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Bisexuality and School Culture: School as a Prime Site for Bi-Intervention

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Bisexuality has been a neglected topic in U.S. schools. This is not entirely surprising given bisexuality's marginal positionality in U.S. society. Before exploring how, and to what degree, bisexuality gets treated in schools, this article sets the larger context by beginning with a brief description and analysis of societal attitudes about bisexuality in general. Then, an examination of the status of bisexuality in schools with particular foci on the curricular (e.g., the sexuality education and general curriculum) and extracurricular (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliances) components is undertaken. Finally, reasons are offered about why bisexuality should be genuinely and fully included in sexuality education and other courses across the curriculum and in extracurricular settings. The main arguments advanced are that there has been widespread binegativity in U.S. society that not only has been harmful to bisexuals, but also has reified and reproduced binary, dichotomous thinking about sexual and gender matters, rendering bisexuality invisible in most circumstances in schools. Another critical point is that though schools are well positioned to eradicate binegativity and use teaching about bisexuality as a way of doing positive cultural work surrounding sexuality and gender, major school reform—including structural changes to the curricular and extracurricular aspects of schooling—needs to occur.

Thanks and gratitude are in order for Dr. Mickey Eliason and Dr. Gust Yep, who are dear friends and colleagues and whose sharp intellect and dogged commitment to gender and sexual justice have forced me—in the very best sense of the term—to think more deeply about various interventions needed to create a more just, equitable and nonviolent world for sexual and gender 'minorities.' My own thinking and academic work have profited enormously from the influence they have had on me as coauthors, and as academic comrades in general.

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Youth culture is permeated by nuance, especially with regard to sexuality. Sexual behavior and sexual orientation flow within various gender expressions and changing definitions of what is gay, bisexual, straight. If pushed they might agree to vague terms such as “queer” or “not straight.” (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 209)

Bisexuality unsettles certainties: straight, gay, lesbian. It has affinities with all of these, and is delimited by none. It is, then, an identity that is also *not* an identity, a sign of the certainty of ambiguity, the stability of instability, and a category that defies and defeats categorization. (Garber, 1995, p. 70)

Bisexual youth say they have not gained knowledge about bisexuality at school but on their own. In their opinion the sexual education at school seems to reinforce traditional division of homo- and heterosexuality and of masculinity and femininity. (Kangasvuo, 2003, p. 210)

Bisexuality has been an acknowledged phenomenon by sex researchers for more than a century. It has enjoyed some attention by anthropologists, biologists, classicists, historians, psychologists and sociologists among other academics. Writing about bisexuality’s presence throughout the early history of the Western world, Eva Canterella (2002), a classicist at the University of Milan, documented the pervasiveness of bisexual behavior in the ancient Western world. Despite these studies and the fairly recent integration of bisexuality in models of sexual identity development, in many ways—and in most instances—bisexuality has enjoyed little more than a nod by U.S. society. In general, bisexuality continues to be given short shrift as a legitimate sexual identity by scholars in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) studies and sexuality studies more broadly, as well as by LGBT social/political organizations. This is reflected in schools in terms of the curricular and extracurricular activities. In this article I provide a brief treatment of general societal attitudes about bisexuality. Then I turn to an exploration of how the broader societal views of bisexuality are reflected in school culture, and finally I turn to ways in which schools can be more inclusive of bisexuality as a form of attraction, sexual identity and/or sexual behavior.

