



# 1

## Sexualities in Education

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### EDITORS' NOTE

We often think of schools as places where kids learn to read and write, and we often conceptualize their consequences in economic terms. But it's clear that they are more than that. In chapter 3, Riegle-Crumb provided examples of how schools help shape students' conceptions of what it means to be a boy or a girl. In chapter 4, Eschmann and Payne told us about how schools help create race and perpetuate racial hierarchies.

University of Oregon sociologist C.J. Pascoe and Northwestern sociologist Tony Silva point out that schools are also profoundly sexual institutions. Intentionally or not, schools often reinforce the idea that heterosexual relationships are the norm, and that same-sex relationships are abnormal or even deviant. Schools do so via both **hidden** and **explicit curricula**. Can you think of explicit lessons—perhaps in sex education or literature classes—that you've been exposed to that conveyed ideas about what hetero- or homosexuality is? Can you think of instances in which you learned similar lessons, not via classroom instruction, but by the way your school was organized or by means of things you heard teachers say (or not say) in offhand remarks?

You might also notice in this case study that Pascoe and Silva use evidence very differently than many of the authors you've encountered so far. What can these qualitative data tell you that the quantitative data you encountered in the tables elsewhere in the book cannot?

## KEY POINTS

- Educational institutions are a key part of the heterosexualizing process.
- Formal and informal curricula, institutional practices, and students' peer groups socialize students into (hetero)sexual meanings.
- Schools can be hostile environments for sexual- and gender-minority students.

## SCENES FROM A HIGH SCHOOL

I recently visited River High School, a working-class suburban school in Northern California, on National Coming Out Day.<sup>1</sup> In preparation for National Coming Out Day, which happened to fall on the same day as the school's homecoming football game and a related schoolwide pep rally, several of the students from River High's Gay/Straight Alliance created shirts that read "Nobody Knows I'm a Lesbian" or "Nobody Knows I'm Gay" to wear to the homecoming assembly.

The rally consisted of six homecoming princesses competing in skits to be elected as that year's homecoming queen. The final skit of the homecoming rally, titled "All for You," featured seven girls in tight jeans and black tank tops dancing suggestively, and each grabbing a boy, as Janet Jackson sang, "How many nights I've laid in bed excited over you/I've closed my eyes and thought of us a hundred different ways/I've gotten there so many times I wonder how bout you. . . . If I was your girl/Oh the things I'd do to you/I'd make you call out my name." The girls walked up behind the boys and ran their hands down the fronts of the boys' bodies. They turned the boys around and made them kneel in front of them so that the boys were facing the girls' crotches, took the boys' heads in two hands, and moved them around as the girls wiggled their hips into the boys' faces. This skit followed two others featuring homecoming princesses performing similar, slightly less sexually explicit, dances.

After the homecoming rally and its celebration of heterosexuality, Lacy, Genevieve, and Riley, all members of River High's Gay/Straight Alliance, ran up to me wearing all black with rainbow pins and belts. Given the alliance's preparations leading up to National Coming Out Day, I was wondering why they were not wearing their special gay pride T-shirts. I didn't have time to ask where their shirts were as they tumbled over each other, indignantly explaining to me what had happened. Lacy angrily unbuttoned her sweater, revealing her black-and-white "Nobody Knows I'm a Lesbian" T-shirt, and said, "Mr. Hobart [the school principal] came up to me and said I have to cover this shirt up. I couldn't wear it!" Riley and Genevieve, equally resentful, cried, "He made me take mine off, too!" Riley unfolded the shirt she had painted in rainbow colors. Lacy, incensed, cried, "And look what they can do up there! All grinding against each other and stuff! And I can't wear this shirt!"

1. Adapted from C. J. Pascoe's book *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, with a New Preface (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

When I asked Genevieve later why the girls could not wear the shirts, she explained,

'Cause this school says that if you are wearing a shirt saying that you're a lesbian, that says that you are supposedly having sexual acts with the same sex. I find that stupid, because what if someone was walking around saying, "Hey, I'm a heterosexual"? Does that mean that you're sexually active? I was very, very, very angry that day. 'Cause that was the homecoming assembly day, my God! Did you see what those girls were doing? Not that I was complaining, but I did have a complaint toward the authority of the school. The school will let chicks rub their crotches and shake their asses in front of all these students in the school. Like, nastiness; but my girlfriend can't wear a "Nobody Knows I'm a Lesbian" shirt.

