Queering Family Engagement in K-12 Institutions
Learning, Diversity, and Urban Studies Capstone
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Abstract

This paper serves two purpose: First, it explores existing research on queering family engagement, and secondly, it describes two potential resources that have been created as part of a holistic approach to queering family engagement. The literature review attempts to answer two questions: How can K-12 schools promote a safer environment for LGBT students and LGBT families by queering family engagement? How might queering family engagement for the LGBT community also improve family-school relations for other traditionally marginalized identities? While LGBT youth and youth of LGBT families are the primary focus of the literature review, all traditionally marginalized youth are meant to benefit from the queered family engagement strategies. Queer theory and intersectionality theory are prevalent in the research and are therefore utilized as the base for the two strategies meant to queer family engagement. These two strategies include a documentary addressing the need for intersectionality in teacher preparation programs and professional development and a Queering Family Engagement Program.

Keywords: LGBT, queer theory, intersectionality, family engagement

Literature Review

This literature review attempts to answer two questions: How can K-12 schools promote a safer environment for LGBT students and LGBT families by queering family engagement[1]? How might queering family engagement for the LGBT community also improve family-school relations for other traditionally marginalized identities? These questions position families and students whom identify as LGBT and/or as other traditionally marginalized identities as the learners to be observed in this literature review; they have been chosen as the focus of diversity as public schools are currently failing to provide the cultural enrichment and support that diverse students and families need to succeed. The urban learning context is inclusive of urban intensive, urban emergent, and urban characteristic K-12 public schools.

The literature review is structured as follows. The discussion will begin with a rationale of the difficulties that LGBT[2] youth and children of LGBT parents face in order to emphasize the importance of queering family engagement. Next, the literature review will explore the theories that provide a foundation for this exploration; queer theory, intersectionality, and critical consciousness are all utilized. From there, the importance of family acceptance will be discussed to emphasize why families of LGBT youth should be engaged in the first place. Then a brief section on the perceptions of LGBT inclusivity in schools will be discussed to demonstrate that LGBT issues are not a hidden subject that the public largely wants to ignore, but rather LGBT

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[1] In this context, queer is used in its verb form, meaning "to deviate from the norm." Pulling from queer theory, queering is a method used to challenge heteronormativity and gender binaries. Furthermore, it is used as an umbrella term to challenge all other forms of identity oppression as well.

[2] As authors tend to vary in the terminology used to address lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and questioning youth, the acronym LGBT will be used throughout the literature to provide consistency. This is not meant to leave out any identity; it is solely for the purpose of maintaining a singular definition when referencing queer youth and queer families. Furthermore, while many authors referenced in this study refer to parent involvement or parent engagement, it is important to know that family engagement is the title for this work as it is inclusive of all family structures that may serve as guardians to youth and engagement provides a more all-encompassing idea of how families are involved in schools.

topics are becoming more and more accepted. The literature review will finish with a deep analysis of family engagement strategies as they relate to supporting LGBT youth and families as well as supporting other oppressed identities.

Rationale

Researchers unanimously agree that LGBT youth are more likely than heterosexual-identified youth to be at risk of harassment and marginalization due to their sexual-minority status, and harassment can lead to negative health impacts such as depression, illegal substance use, and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Ulman & Ferfolja, 2016; Lindley & Reininger, 2001; Sadowksi 2010; Ryan, 2010; Fisher et al., 2008; Dessel, 2010; Kosciw et al., 2012; Mufioz-Plaza et al., 2002; Watson & Miller, 2012). According to the GLSEN 2017 National School Climate Survey, 60% of LGBT students have experienced some type of LGBT-related discrimination at school. Furthermore, the same study (GLSEN, 2018) finds that students facing harassment due to their sexual orientation are three times as likely to miss school, more likely to have a lower GPA, twice as likely to report that they do not have plans to pursue post-secondary education, more likely to be disciplined at school, and have lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression.

Fisher et al. (2008) emphasizes the complexity of the marginalization that queer students of color face due to their intersectional[3] identities; due to their "double" or "triple" minority status, queer sexual minority students may experience more harassment, discrimination, and marginalization. Furthermore, queer students of color may have to balance the norms and expectations of very different communities. Shelton (2017) also focuses on the importance of the

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[3] The concept of intersectionality has been utilized by women of color, such as Audre Lorde and the Combahee River Collective, to identify how interlocking systems of power impact those who are most marginalized in society. The term "intersectionality" itself was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989; however, the concept has been around much longer. In this literature review, intersectionality is essential to understanding how LGBT identities relate and interact with other traditionally marginalized identities in society.

intersectionality of race and sexuality. In her study, Shelton uses a focus group to investigate how a particular participant identifies as a queer person of color, and this participant outlines the interconnectedness of race and sexuality, specifically how racism and homophobia cannot be separated for queers of color. This is a perfect example of intersectionality at play.