BROAD SOCIETAL VIEWS ABOUT BISEXUALITY

Although bisexuality is a concept familiar to most, it is curious why it is not more ‘on the map’ in terms of being thoroughly integrated in scholarly

and general discourses. For the most part, bisexuality has not been fully recognized as a genuine and valid sexual identity and sexual lifestyle. There are multiple reasons why bisexuality is not viewed as a fully legitimate, even believable, sexual and social identity and lifestyle. Steven Angelides (2001) puts it best by asserting

Doubts about bisexuality are not new. Various characterized within dominant discourses of sexuality as, among other things, a form of infantilism or immaturity, a transitional phase, a self-delusion or state of confusion, a personal or political cop out, a panacea, a superficial fashion trend . . . even a lie . . . , the category of bisexuality for over a century has been persistently refused the title of legitimate sexual identity. (p. 1)

Besides the reasons indicated above, there is still a considerable level of heteronormativity at work, and bisexuals continue to be admonished because they are not heterosexuals (Queen, 1996). The story is even more complicated. Our society tends to be monosexist (see Israel & Mohr, 2004) in that most individuals believe that sexual identity and sexual behavior should be (perhaps, may be only) centered on either same-sex or so-called opposite sex. It constitutes an 'either/or' proposition. Often it is difficult for most individuals to believe and accept that it is possible for individuals—adolescents and adults—to genuinely have a stable sexual identity that includes sexual attraction/contact and/or romantic feelings for both members of the same sex and the other sex.

Bisexuality, in theory and practice, in many ways defies the monosexist model which, in part, has generated prejudice against bisexuals on a number of fronts and has permeated social life in the United States. *Binegativity*, a term that refers to a number of negative attitudes about bisexuality and bisexuals (see, e.g., Eliason, 2001), captures much of the prejudice and resulting violence perpetrated against bisexuals from not only heterosexually identified folks, but also from gay/lesbian identified individuals. As Alexander and Yescavage (2003) pointed out, although there are some members of the gay and lesbian 'community' who accept bisexuals as part of the queer clan, "others, however, question whether bisexuals and the transgendered really 'belong' to the gay and lesbian community" (p. 3). A shared sexual minority status offers little acceptance of bisexuals by many gays and lesbians. Then, there are those in the 'straight community' who write bisexuals off as queers who best belong in the 'gay and lesbian community.' Binegative beliefs and attitudes are widespread and play out in various ways. Some manifestations of binegativity are expressed in the following commonly held beliefs:

- Bisexuality is farce and has no basis in reality, namely, bisexual people are nonexistent (Angel, 2008; Human Rights Campaign, 2010).

- Bisexual people face less discrimination than gays and lesbians (Angel, 2008).
- Bisexuals are in a transitional state from hetero land to homo land (Burleson, 2005).
- Bisexual people are really gay or lesbian but don't have the courage to come out (Eliason, 1997).
- Bisexual males are vectors of disease (primarily HIV/AIDS) and spread sexually transmitted diseases to the straight community (Burleson, 2005; Eliason, 1997).
- Bisexual people are incapable of being monogamous (Eliason, 1997; Human Rights Campaign, 2010).
- Bisexual people are confused and cannot make up their minds (Human Rights Campaign, 2010).
- Bisexuals are confused about their identity (Eliason, 1997).
- Bisexuals conveniently use their bi-identity to enjoy heterosexual privilege (Burleson, 2005).

The list above is hardly exhaustive. These binegative beliefs (sometimes referred to as *biphobia*) and attitudes are widely cited in the literature (for additional examples, see Burleson, 2005; Eliason, 1997; Eliason, 2001; Fox, 1996; Garber, 1995; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Kangasvuo, 2003; Kaplan, 1995). It goes without saying that binegativity has had, and continues to have, a deleterious impact on bisexuals. Schools, as an integral institution of U.S. society, have been inhospitable and downright negative to sexual minority youth (including bisexuals) in a few significant ways.