While the principal may have argued that the problem was not homosexuality but sexual activity, the explicitly sexual displays in the homecoming skits indicated that something more than concern over sexual activity was at play. It seemed, given this incident, that the school had very little problem with students addressing sex as long as they focused on heterosexuality. Explicit expressions of heterosexual sexuality, such as sensual dance moves, skits that tell stories about heterosexual relationships, and in fact an entire homecoming ritual based on male and female pairings, were sanctioned, whereas expressions that challenge such an order, like T-shirts expressing alternative identities, were banned.

This situation is not unique to River High School. This case study explores the way that schools in the United States set up particular sexual orders that typically affirm heterosexuality and normative masculinity and femininity.

## INTRODUCTION

While we tend to focus on schools' academic functions, schools are also fundamentally sexual institutions. In the West, most schools—public, private, and religious—promote specific sexual practices and relationship forms, particularly heterosexual penetrative sex within the confines of a committed monogamous relationship (preferably sanctioned by marriage). The ways in which schools promote normative sexual practices, identities, and expressions are often so mundane, everyday, and taken-for-granted that children and adolescents do not realize that schools are helping create their frameworks for understanding and expressing sexuality.

Schools promote particular forms of sexual identities, practices, and norms through interrelated processes of homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. *Homophobia* refers to prejudice and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals (Bridges and Pascoe 2016; Doan, Loehr, and Miller 2014). *Heterosexism* is the ideology that heterosexuality is the only normal sexuality. Both reinforce practices and policies that institutionalize *heteronormativity*, the assumption that individuals are straight and that their gender identity matches up with their assigned biological sex. All these create particular expectations for, and demands and constraints on, how individuals identify and express their sexuality and gender. Schools set up formal and informal sexual practices through school rituals, pedagogical practices, and

disciplinary procedures that reflect definitions of masculinity and femininity as opposite, complementary, unequal, and heterosexual, in what Judith Butler calls the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler 1993). Schools convey and regulate sexual meanings organized in ways that are heteronormative and homophobic. The heterosexualizing process organized by educational institutions from elementary school through high school cannot be separated from, and is central to, the development of masculine and feminine identities.

Gender and sexuality are distinct—and this case study focuses on sexuality—but institutional and individual practices often regulate gender normativity and heterosexuality simultaneously. They do so in part by encouraging the development of purportedly opposite and complementary gender practices—resulting in expressions of normative femininity for girls, and normative masculinity for boys—central to which are expressions of heterosexuality: girls should be interested exclusively in boys, and boys should be exclusively interested in girls, and the way they express these interests should be shaped by femininity and masculinity, respectively.

Educational institutions regulate sexualities through formal and informal curricula, including heteronormative framings of animal or human biology and sex education; institutional practices such as school disciplinary measures; bullying policies; school rituals; student-adult interactions; and decisions about the degree to which they permit and/or promote the Gay/Straight Alliance and other student groups concerned with equal rights.

There are some important terms to know for this case study. *Sex* refers to individuals’ biological characteristics, such as chromosomes, genitalia, reproductive organs, and hormones. *Gender* is the set of social expectations about behavior, ideology, appearance, and disposition that are assigned to people of a given sex. In the West, gender is shaped by the cultural expectation that there are two purportedly opposite and complementary types of people—men and women—who should express themselves in masculine or feminine ways, respectively, depending on the sex they were assigned at birth. *Heterogender* is the way in which heterosexuality operates differently for men and women: for example, men should be aggressive, dominant, and highly interested in (heterosexual) sex; and women should be passive, submissive, and not nearly as interested in sex. *Hegemonic masculinity* is the dominant form of masculinity at a given time and place that guarantees the reproduction of patriarchy (Connell 1987).