Kosciw et al. (2012) report that overall anti-LGBT remarks have been slightly decreasing over time; however, there was an increase in LGBT youth reporting themselves as victims of cyberbullying. This indicates that this harassment is still valid, even if the form it takes is changing with the modern world. It is also important to note that the decrease of bullying is very slight; for example, there was a decrease from 26.3% in 2007 to 23.8% in 2009 for frequency of verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Children of LGBT parents also face bullying and discrimination due to their parent's sexual orientation (Bower & Klecka, 2009). Fox (2007) and Dessel (2010) report that this number of children is conservatively between one and nine million, but is likely to be higher, between 6 and 14 million (Fox, 2007); Gates (2013), using information from the 2010 Census, estimates that as many as 6 million American children and adults have an LGBT parent. Adding the number of children of LGBT families with the four to ten percent of the U.S. population that identifies as LGBT themselves (Dessel, 2010), it can be concluded that a significant percentage of the U.S. population is facing anti-LGBT discrimination in school settings. Therefore, it is integral that family engagement be queered in order to meet the needs of both LGBT families and LGBT youth.

Theory

Queer theory[4] is outlined in many of the studies as it provides a contextual understanding of the heteronormative patriarchy that currently controls society. Cohen (1997) brings intersectionality to the forefront of the queer theory and queer politics by positing that the notion of queer is rooted "not in our shared history or identity, but in our shared marginal relationship to dominant power" (p. 458). This concept allows one to use queer theory as an umbrella term that encompasses all minority identities, not just LGBT identities. This assumption does not intend to ascribe the connotation of LGBT to other minoritized identities that may not already embrace that intersectionality, but rather it offers the umbrella of queer as a means to build coalitions that might fight against the oppressive structures that negatively impact all of the aforementioned intersectional identities.

Several of the articles explored in this literature review pull directly from queer theory in their rationales. Ullman and Ferfolja (2016) base their study on the queer theory premise that schools are heterosexist organizations that promote dominant discourses of gender and sexuality in a way that normalizes heterosexism. Watson and Miller (2012) call for educators to dismantle the heteronormative frames so that sexual orientation oppression can no longer take place. Similarly, Bower & Klecka (2009) argue that teachers inherently have a sense of normal and deviant parents which leads to the privileging of heterosexual parents and the marginalization of LGBT parents, and they discuss the need to queer the heteronormative teacher social norms in order to create welcoming spaces for LGBT parents. A possible recommendation is for teachers to be introduced to heterosexuality and to acknowledge it; by making it visible it forces teachers to think about the privileges associated with it.

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[4] While queer theory is largely critiqued for focusing on a white, middle-class narrative, the queer theory utilized for the purpose of this literature focuses on a more intersectional approach to queer theory.

While all of these authors directly pull from queer theory as it relates to the LGBT definition of queer, Yull et al. (2018) argues that the dominant models of parent involvement are based on the values of White, middle-class families; they argue that families of color are traditionally left out of the White family engagement model, thereby invoking the broader definition of queer as inclusive of all marginalized groups, families of color in this case. Pairing this concept with Bower & Klecka's (2009) focus on the heteronormative structure of parent involvement, it can be argued that traditional models of parent involvement are based on the values of White, *heteronormative,* middle-class families; this distinction of adding heteronormative into this assumption is important when discussing how to engage queer youth and queer families. It is equally important to recognize the whiteness and middle-class aspects of dominant models of parent's involvement as one addresses the intersectionality of queer youth and queer families.

In addition to queer theory and intersectionality theory, Watson and Miller (2012) pulls heavily from the work of Paulo Freirean and offers a Freirean approach towards LGBT oppression. They suggest a framework that calls for the oppressed (LGBT youth in this case) to initiate action. It would appear then that Watson and Miller (2012) are calling for critical consciousness through youth participatory action research as a means to alleviate the social complexities that LGBT youth face. This combination of queer theory, intersectionality theory, and Freirean praxis can be used in conjunction to view family engagement as a viable means to promote social equality for LGBT families, LGBT youth, and all other marginalized identities.