BISEXUALITY AND SCHOOL CULTURE

Schools are a microcosm of what transpires in the broader societal context. Schools have been hostile to sexual minority youth, including bisexuals, as evidenced by the results of a recent nation-wide empirical study. Specifically regarding bisexuality, there has been an absence and even silence in the school curriculum and in other aspects of schooling. Mistreatment of sexual minority youth in schools by other school-aged individuals, in addition to the curricular and extracurricular silence about bisexuality, is negative forces confronting bisexual youth. First, let's turn to the compelling yet haunting results from a major study, and then an examination of the curriculum concerning bisexuality is in order. An influential and widely cited study involving 1,732 respondents (students) regarding school climate issues and *LGBisexualTQ* youth was published by the Harris Interactive and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) in 2005. In sum, it revealed that schools in the United States remain dangerous places for sexual minority

youth. For instance, 89% of respondents reported hearing the often-uttered derogatory comment “that’s so gay.” Nearly 20% of the respondents heard homophobic comments, and seldom did school personnel who overheard such comments intervene in any way. Sixty-four percent of the respondents reported being verbally harassed. Thirteen percent were physically harassed, and 18% were physically assaulted. Many students were not out at school, and scores of others did not feel comfortable being themselves at school (Harris & GLSEN, 2005).

Although GLSEN has done a considerable amount of important work to bring more social justice to schools throughout the United States since becoming a national organization in 1995, including conducting a nationwide school climate survey, the survey results make little distinction about how school climate affects specific subsets of sexual minority youths. School climate results were not offered specifically for bisexuality. In other words, there is no information presented about how bisexually identified students (or those who indicate that they are neither straight nor gay/lesbian—increasingly, many youth refuse to be labeled at all) experience school climate regarding their bisexuality. For purposes of visibility and to aid in making targeted, specific interventions in schools for bisexual students, it would be valuable for future surveys to include questions specifically about bisexuality, however broadly defined, to assist school teachers, nurses, counselors, security personnel, administrators, community members, students and parents to be able to target interventions to counter and address the insidious binegativity, biphobia that undoubtedly continues to exist in school culture due to sexual and gender hierarchies, which stress heteronormativity with all of its attendant proscriptions.¹ As the curriculum is the bedrock of the school experience, it is important to examine how bisexuality has been treated in this realm of schooling.

Curricular Obliteration

Heteronormativity is promoted, reified and reproduced in schools. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that schools have largely neglected sexual minority issues, especially bisexuality, in the curriculum and in extracurricular programs. In terms of the curriculum, generally issues related to queer youth in schools fall within multiculturalism and the sexuality education curricula. There is a scarcity of information specifically about whether bisexuality is part of the curriculum. An examination of the multicultural education curricula, however, reveals that “the majority do not address the concern of queer youth within the official curriculum. These missing discourses tell queer youth that they are not worthy of inclusion, that they are and ought to remain invisible” (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004, p. 155). This sort of curricular neglect is also true for school-based sexuality education.

Sexuality Education

Historically, sexuality education has been extraordinarily heterosexist even to the extent of passing and enacting federal legislation in support of abstinence-only-until-marriage, which sends a strong message that sexual contact is reserved for heterosexually married individuals. The Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) was passed in 1982, and the most recent legislation was the Title V portion of the Social Security Act, which was passed in 1996. The content of both of these federally based approaches to sexuality education involved restricting discussions and lessons about sexuality to heterosexuality. In most instances coverage of bisexuality and homosexuality was strictly prohibited. In fact, all content in textbooks, workbooks, lessons and lectures reflected the ideas that there were benefits to physical, social and emotional health from postponing sexual activity until (heterosexually) married, and that sexual behavior outside of marriage would likely have negative health outcomes. What results is that

Students leave the classroom with an understanding that heterosexuality is more revered and is simply better than other sexual identities [and behaviors] and lifestyles. Discussions about bisexuality and homosexuality rarely occur... Essentially, this approach conveys the message that bisexuals, gays, and lesbians are not 'fully sexual human beings' and that their sexuality is downright wrong. (Elia, 2005, p. 51)

This unwaivering heterocentric focus has been a prominent feature of school-based sexuality education since its inception in the early 20th century (Elia, 2009). Sexual and gendered others/minorities are systematically erased and have been for about a century. Again, it should be noted that the term *bisexuality* is rarely if ever uttered. Even when opposition is leveled against abstinence-only-until-marriage sexuality education, often the 'umbrella terms' such as LGBT or queer are identified as groups opposing such measures. Bisexuality gets 'lost in the shuffle.' This is highly problematic and serves to keep bisexuality deeply buried in the closet.

