learning outcomes, and teaching style. That being said, there are ways to teach LGBTQ content that implicitly harm or make LGBTQ students uncomfortable. I can't chronicle every pitfall a teacher might experience, but these are some common themes inspired by my, and other students', experiences.

Tokenism

Tokenism is the practice of creating face-value diversity, often to avoid criticism. Common forms of tokenism include:

- Forcing a person of marginalized identity to speak on behalf of their community
- Creating symbolic gestures of solidarity
- Treating marginalized identities as checklist items

Though tokenism is a practice that can apply to any marginalized group, here are examples of what LGBTQ-specific acts of tokenism might look like in the classroom:

- Only speaking about LGBTQ issues once in the classroom, in order to "check the box"
- Assuming that all LGBTQ people have the same coming out or relationship experience
- Asking out LGBTQ students to talk on behalf of the community

The line between tokenism and genuine representation can be blurry. Often, those with the best possible intentions end up harming marginalized communities through tokenism. The main way to avoid taking part in tokenism is to examine your intentions. If you include mention of LGBTQ voices and experiences in the classroom to check a box, or in states such as California, to follow guidelines surrounding inclusive education, then it is likely that your inclusion could come off as tokenism. Instead of coming from a place of following a rule, guideline, or social norm, come from a place of support. Seeing LGBTQ people in the classroom validates queer youths' sense of identity and creates a safer classroom environment. Come from a place of wanting to do that for your LGBTQ students, as opposed to simply checking off a box, and it is likely that your LGBTQ inclusion will avoid falling into traditional tokenistic troupes.

Tone

The tone you use when talking about LGBTQ people and identity has the potential to shape your students' thoughts on the subject. The way you, personally, approach teaching LGBTQ material is often exposed through your tone. If you are unsure, apprehensive, or uncomfortable with teaching LGBTQ content, it becomes apparent through your tone. With that in mind, here are some common scenarios you should try to avoid in your teaching.

1. **A tone that displays discomfort with the subject material:** When you bring up the sexuality of a historical figure or character, does your voice get quieter? Do you feel

uncomfortable? A tone that displays discomfort with LGBTQ identity and experiences suggests that these subjects are, by their nature, uncomfortable to talk about. Though that might be true for some people, it sends the message that LGBTQ identity is an awkward, taboo topic. Most likely stemming from an understanding of LGBTQ identity as one primarily focused in sexual deviancy (think of age-old stereotypes claiming that LGBTQ people are perverted, and still-present sentiment claiming that LGBTQ people are "corrupting the children"), treating LGBTQ people and identity as a taboo topic reinforces negative perception. Furthermore, the idea that LGBTQ identity is mainly applicable to one's sex life erases the nuance of queer identity. When there are laws across the world the criminilize same-sex relationships and people are kicked out of their homes because of their identity, it is not simply a "preference" or a portion of one's self that is only relevant to sex and dating. It is part of who you are.

2. **A tone that is hesitant to bring up LGBTQ material**: I heard an experience from a student I interviewed where their teacher complained about California's FAIR Act (the piece of legislation that requires schools to teach about LGBTQ history) before discussing the sexuality of figures they were learning about in class. This attitude, suggesting that LGBTQ history is a burden to teach, has the potential to rub off on students. It makes LGBTQ students feel as if seeing themselves in the curriculum is a cumbersome task as opposed to a powerful moment every student is deserving of. It also suggests that LGBTQ topics are being forced on teachers, which echoes partisan homophobic and transphobic sentiment claiming the existence of a dangerous "gay agenda".
3. **A tone that suggests no LGBTQ people are present in the space:** Encouraging all of your students to be allies might not be the scenario you expect to be atributed with this statement. After all, teachers and adminstration want students to be supportive of the LGBTQ community. However, by proclaiming your students or space to be one of allies, it erases the actual queer people found within space. Not all students are allies, some are members of LGBTQ community, and that is important to recognize. Instead, try using phrases like "My classroom is a safe space" or "This school stands with the LGBTQ community".
4. **A classroom environment that allows for homophobic/transphobic attitudes**: Whether it be through your own approach to teaching LGBTQ content, or letting insensitive remarks go unaddressed, a class environment that hosts homophobia and transphobia is most dangerous to LGBTQ students. After all, it is remarkably difficult to learn when you fear judgement and vitriol from your peers. This means calling out offensive remarks when you hear them, no matter how small or insignificant they seem. I can't count the number of times I heard a peer say something insensitive within the teacher's earshot, and the teacher just let it happen. In my peer interviews, the consensus among students was that, most of the time, teachers don't do anything when confronted with homophobia and transphobia in their classrooms. As a student, I don't necessarily

have the authority to say how teachers should confront students after they have said something insensitive or offensive. However, I can say that teachers who make an effort to call out homophobia and transphobia have created classroom environments that made me feel safe and supported.

Resources

- Learning for Justice Gender and Sexuality Resources (x)
- "Best Pratices for Serving LGBTQ Students" (x)
- "The Role of Gay Men and Lesbians in the Civil Rights Movement" (lesson plan series) (x)
- "Untold Voices: Stories and Lessons for Grades 6-12" (LGBTQ history resources) (x)
- GLSEN Sex Education resources (x)
- GLSEN Inclusive Education Resources (x)
- GLSEN Inclusive Athletics Resources (x)
- Santa Cruz Safe Schools Project LGBTQ History Curriculum (under paywall) (x)
- History Unerased "Intersections and Connections" Curriculum (x)
- "An Educator's Guide to Teaching LGBTQ History" (x)
- Teaching LGBTQ History: Instructional Resources for California Students, Educators, and Families (x)
- "Making Gay History" Podcast: (x)
- "Queer America" Podcast: (x)
- One Archives (LGBTQ history archives and resources) (x)
- The Trevor Project (x)
- TransAthetlete "Take Action" Page (x)
- "Reading Queerly in the High School Classoom: Exploring a Gay and Lesbian Literature Course" (x)

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Laine Schlezinger (she/they) is a Jewish, queer, and hard-of-hearing writer, artist and activist. They are part of the Senior Class of 2021 at Burlingame High School in Burlingame, CA, and will be attending George Washington University for a combined BA/MA in Psychology and Art Therapy in the fall. Laine is an active member of the BHS Gender and Sexuality Alliance, a Kol Koleinu Teen Feminist Fellow, and an alum of the StarVista Health Ambassador Program for Youth. Her writing and art can be found in various other Kol Koleinu projects, local events, and in The Forward as part of the 2020 Youth Writers' Contest.

Outside of their activism and creative work, Laine can be found playing flute and piccolo for the BHS Wind Ensemble (and just for fun!), baking for her friends and family, and exploring various artistic endeavors.