Family Acceptance is Key

The Ryan et al. (2010) study addresses the lack of research on the influence of family acceptance as it relates to the health of LGBT adolescents and young adults. They used a

participatory research approach in order to increase representativeness and cultural competence. Their findings show a positive connection between family acceptance and health of LGBT youth. Specifically, they found that White families reported higher acceptance rates than Latino families; those born in the U.S. reported higher family acceptance than immigrants; participants without a childhood religious affiliation reported higher acceptance than those with a religious affiliation; highly accepting families reported low religiosity; and families with higher parental occupation status were more accepting. These higher levels of family acceptance are clearly linked to the positive health of youth in terms of self-esteem, social support, and general health. Rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts and attempts were lower for youth with highly accepting families (Ryan et al., 2010). These results show that family acceptance is key to supporting LGBT youth. While this particular study was meant to inform nursing practice and research, it can (and should be) utilized to inform school-family interactions as well. As families are clearly key in promoting the well-being of LGBT students, it is essential that schools help families utilize a strengths-based approach to adopt supportive behaviors for their LGBT youth instead of moving forward with limited information about sexual orientation and gender identity development.

In a separate article, Ryan (2010) points out that all "families want the best for their children-even if the way they express their care and concern is experienced as rejection by their LGBT children" (p.11). While not all families are equipped to react positively to their child's 'coming out,' that does not mean that they do not want the best for their child. Both of these articles presented by Ryan reinforce the importance of family engagement, which indicates that families need to be engaged by the school to support LGBT youth.

Sadowski (2010) builds off of Ryan's work on family acceptance and examines the relationship between schools and families of LGBT youth. While there is a need to tread carefully when discussing a student's sexual orientation with their family, Sadowski (2010) also argues that is essential not to leave parents in the dark about LGBT issues. Sadowski (2010) enumerates several examples of institution-level steps that can include families in the discussion of LGBT issues in schools as well as accepting behaviors that individual families can use to support their LGBT youth. Examples of institution-level steps are: a parent booster club in Santee, CA that raises funds and community support for the GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance), a forum on LGBT issues for parents and other community members held in Massachusetts that allowed families of LGBT students and LGBT alumni of the school to participate in a dialogue, and a state-level collaboration to educate parents and caregivers about LGBT issues through schools in Massachusetts. On a family level, Sadowski (2010) references a list of 55 accepting behaviors that families can demonstrate to influence positive developmental and behavioral outcomes in LGBT youth; a few of these behaviors include talking with a child about their identity, supporting a child's identity even if it makes the parent uncomfortable, bringing the child to LGBT organizations and events, requiring other family members to accept the LGBT child, connecting LGBT child with a LGBT adult role model, welcoming a child's friends and partners into the home, and believing one's child can have a happy future as a LGBT adult.

GLSEN (2018) finds that parent advocacy on behalf of LGBT youth promotes better wellbeing, including higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression. However, only a small percentage, 25%, of students report that their parents engaged in some type of advocacy on their behalf to make the school a safer, more inclusive space. School climate may or may not influence said advocacy; the correlational relationship between parent advocacy and LGBT-

related resources and supports at schools leaves it unclear which influences which. Regardless, it is important to note that parent advocacy on behalf of LGBT youth positively impacts health and well-being, therefore supporting the claim that family acceptance is essential.

Family and Community Perceptions of LGBT Inclusivity in Schools

Ullman and Ferfolja (2016) present research on parental perceptions of LGBT inclusivity in K-12 educational contexts. Overwhelmingly, the parents were in favor of some form of LGBT-inclusive education. Furthermore, parents were in support of an early start to LGBT inclusive education; however, it should be noted that parents suggested an incredibly heteronormative[5] framing of familial love. The participants agreed that LGBT education should be for all students and there should not be an option to opt-out of LGBT lessons, just as it would not be appropriate to opt-out of civil rights history. Another interesting discussion point in the Ullman and Ferfolja (2016) parent focus groups was the importance of engaging parents around LGBT inclusion. The parents in the study agree that the parent community should be informed about sexuality and gender expression topics being included in education; however, as schools don't typically inform parents about what goes on in other subject areas, it could be a touchy subject.