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

To date there has been relatively little research on the role of schools in shaping child and adolescent sexuality, but what research does exist points to the enforcement of heteronormativity and heterosexism through curricula, institutional practices, and students’ social worlds. Studies use diverse research methods, including semistructured interviews, content analysis, ethnographies, and surveys. Much of the nationally representative survey research uses the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health and its related study, the Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement Study, as well as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

## Curricula

Schools reinforce heteronormativity and heterosexism through both informal and formal curricula. See chapter 9 by Patricia Bromley and Daniel Scott Smith for a more detailed discussion of the multiple forms of curricula. Formal curricula include educational goals, explicit messages in textbooks, learning objectives, and class assignments. It is what we think of as the work that occurs in schools. Informal curricula, also known as hidden curricula, are the norms, values, attitudes, and ideologies that children learn at school but that are not an official part of schools’ lesson plans (Martin 1976).

**Formal Curricula** Formal curricula emphasize heteronormativity and normative sexual practices, especially through sex education. Given the anemic and shifting federal regulation of sex education, it is highly varied and inconsistent across American states. As table 1 demonstrates, only twenty-four states and Washington, DC, require sex education in public schools; only thirty-three states and Washington, DC, require education about HIV/AIDS; and only twenty states require that sex education be medically accurate (NCSL 2016). Given such limited coverage and irregular standards, few youth are exposed to comprehensive sex education: among those aged fifteen to nineteen in 2011–2013, only 55 percent of men and 60 percent of women were taught about contraception, only 58 percent of men and 50 percent of women were taught how to use a condom, and fewer than half were taught where to access contraception (Lindberg, Maddow-Zimet, and Boonstra 2016; see also Guttmacher Institute 2016). The proportion of teens who receive comprehensive sex education actually declined between 2006 and 2013, especially in rural areas.

Currently most sex education curricula employ one of three main approaches:

1. Abstinence-only education, which teaches that abstinence is the only morally correct option for teenagers; it censors information about condoms and contraception.
2. Abstinence-plus education, which includes information about condoms and contraception in the context of strong abstinence messages.
3. Comprehensive sex education, which teaches about abstinence as the best method for avoiding sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy, but also teaches about condoms and contraception to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy and of infection with STIs, including HIV. Comprehensive sex education also often teaches interpersonal and communication skills and helps young people explore their own values, goals, and options.

Since the 1980s, the federal government has provided hundreds of millions of dollars to abstinence-only-until-marriage education programs. Today, tens of millions of dollars per year are allocated under Title V of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Act, which requires that states contribute three dollars for every four federal dollars they receive (for a history of sex education in the United States, see SIECUS n.d.).

Until recently, to be eligible for funding, sex education programs had to follow an eight-point abstinence model, as outlined in section 510(b) of Title V of the Social

Table 1 State Policies on Sex Education in Schools

State	Be Age Appropriate	Be Culturally Appropriate and Unbiased	Cannot Promote Religion	Notice	Consent	Opt Out
Alabama	X					X
Arizona	X			HIV	Sex	HIV
California	X	X	X	X		X
Colorado	X	X		X		X
Connecticut						X
Delaware						
DC	X			X		X
Florida	X					X
Georgia				X		X
Hawaii	X					X
Idaho						X
Illinois	X					X
Indiana						
Iowa	X	X		X		X
Kentucky						
Louisiana	X		X	X		X
Maine	X					X
Maryland						X
Massachusetts				X		X
Michigan	X			X		X
Minnesota						X
Mississippi	X			X		X
Missouri	X			X		X
Montana						
Nevada	X			X	X	
New Hampshire						X
New Jersey	X	X		X		X
New Mexico						X
New York	HIV					HIV
North Carolina	X					
North Dakota						
Ohio						X
Oklahoma				X		X
Oregon	X	X		X		X
Pennsylvania	HIV			X		HIV
Rhode Island	X	X				X

Table 1 (continued)

State	Be Age Appropriate	Be Culturally Appropriate and Unbiased	Cannot Promote Religion	Notice	Consent	Opt Out
South Carolina	X			X		X
Tennessee	HIV					X
Texas	X			X		X
Utah		X		X	X	
Vermont	X					X
Virginia	X			X		X
Washington	X	X		X		X
West Virginia				X		X
Wisconsin				X		X
TOTAL	26+DC	8	2	22+DC	3	36+DC

SOURCE: "State Policies on Sex Education in Schools," National Conference of State Legislatures, December 21, 2016, [www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-policies-on-sex-education-in-schools.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-policies-on-sex-education-in-schools.aspx).