Another issue from which bisexuals and bisexuality have suffered in general and specifically concerning school-based sexuality education is what I have come to call the 'plight of the alphabet soup approach to inclusion.' Anyone who is even remotely familiar with the literature has seen the LGBT moniker, which has expanded over the years to include *LGBisexualTQQI* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex). For all intents and purposes, it is an empty *B*. It has been a placeholder for bisexuality/bisexuals in the string of letters that are reserved for sexual and gendered others. Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh (2004) indicated that "it seems as if gay and lesbian issues (but not necessarily queer, bi- or transgendered) are appearing everywhere" (p. 151). Although it would be incorrect for me to assert that there has been no work done along bisexual lines as far as

school-based sexuality education is concerned, bisexuality is still grossly underrepresented in the literature. For instance, while doing the research for this article, I found a plethora of scholarly articles on *LGBisexual*TQ youth, but only very few dealing specifically with bisexual youth, and even fewer focusing on bisexuality and school-based sexuality education. Bisexuality and bisexuals only receive a paucity of treatment.

Perhaps the most prominent institutional proponent of broad-based, comprehensive school-based sexuality education in the United States is the Sexuality Information Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). In 2004 it produced the third edition of the *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Kindergarten through 12th Grade*, which offers developmentally appropriate information about a number of aspects of sexuality along the lines of the biological, ethical, sociocultural, psychological and spiritual aspects of sexuality. Whereas bisexuality is mentioned along with gay and lesbian identities and behavior as valid and acceptable, the guidelines are vague when it comes to bisexuality. For example, bisexuality is not clearly defined, and there are no concrete suggestions about how to approach bisexuality in the classroom in terms of readings, lessons, classroom activities or assignments. Although well intentioned, SIECUS falls into the all-too-common practice of invoking 'bisexuality' without offering substantive suggestions about how to provide comprehensive educational experiences for those students receiving sexuality education. Again, we are faced with the 'empty *B*.'

Beyond the concern that SIECUS glosses over bisexuality is how sexual identities are characterized in the guidelines. They are portrayed as fixed. The terms *bisexuality*, *bisexual*, *gay*, *lesbian*, and *homosexuality* are mentioned as essentialized and unchanging. Offering a critique of the *SIECUS Guidelines*, Elia and Eliason (2010b) noted, "How about the growing number of youth who identify as queer or blur the lines between gay, lesbian, and bisexual and heterosexual sexualities? And, where are gender queer youth in the guidelines?" (p. 34). Additionally, the guidelines tend to 'collapse' all of the sexuality identities together and perpetuate the notion that all sexual minorities—LGBT—get lumped together by highlighting the similarities shared by LGBT people. For example, the guidelines state that "gay men, lesbians, bisexuals are alike in most ways" (for a detailed critique of the *SIECUS Guidelines*, see, e.g., Elia & Eliason, 2010b). It is concerning that SIECUS uses the rhetoric of lumping all sexual identities together as this obscures palpable individual differences. It is critical that bisexuality, for example, stand on its own (i.e., be split apart from other sexual identities, behaviors, etc.). Such lumping together (e.g., LGBTQ) serves to make bisexuality invisible in sexuality education, if the lesson even goes so far as addressing 'sexual minority' issues. What results is systematic erasure, which is a form of violence and neglect. Given the number of youth who identify as bisexual, queer, gender queer or who refuse to claim any sexual identity (see Savin-Williams, 2005),

it is incredibly important to mark bisexuality specifically and deal with it substantively in the sexuality education curriculum.