The size of Ullman and Ferfolja's (2016) study is limited as only 22 parents were interviewed; however, the parents do represent a wide range of school sites including public and private, primary and secondary. Another limitation is that Ullman and Ferfolja (2016) conducted

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[5] Heteronormative family structures are based on a set of nuclear family ideals, implicitly organized around White, middle class, monogamous heterosexual marriage, co-residence, and co-parenting. This allows certain family structures to be privileged and treated as "normal." Therefore, while it is positive that this study is inclusive of LGBT families, it is limited to LGBT families that conform to the normative family structure, i.e. monogamous, married couples that co-reside and co-parent. Truly queering K-12 educational contexts might allow for a more broad and open definition of family structures in the curriculum.

this study in Australia, where the political climate and laws are different from the U.S. However, a study done in South Carolina addresses similar themes.

Lindley and Reininger (2000) studied the support for homosexuality instruction in South Carolina Public Schools. The study was conducted through telephone interviews with South Carolina registered voters, and a total of 534 completed interviews were recorded, producing results on voter's support for 12 different sexuality education topics. The following list shows the topics listed with the most supported subject first: 1) sexually transmitted diseases, 2) sexual abuse, rape, and sexual assault, 3) parenting responsibilities, 4) abstinence, 5) importance of responsible relationships, 6) pregnancy and childbirth, 7) reproductive anatomy, 8) physical and social growth change; puberty/adolescence, 9) contraception, 10) sexual decision making, 11) abortion, and 12) homosexuality. Homosexuality had the least amount of support with 48% of voters supporting its instruction in public schools. The demographics of the voters that supported the instruction of homosexuality is interesting: 65% of Black respondents, 65% of Democrats, 56% of voters living in urban areas, and 60% with liberal religious ideology. The fact that most Black voters support the instruction of homosexuality fits into Cohen's (1997) queer politics that urges a coalition of identities that share a marginal relationship to dominant power; both communities of color and LGBT communities are marginalized, thus it is essential that they support one another in order to challenge dominant power.

The Lindley and Reininger (2000) study has its limitations as well. The study was conducted in the late 90s, and the political climate has shifted significantly since then. However, if these results show nearly half of the respondents as supportive of homosexuality instruction in public schools in the 90s, it might suggest that in 2019 the percentage would be higher. Another limitation is the phrasing of "homosexuality instruction;" originally the questionnaire framed the

topic as "sexual identity and orientation," but advisory committee members felt that these terms were too unfamiliar and ambiguous for the general public.

Both of these articles emphasize that there is a significant population that is welcoming to more LGBT issues being present in the school. If families and communities are welcoming to the concept of discussing LGBT issues in schools, it strengthens the argument for queering family engagement to include LGBT families and youth.

Queering Family Engagement for LGBT Families and Youth

Family engagement is essential due to its positive impact on student achievement; students perform better in schools when their families are actively engaged in their learning (Yull et al., 2018; Erdener, 2016). Students are shown to have improved outcomes (in terms of attendance, behavior, school retention, academic achievement, and wellbeing) when their parents are engaged in student learning and schools (Erdener, 2016).

Epstein's (2010) widely referenced framework of parent involvement includes six categories: 1) parenting, 2) communicating, 3) volunteering, 4) learning at home, 5) decision-making, and 6) collaborating with community. While Epstein's (2010) framework is widespread, that doesn't translate to being an entirely inclusive and queer model. In fact, Schutz (2006) critiques Epstein's framework for having a deficit view of community arguing that Epstein focuses on helping children fit into the dominant culture of schooling. Some authors offer differing approaches to family engagement than loosely follow Epstein's model, but offer a queerer approach.

Parenting. According to Epstein (2010), the parenting aspect entails helping all families establish home environments that support children as students; family support programs, home visits, and parent education courses are all examples of this category. The suggestion of Kosciw

et al. (2012) for families of LGBT youth to join their local PFLAG chapter encourages families to establish home environments that support the specific needs of their LGBT children. Ryan et al. (2010) advises schools to identify parents and guardians of LGBT children and provide them with specific guidance as to how to best support their children. Both of these suggestions follow Epstein's suggestion while providing a broader definition of how to support children in their home environment. This aspect can be further explored through an intersectional lens by providing family support groups based on identity affinities or by providing culturally relevant parent education courses.

Communicating. Communicating refers to the forms of school-to-home (and vice versa) communication that are used to discuss school programs and children's progress (Epstein, 2010). In terms of supporting LGBT youth and families, broader and more inclusive forms of communication may be considered. For example, Mufioz-Plaza et al. (2002) and Ryan et al. (2010) present a set of recommendations for supporting LGBT youth in school settings:

- Display LGBT materials throughout the campus

- Show no tolerance for anti-LGBT harassment

- Include sexual orientation in school non-discrimination policy

- Support LGBT teachers so they can be visible role models and mentors

- Include training on LGBT issues for all school personnel

- Sponsor a gay/straight alliance club

- Offer confidential, sensitive counseling

- Expand curriculum choices to include LGBT topics and issues

In addition to strategies that support LGBT youth, Fox (2007) enumerates multiple strategies for making educational setting more inclusive to LGBT families:

- Use the word 'partner' instead of gendered terms such as 'wife' or 'husband.'