Security Act. This meant a program that "(A) has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity; (B) teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children; (C) teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems; (D) teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in [the] context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity; (E) teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical [side] effects; (F) teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society; (G) teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and (H) teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity."<sup>2</sup>

Even though this type of abstinence program is widely taught, research indicates it is ineffective. While comprehensive sex education programs increase youths' contraceptive use and delay their first sexual experience, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs do not (Kirby 2008). Indeed, comprehensive sex education helps reduce unintended pregnancy and rates of STI transmission (UNESCO 2015). Most female youth who pledge abstinence break their pledges. Moreover, they are likelier to contract the human papillomavirus than their peers who do not pledge abstinence, and more likely to experience unintended pregnancy (Paik, Sanchagrin, and Heimer 2016; see also Brückner

2. "Separate Program for Abstinence Education," Compilation of the Social Security Laws, Social Security Administration, [https://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title05/0510.htm](https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title05/0510.htm).

and Bearman 2005). Abstinence-only education is in fact associated with a *higher* likelihood of teenage pregnancy, not lower (Kohler, Manhart, and Lafferty 2008; Stanger-Hall and Hall 2011). Teen pregnancy has declined dramatically since 1990. However, this is attributable to both delaying sex and greater contraceptive use (Kearney and Levine 2014; Patten and Livingston 2016). The most widely used federally funded abstinence-education curricula contain pervasive errors and misinformation (US House of Representatives 2004). Indeed, many underestimate the effectiveness of condoms and other contraceptives, make false claims about the physical and psychological risks of abortion, misinform youth about the incidence and transmission of STIs, and replace scientific facts with religious views and moral judgments. This helps explain why the United States has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the West and high rates of sexually transmitted infection among youth. In countries with comprehensive sex education, in contrast, youth have far lower rates of teen pregnancy and STI transmission, and more egalitarian views of sexuality (Schalet 2011). While many comprehensive sex education programs discuss the dangers of sexuality, few explore its pleasures. Similarly, most programs do not stress gender egalitarianism in sex, contributing to an “orgasm gap” in female-male sexual encounters in which women are far less likely to orgasm than men (Armstrong, England, and Fogarty 2012: 454).

Regardless of gender or sexual identity, in general youth in the United States are ill-informed and ill-prepared when it comes to making safe and healthy decisions about sexual activity; but this is especially exacerbated among LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming youth. Indeed, only 12 percent of millennials report having received education about same-sex relationships in sex education (Jones and Cox 2015). Many of the schools that do offer sex education neglect discussions of sexual health in relation to LGBTQ populations, promoting penile-vaginal sex within the context of a monogamous other-sex relationship (often marriage). Overall, the typical contemporary sex education curriculum—or its lack—often reinforces inequalities on the axes of sexuality, gender, race, and class (Fields 2008).

**Informal Curricula** Informal curricula are a set of implicit beliefs and behaviors that are rewarded by dominant institutions and instilled in children (Vander Zanden 1993). In contrast to the “curriculum proper,” or what is openly intended that students should learn (Martin 1976), hidden curricula include the lessons students learn from the ways in which schools organize bodies and from offhand comments by teachers, among other sources. It may be that students learn more from the informal sexuality curriculum than from the formal one.

In terms of sexuality, the hidden curriculum can be seen in the images that accompany nonsexual topics, examples used by teachers to illustrate a variety of concepts, or the language used to teach nonsexual topics. The vast majority of parental images in literature provided by schools, for example, show a mother and a father, rather than two mothers or two fathers, reinforcing the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal sexuality, and monogamy is the only acceptable relationship form. The way science is framed and communicated to students underscores heteronormativity (Letts 2001).

Many biology textbooks explain animal behavior using Western understandings of heterosexuality and normative masculinity or femininity, ignoring the extensive diversity of sex, gender, and sexuality in the animal kingdom (Roughgarden 2013). Human biology textbooks explain the merging of eggs and sperm using frameworks that reflect the centrality of physicality and aggression to normative masculinity, erroneously framing sperm as active and eggs as passive, just waiting to be fertilized (Martin 1991). These textbooks ignore the fact that the egg moves, saying instead that it “is swept” or “drifts,” whereas they describe sperm as “strong and efficiently powered,” active penetrators who rescue the passive egg from certain death (Martin 1991: 489).