- Leave space on enrollment forms for families to share as much information as they choose.

- Apply an inclusive definition of families and put it in the handbook.

- Display posters that represent LGBT families.

- Include sexual orientation in the non-discrimination clause and abide by it.

- Display queer affirming symbols.

- Include age-appropriate literature that represents the LGBT community.

- Stop derogatory comments immediately and explain why they are offensive.

These two lists are very similar and have a lot of overlap which indicates that supporting LGBT youth and supporting LGBT families are part of the same project for empowering the LGBT community in general via improved communication. These communication strategies can be used for other identities as well; for example, displaying posters of families of color or including wording such as "guardian" instead of parent can be approaches that are inclusive of a variety of intersectional identities.

Volunteering. According to Epstein (2010), volunteering is the recruitment and organizing of parents to help and support the school; classroom volunteer programs and parent rooms/family centers are both forms of traditional volunteering. Yull et al. (2018) offers a queer method of volunteering in schools (in this context, queer is used in its umbrella term definition that encompasses all marginalized identities). The study uses a community-based participatory research program to investigate the implications of a Parent Mentor Program in a small city with urban characteristics. The program allows parents of color who have traditionally felt marginalized in the school system engage in the classroom while simultaneously helping

teachers address cross-cultural miscommunication. The findings show that the Parent Mentor Program effectively creates a school climate and culture that is more inclusive; furthermore, the program helps keep students of color in the classroom. The Parent Mentor Program creates alliances between White teachers and parents of color to improve experiences of students of color. Could this type of approach be used to create an alliance between straight teachers/ LGBT students and families? The parents in the Yull et al. (2018) study were not placed in the classroom with their own children, rather they were used as a cultural resource for all students of color. It may be possible to implement a similar program utilizing LGBT parents and/or community members.

Learning at Home. Epstein (2010) defines learning at home as providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other school related activities. In terms of queering learning at home, LGBT issues must be first included in homework and curriculum-related activities. This references back to the concept that Lindley and Reininger (2000) explored about the community support for teaching homosexuality in public schools. If the curriculum includes topics on LGBT issues, it will open doors for families to communicate with their youth about LGBT identities. Furthermore, Epstein (2010) suggests sending information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home. To queer that concept, what if information, such as Ryan's (2010) recommendations discussed in the previous section, were sent home to facilitate a learning process about accepting LGBT youth?

Decision-Making. Decision-making is defined as including participants in school decisions and developing parent representatives in parent organizations (PTAs/PTOs) and district-level advisory councils and committees (Epstein, 2010). To queer this decision making,

Yull et al.'s (2018) study referencing the importance of the voices and contributions of families of color can be representative. Furthermore, the studies of Lindley and Reininger (2000), Bower and Klecka (2009), and Ullman and Ferfolja (2016) all highlight the power of allowing families to have input on the decisions to include LGBT issues in school settings and curriculum. Particularly, Bower and Klecka (2009) explore the social norms teachers have for parent involvement and how LGBT parents are positioned in those norms; the study finds that this heteronormativity results in inequitable schools' experiences for LGBT families and their children. Therefore, decision-making power needs to be given to LGBT families to disrupt the heteronormative attitudes of teachers. Bower and Klecka (2009) suggest that heterosexuality must be introduced into teacher education in order to undermine the invisibility of heteronormativity. Potentially that could position LGBT families in a place of power to add their voices into the decision-making process that could then advocate for LGBT-inclusivity within schools in curriculum and in school culture. Encouraging whiteness and other dominant, typically invisible identities to be introduced into teacher education could also be used to promote a queer learning environment for all identities.

Collaborating with community. Epstein (2010) defines collaborating with community as coordinating resources and services from the community for families and students and providing services to the community; examples of this may include providing information to families on community health and other programs or services. Fisher et al. (2008), in their discussion on strategies for promoting school success for LGBT youth, suggest the importance of support groups and counseling. While this might be a resource traditionally offered by schools to students, engaging community-based counseling for LGBT families as well could be a way of coordinating resources from the community to families in a queer manner.

Conclusion

While there is significant literature on queer theory, on intersectionality, on LGBT youth and LGBT families, and on family engagement, there appears to be a lack of research on the concept of queering family engagement. Therefore, the collection of articles and studies analyzed for this literature review may seem like a far-stretched connection of themes, but as is explored above, queer theory, intersectionality, and family engagement are all very much so interconnected. When discussing family engagement for families of LGBT youth, it is impossible not to address family engagement for LGBT families as the LGBT youth will likely be LGBT families themselves in the future. Therefore, it is essential that schools support LGBT individuals and families throughout the span of their lives, much like the way that heterosexual youth and families are supported in their entire journey within the education system. Furthermore, the concept of queer must be inclusive of families and students of color and families and students with other traditionally marginalized identities as schools are inherently set up to oppress any identity that does not conform to the White, middle-class, heteronormative model.

Family engagement seems to be a viable means of addressing these oppressive structures because of the known positive results of family engagement for all youth and because of the affirmative impact of family acceptance on LGBT youth in particular. Thus, this literature review has produced a look into the currently existing strategies of queering family engagement and calls for the continuation of said practices while continuously striving to further queer family engagement strategies in schools. The end goal is to provide a safe, nurturing learning environment for all students that acknowledges and embraces the unique intersectionality of each individual student.

Project Description

As queering family engagement is a lofty goal; I do not believe that there is one simple approach. Therefore, for my project, I have introduced two possible approaches that might be used *as part of* a holistic approach to queering family engagement. The methods I have chosen are 1) a documentary meant to address teacher preparation programs and administrators in charge of professional development, as well as 2) a family engagement program designed to work directly with families, students, and teachers. I started with the documentary, but I quickly acknowledged the need to expand the breadth of the intended audience. I decided that the Queering Family Engagement Program that I was developing would be an ideal companion to the documentary. These two methods are *not* inclusive of an entire, holistic approach to queering family engagement, rather they are a starting place.

Documentary: *No Single Issue Lives: Teaching at the Intersections*

This documentary is a compilation of interviews with teachers whom are currently teaching in K-12 public, private, and charter schools in Nashville. The documentary aims to explore what intersectionality means to teachers and how intersectionality plays out on a classroom level. The documentary was broken into several sections: First, teachers were asked to introduce themselves and name their identities. This was done intentionally to get the teachers thinking about their own identity and how that relates to intersectionality. Next, I encouraged teachers to explore their knowledge and views of intersectionality as a whole and specifically how intersectionality impacts their classrooms. Lastly, I asked teachers to share their perceptions about the role in which teacher preparation programs and professional development prepare teachers to address intersectionality. Teachers were encouraged to vocalize the positive and negative aspects of their respective teacher preparation programs and professional development

experiences. The overall goal of the project is that the professors in charge of teacher preparation programs and the administrators in charge of professional development will utilize this valuable teacher feedback when planning and implementing their respective syllabi.

Queering Family Engagement Program:

The family engagement program, originally created for my Queer Theory class, is meant to serve as an outline for a program that would be shaped by the exact environment and needs of the school in which it is implemented. The baseline syllabus I created is created for KIPP Collegiate High School, where I will be working for the 2019-2020 school year. The basic tenants of the reading list are pulled from queer theory and intersectionality theory, and I tried to pull a variety of content, ranging from academic papers to YouTube videos, in order to reach the various learning styles of families, students, and teachers. The goal is to create a collaborative, community-led effort of creating and maintaining a family engagement program that focuses on the people who are actually involved in the process.

Find the first two weeks of the program below:

Proposed Schedule*:
*Subject to change

Date	Topic	Content (The content is available for those who wish to engage with it; however, it is not a requirement. Feel free to read/watch any content that you feel comfortable engaging with.)
Week One (August 12-16)	Introduction	**Activities:** Restorative Circle: *This will be used to do introductions, set norms, decide on meeting dates/time, and create a communication plan.*
Week Two (August 26-30)	What is queer theory? How do we define queer?	**Readings:** Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" Dean Spade, *Normal Life* (Chapter One, specifically pages 63-64)

	Who does it include? How can a definition of queer unite us moving forward? What is the potential of a queer politics or of a critical queer and trans politics? Is queer a helpful term for this group? Or is there a more useful term to use?	**Videos:** https://www.ici-berlin.org/events/cathy-cohen-lecture/ http://www.deanspade.net/2013/02/09/impossibility-now-a-trans-politics-manifesto/ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lhk_Cc0tgSo **Activities:** Jigsaw Reading/Video Share-Out: *Let group divide into smaller groups based on a reading or video that they particularly enjoyed. Then groups will share out what they gathered from the content they chose This method will be used to direct the discussion as it will piece together different readings and videos into a cohesive message.*