Such examples are not limited to biology lessons, however: as the following lesson plan indicates, teachers can illustrate that the letters Q and U always go together by planning a mock wedding between “Queen Q” and “Quarterback U” (or some variation of these names).<sup>3</sup> The lesson plan includes a wedding story that reads: “Their wedding was the happiest day of their lives, and from that day forward they were known as Q and Quarterback U of Alphabet Land blissfully working together to make the /qu/ sound.” The story is accompanied by drawings of a female stick figure with pigtails who is dressed in a formal gown, with a gold crown on her head, next to a male stick figure who is wearing a football uniform, complete with helmet, cleats, and football in hand. Also included in the lesson plan are invitations for students to attend the wedding event in which the pair is “to be joined forever in marriage to make new words together.” The invitation further reads: “Boys are invited to come dressed as quarterbacks while girls are invited to come as queens.” A wedding guestbook sign-in and a quilt activity for the wedding gift are also part of the lesson plan. This lesson is not explicitly about gender or heterosexuality, but at a young age children are learning about how these two types of people—male and female—“are joined together in marriage” on “the happiest day of their lives.”

The way schools organize children—often by gender—also points to a hidden curriculum reinforcing a binary gender order and heteronormativity. Schools require youth to identify as male or female; schools also develop institutional practices, as well as organize physical building layouts (e.g., locker rooms and restrooms), to separate them by gender. Separate facilities for boys and girls teach youth that there are only two sexes that are opposite and complementary in social and sexual practice.<sup>4</sup> In childhood, children are organized by gender daily in activities ranging from lining up to competing in contests; this continues in young adulthood, during which time youth are separated by gender for sports teams and graduation events. Segregation by gender affects how children understand themselves as gendered and sexual beings. Girls and boys are taught to identify and express themselves in distinct and purportedly complementary ways—which become so normalized they feel natural, when in fact they are the products of learning—and this reinforces heteronormativity.

3. Variations of this lesson can be found in multiple places. This particular one is quoted from Growing Kinders on the Teachers Pay Teachers website: [www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/The-Wedding-of-Q-and-U-128393](http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/The-Wedding-of-Q-and-U-128393).

4. See biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling’s influential work “The Five Sexes, Revisited” demonstrating that there are more than two biological sexes. People who are neither male nor female are “intersex.”

### Institutional Practices

School-sponsored events, student-adult interactions, and disciplinary practices also reinforce heteronormativity, as is evident in our opening vignette that took place at River High School. School rituals do not simply reflect heteronormative gender difference: they affirm its value and centrality to social life.

Prom, in particular, is an iconic school ritual and a rite of passage for adolescents (Best 2000). As a symbol of idealized dating and romance, prom is a central site for the regulation and production of (hetero)sexuality. It valorizes heterosexuality and its centrality to successful adulthood—and with it, normative masculinity for men and normative femininity for women. For example, boys are expected to ask out girls and plan for activities that will take place both before and after the prom, while girls are expected to fantasize about romance and obsess about their appearance. Through discourses of romance and sexuality at prom, inequality between boys and girls is naturalized as a fundamental feature of heterosexuality (Best 2000). Consequently, LGBTQ proms can be a site of resistance (Best 2000), as they challenge the heteronormativity and gender normativity central to heterosexual proms. Other school events perform functions similar to that of high school proms: sports, for instance, feature primarily female cheerleaders who cheer only for males' games, asserting gender differentiation and assigning particular meanings to heterosexuality.

Disciplinary procedures also convey gendered and sexualized meanings. Dress codes, for instance, may be different for boys and girls. Indeed, teachers and administrators may even draw on homophobic sentiments to discipline students, such as in one instance when a principal punished two boys for fighting by forcing them to hold hands in front of the student body. Disciplinary codes regarding sexuality fall more heavily on students of color—black boys are punished for engaging in the same behavior (e.g., sexualized advances toward girls) that white boys engage in with little or no consequence (Ferguson 2000; Pascoe 2011)—and on queer youth.