Project Write-Up

Impact of Project

The documentary *No Single Issue Lives: Teaching at the Intersections* and the Queering Family Engagement Program are both meant to disrupt the heteronormative, oppressive education system that favors White, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gender students and families. The documentary and the family engagement program approach the same issue from different angles. The documentary is meant to be a wake-up call for teacher preparation programs and for administrators in charge of designing professional development (PD) sessions, whereas the family engagement program is designed for the families, students, and teachers themselves. The two together are meant to be part of a holistic, intersectional approach to disrupt the constructs of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and classism that plague the public-school education system.

As the documentary has been and will continue to be shared with teacher preparation programs and administrators, I believe that it has the ability to shift the manner in which our teachers are prepared for the classroom. We expect so much of our teachers, yet the training is inadequate. Therefore, I believe it needs to start in the training programs, whether that be a traditional four-year degree in education or an alternative preparation program, such as Teach for America or Relay Teaching Residency. In order for these preparation programs to instill an intersectional pedagogy in future teachers, the professors/trainers need to "walk the walk" and incorporate intersectionality into their pedagogy as well. I see this documentary as a call to action for professors to change their own practices and syllabi to be more intersectional. I am hopeful that the more professors who implement intersectionality into their own practice, the more prepared future teachers will be to meet the needs of their unique students.

Training and sustaining intersectionality-focused teachers is not solely dependent on teacher preparation programs nor solely dependent on professional development; rather, it is the combination of the two. Therefore, in addition to inspiring the professors/trainers who instruct pre-service teachers, administrators need to heed the same call to action. The training that happens in pre-service preparation programs will not be as beneficial if it is not continued in professional development sessions. Additionally, teachers who do not receive an adequate teacher preparation training are in high need of PD that fills the gaps. Therefore, the administrators that are designing the PD sessions need to "walk the walk" as well. Many teachers in the documentary state that they wish their PD sessions would deliver a toolkit of sorts designed for the specific school setting and content area. While the teacher preparation programs need to lay the groundwork of intersectionality with pre-service teachers, it is necessary for professional development to lay out usable skills and strategies, specific to their context. This will allow teachers to flourish in their classrooms, resulting in increased student success.

While the documentary will hopefully serve as a stepping stone towards improving teacher preparation programs and professional development, I have also devised a family engagement program meant to create an inclusive environment for all families. With its broad range of topics, various facilitation strategies, and careful consideration of logistics, it is meant to cater directly to families and students rather than to the school. For example, the program is designed to take place outside of school grounds in the hopes that this will allow families who may otherwise be uncomfortable attending a school event on campus. Additionally, childcare and food will be provided as this can often be a barrier to family involvement. Furthermore, the date and time will be chosen based on the attendees and what their needs are. The actual content

of the program is heavily centered in queer theory; therefore, it has the potential to seriously shift family, student, and teacher opinions on the status quo family engagement structure.

Relation to Literature Review

The literature review on queering family engagement relied heavily on queer theory and intersectionality theory to explain how family engagement can be utilized as a viable path to fully support LGBT youth and LGBT families; furthermore, these theories of relationality allow for the inclusion of other students and families with marginalized identities in the push for a queer family engagement program. The theories that guided the research have also been used to shape the two projects; queer theory is explicitly used to guide the family engagement program, and intersectionality is the obvious focus of the documentary.

The family engagement program has been designed with a combination of Cohen's (1997) definition of queer politics and the Epstein (2010) framework in mind. Cohen's (1997) call for all marginalized identities to utilize queer as an umbrella term was used as the overall goal of the project; the objective is to unite families and students of all backgrounds and identities into a shared sense of world-making. In addition to the framework of queer theory, I utilized tenants from all six of Epstein's (2010) categories- parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community- while creating the program. For example, the queering family engagement program clearly fits into the parenting category as it is a combination of family support and parent education; however, it does not slip into Epstein's deficit view that encourages children to fit into the dominant culture of schooling because the program positions families and students as the primary focus and as the primary leaders. This allows them to become self-actualized instead of attempting to conform to a broken system. Another example is the learning at home category. The queering family

engagement program allows families to expand their knowledgebase and critical consciousness which will in turn allow families to help students with their own critical thinking process.

The documentary may seem a little bit more distant from the literature review as it does not directly speak about engaging families of LGBT youth and LGBT families; however, it is absolutely integral to the self-actualization that needs to occur on all levels if family engagement is ever truly to be queered. The documentary calls for teacher preparation programs and PD that instills intersectionality in their teachers. Part of intersectionality is understanding one's own identities and the privileges and oppressions that play out in their lived experiences; understanding intersectionality as a lens of analysis and as a pedagogical tool is therefore necessary for promoting self-actualization. This view of intersectionality is undeniably intertwined with queer theory, which was hinted at in the literature review. While intersectionality theory invests in the concept of recognizing individual identity, it is also essential to viewing the systems of power that impact all of society. That second portion of the definition directly relates to queer theory as queer theory pushes for a more collective identity, and it is within the intersectional analysis of power, that one can truly understand how queer theory can unite all identities that may not share all attributes but share a marginalized relationship to dominant power.

The literature review specifically addressed the issues that LGBT youth and children of LGBT families face, but also linked it to similar experiences of other marginalized youth. Queer theory and intersectionality theory were integral to making those connections, so it is only natural that the projects are grounded in the same theories. This holistic approach to the literature is replicated in the project component. Queering family engagement requires a holistic approach

as it is not a single-issue, rather it is a series of interconnected and overlapping issues that are best defined by queer theory and intersectionality theory.

Challenges

In the course of creating the documentary, I interviewed eight educators within the metro Nashville area from public, charter, and private schools. Each interview lasted from 15 to 20 minutes resulting in an abundance of material. Unfortunately, I needed to condense this wealth of information, which resulted in a loss of teacher voice. I was unable to highlight absolutely everything that each teacher said, and it was difficult to pick out the segments that would most accurately encompass that teacher's message. I truly believe in the power of storytelling as a means of growth; therefore, I loved highlighting individual teacher voices and I wish I had been able to showcase more of their stories. Unfortunately, the constraint of creating a documentary that viewers will sit through limited this.

Additionally, the sample size was a challenge that I encountered. While I thoroughly enjoyed the interviews with all eight teachers, I acknowledge that they cannot speak on behalf of all other Nashville educators. In a district as large as Metro Nashville Public Schools, I feel that only interviewing eight teachers barely makes a dent. Future work may include interviewing more teachers as well as developing a survey that might allow the voices of more educators to join the conversation on intersectionality in the classroom.

Outcomes

In creating both of these resources, I've learned a great deal. From the documentary, I was able to gain insider knowledge from teacher perspectives. As I am not a certified teacher, it is invaluable for me to hear teachers speak from their perspective in the classroom. I truly believe that anyone who wants to improve the education system needs to spend more time

discussing with the people investing the most time in the classroom: teachers. From the family engagement program, I've been able to analyze the intricacies involved in arranging any type of family program that is truly equitable and accessible. While I have not yet implemented the program, I was able to troubleshoot as I created a tentative program. Trying to consider all of the obstacles and barriers that families might face that could prevent them from attending a family engagement program opened my eyes to the intricacies involved with family engagement, and I am confident that I will learn more when I actually implement this program.

Next Steps

The documentary, *No Single Issue Lives: Teaching at the Intersections,* will be shown to the Department of Teaching and Learning at Vanderbilt in the hopes that it will initiate a change in the current teacher preparation program at Peabody College. From there, I would like to see it expand to other universities as well as other K-12 institutions. I have already made plans to show the film for several professors at Peabody, and I intend to work with the same Peabody professors to circulate the documentary to professors at other teacher preparation programs.

I am planning on implementing the family engagement program at KIPP Collegiate High School where I will be working for the 2019-2020 school year. I will be starting as the Operations Coordinator for the school, but hope to be doing family engagement work as well. While I do not foresee being able to fully implement the family engagement program within my first year, I do intend implementing it piece by piece. Eventually, I hope to fully implement the program and be able to help other schools create similar family engagement programs that work for their school and their families.

These two pieces are the beginning of a more holistic approach to queering family engagement. I fully intend to circulate the documentary to as wide of an audience as possible,

and I intend to put the family engagement program into practice as well, eventually adapting it for other schools. However, these are not the end-all-be-all of queering family engagement; they are just a start. My future work includes further researching queer theory and intersectionality and attempting to understand their relation to educational settings, family engagement, and pedagogy. It is my goal to continue to development resources that will disrupt the heteronormative, oppressive education system; this is just the beginning.

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