### Student Practices

Messages about gender and sexuality aren't solely transmitted through school regulations, teacher practices, and curricula. Through student practices such as bullying, gendered harassment, or participation in Gay/Straight Alliances, students both reinforce and contest heterosexism in their schools. Boys, for instance, regulate the sexuality and masculinity of male peers through gendered homophobic harassment (Pascoe 2011; Plummer 2001). In her ethnography of a high school, Pascoe (2011) found that boys used this "fag discourse" as an everyday practice to enforce normative masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality. Almost all boys were susceptible to being labeled a "fag," not just gay-identified boys. Key ways boys demonstrated acceptable masculinity to other boys—and repudiated the fag label—were through dominance over girls' bodies, such as through touching, sex, and discussions of sexual dominance over women (Pascoe 2011). Heterosexist and sexist harassment shapes children's frameworks for perceiving what constitutes "normal" masculinity, femininity, and sexuality, as well as how they express their own gender and sexuality.

Rates of harassment of girls and LGBTQ youth may be slowly declining, but harassment still shape these students' educational experiences. Surveys of LGBTQ youth across

the United States indicate that the majority hear anti-LGBTQ language or slurs from peers often, and over a third are physically harassed, leading many to feel unsafe at school (Kosciw et al. 2014; see also Greytak et al. 2016). To contest heterosexism and facilitate a welcoming environment in schools, some students form Gay/Straight Alliances (Blumenfield 2012). Students attending schools that have such alliances—only about half of schools nationwide—hear fewer anti-LGBTQ slurs or remarks, experience less physical harassment, and report feeling safer at school (Kosciw et al. 2014). For girls, peer interaction is often characterized by sexual harassment under the guise of flirtation. Indeed, a majority of girls in middle and high schools experience sexual harassment (Hill and Kears 2011). In general, schools and peer culture can be hostile places for girls and sexual- and gender-minority students.

### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The study of sexuality in schools is a relatively new area, and much more research is necessary. Investigation into schools as sexual institutions, not just gendered ones, is critical. More research on transgender and gender-nonconforming students is needed. These students challenge the entire organization of the school—around males and females—itsself, calling into question, for example, sports teams, locker rooms, bathrooms, graduation rituals, and senior picture rituals. We also need research on best practices regarding sexual diversity in schools. What works? What does not? Much of this research has been difficult, given the institutional constraints imposed on youth and sexuality research.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The effects of formal and informal enforcement of gender and sexuality in schools are profound for gender-normative students, but even more so for LGBTQ, or gender-nonconforming, students. Nationally representative studies show that LGB adolescents experience a greater risk of depression, low self-esteem, and substance abuse; often feel less connected to their schools; and have lower rates of advanced-course completion (Wilkinson and Pearson 2009; Pearson, Muller, and Wilkinson 2007). Boys with same-sex sexuality also experience lower grade point averages and higher course failure rates (Pearson, Muller, and Wilkinson 2007). LGB youth are vastly more likely than heterosexual youth to experience physical violence, substance abuse, and risky sexual practices (Kann et al. 2016; Russell, Franz, and Driscoll 2001).

School culture and context also play a large role in the social, emotional, and academic well-being of youth with same-sex sexuality. Both boys and girls report lower well-being in schools that have a greater proportion of boys playing football—a sport tied tightly to hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. Girls report lower well-being in schools that have a greater proportion of highly religious students (Wilkinson and Pearson 2009). These findings suggest that there are profound social, emotional,

physical, and academic consequences for youths with same-sex sexuality in heterosexual environments, with particular outcomes shaped by youth gender—indicating the different ways in which heteronormativity affects boys and girls.

While many LGBTQ youth form positive views of themselves despite structural heterosexism, a testament to their resilience (Savin-Williams 2005), youth who are outspoken about gender and sexual inequality or who do not embody white, middle-class, gender-normative gay identities face marginalization even in schools with purportedly progressive policies (Elliott 2012). While targeted measures to improve the well-being of LGBTQ youth are imperative, heterosexuality is so institutionalized that efforts aimed at specific populations, in the absence of widespread institutional changes, are likely inadequate.

Legal protections need to be in place to shield LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming students. While male and female students have purportedly been protected from sexual harassment since the passage of Title IX in 1972, its deployment is inadequate and its interpretation is subject to political whim. Boys' sex talk and predatory behavior has become so normalized that teachers don't even recognize it as harassment but, rather, see it as harmless flirting. Teacher training is thus critical: to implement these laws, teachers and administrators must look with new eyes at student interactions, noting the ways in which both homophobic epithets and so-called flirtatious behaviors shore up normative gender and sexual identities and perpetuate unequal gender arrangements.

Our research suggests that educators can take proactive steps to create learning and social environments that are more supportive of LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming youth. Educators need to look seriously at the inclusion (or lack) of LGBTQ and gender-variant people in the school curriculum. LGBTQ students report feeling less isolated when they learn about nonheterosexual and gender-nonconforming people as a part of the regular school curriculum, and experience less homophobic harassment (Kosciw et al. 2014). Learning about LGBTQ, or gender-nonconforming, people also sends a message to straight students about the school's stance on homophobic and sexist teasing. We argue, therefore, that topics about sexuality, gender, and LGBTQ issues should be included in social studies, history, health, family life, and English courses. For instance, history classes should teach about LGBTQ liberation movements and the Stonewall riots, and English classes should discuss gay authors and homoerotic or sexually ambiguous themes in the writings of classic authors. Health and family life classes can discuss a variety of family forms, gender identities, and partnering preferences. Organizations and professionals from a range of disciplines have been mobilizing around issues of harassment, bullying, sexism, and homophobia in schools over the last decade.

A majority of LGBTQ students report experiencing discriminatory treatment by adults at school, such as not being allowed to participate in the same public displays as heterosexual students or being prevented from attending a school function with an individual of the same sex (Kosciw et al. 2014). Relatedly, a majority of schools do not adequately protect LGBTQ students from bullying, harassment, or discrimination. Eighteen states and Washington, DC, have enumerated bullying laws to protect students on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity; thirteen states and Washington, DC, have laws to protect students from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender

identity; and one (Wisconsin) protects students only on the basis of sexual orientation. Seven states—Utah, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina—actually forbid the discussion of LGBTQ people in a positive way; and two states, South Dakota and Missouri, prohibit school districts from enumerating bullying laws to protect LGBTQ students (GLSEN 2016). Whether transgender students have equal access to facilities corresponding to their gender identity under Title IX remains to be seen; there are active court cases at the time of this writing. Mandating bathroom use based on an individual's sex assignment at birth prevents transgender students from engaging in basic human functions and reinforces their marginalization.

Administrators can modify the social organization of schools so that they are less homophobic and more gender normative. Steps include placing affirming posters in classrooms, providing support for Gay/Straight Alliances, sponsoring inclusive assemblies and speakers, and reorganizing highly gendered school rituals. Recognizing LGBTQ issues by noting National Coming Out Day, ensuring that gay and lesbian students are celebrated during multicultural assemblies, and acknowledging the Day of Silence to protest discriminatory treatment of LGBTQ people would be easy ways to incorporate gay and lesbian visibility. Further, schools can rework rituals such as dances, proms, and homecoming to eliminate heterosexism and sexism. The messages conveyed to students through these rituals should not be that the school advocates and in fact demands heterosexualized gender difference. Rituals need to be organized to reflect the diversity of gender and sexual identities of all students. Developing gender-neutral titles instead of *prom king* and *queen*, and allowing same-sex couples to attend, will have a big impact on students, as will not requiring separate dress codes for youth based on gender (e.g., graduation robes or senior photos). Finally, vetting schoolwide performances for sexist or heterosexual content indicates to LGBTQ and gender nonnormative students, as well as straight and normatively gendered students, that school authorities do not tolerate gender- and sexuality-based harassment or violence.

## CASE STUDY 1 REVIEW

### Discussion Questions

1. What was the formal sex education curriculum at your school?
2. Do you remember bullying or harassment at your school? Was it different from or similar to what is described here?
3. How might schools be designed so that they are welcoming for all students?
4. Think about examples of the informal sexuality curriculum at your school. What did it consist of? What messages were given?
5. How can schools reorganize their curricula, policies, and practices to eliminate heterosexism, homophobia, heter-

onormativity, and sexism? How can they operate differently to accommodate LGBTQ, gender-nonnormative youth, and other marginalized populations (e.g., women, youth of color, and marginalized religions)?

### Suggestions for Further Reading

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