Typically, U.S. school-based sexuality education has virtually ignored the fuzzy, blurry gender and sexual world. Therefore, it is important that we move to question critically and dismantle the binary paradigm and way of thinking. In her article on the problematic aspects of binary thinking, Rebecca Kaplan (1995) noted, “[b]inary thinking is a constraining mode of thought, which divides the world into two discrete boxes. This highly pervasive form of thought leads to the erasure of bisexuality” (p. 267). There is perhaps no more pernicious way to symbolically and materially harm a group of people than to systematically erase their existence. Bisexuals as individuals and bisexuality as a sexual identity have paid a tremendous price due to societal erasure. The cultural hegemony of heteronormativity has been “the quintessential force creating, sustaining, and perpetuating the erasure, marginalization, disempowerment, and oppression of sexual others” (Yep, 2003, p. 18). Erasure of the bisexuality has, indeed, been closely associated with, if not the main cause of, marginalization, disempowerment and oppression of bisexuals. Yep (2003) also called attention to the discursive, physical and symbolic violence that sexual others routinely face due to hegemonic sexual and gender hierarchies. Bisexuals certainly have continued to endure such violence and at every level. Sexuality education in schools could potentially play a significant role in mitigating, if not eliminating altogether, the erasure and ensuing violence from which bisexual people and their allies have suffered.

Bisexuality Beyond the Curriculum

The most commonly documented form of violence against sexual and gender minority youth focuses on bullying in schools. There is a tremendous amount of literature on bullying of sexual minority youth. School-based sexuality education has been mostly silent about bisexuality and has colluded in its erasure, nevertheless students who are either out as bisexual or queer, or who are perceived to be gay, lesbian, questioning or gender nonconforming are targeted by other students and are often subjected to verbal and physical assaults. The results of the Harris Interactive and GLSEN (2005) school climate survey, mentioned earlier, shows this quite clearly. Put in even more stark terms, “[o]ver 1.6 million public school students are bullied because of either actual or perceived sexual orientation” (Morillas & Gibbons, 2010). Equally alarming is that much of the time adults who witness bullying and violent behavior—verbal or physical—tolerate it (Weiler, 2003). This violence needs to be combated and not tolerated.

Sexuality education based on democracy, nonviolence, and antioppression, in part, can be instrumental in stemming the tide of taunting and bullying. As just one example of an intervention, the philosophy and practice

that have emerged from school safe zone programs could be infused in the sexuality education curriculum. The basic tenets of safe zone programs are to create a safe, supportive and welcoming environment for sexual and gender minority students. Integral to the safe zone programs are allies—students, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel—who provide support. The principles of safe zone programs should be infused throughout the curriculum and permeate school culture—curricular and extracurricular, including social events. Safe zone programs should not be viewed, however, as a panacea to combat biphobia, homophobia or sexual prejudice in general. Although they are helpful, they have limitations (Ngo, 2003). Along with infusing safe zone practices in the sexuality education curriculum, there needs to be concerted efforts to reform the sexuality education curriculum to reflect and respect sexual and gender diversity. There is no substitute for deep and meaningful curricular efforts—in sexuality education and across the curriculum—that enlighten the school community about bisexuality and lessen binegativity. Beyond using curricular interventions to ameliorate such violence, an examination of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and how bisexuality is treated in this arena is in order.

On the extracurricular level, perhaps the most prominent organization that predominantly serves gay and lesbian youth in schools is the GLSEN, which is the parent organization for GSAs that serve youth. No one can deny that GSAs have not only brought gay visibility to scores of schools across the United States, but also have offered support and safety to sexual minority students. It is widely known that, in part, GLSEN's chief purpose is to be supportive of all sexual minority students. However, I am concerned that in GLSEN's name we see the binary being reproduced. The words *gay*, *lesbian* and *straight* appear in the title of the organization (to be read as Gay/Lesbian [homosexual] ←————→ Straight [heterosexual]), but nowhere are the terms *bisexual* or *queer*, *transgender* or *questioning* in the title of this organization. By virtue of the title of the organization—GLSEN—there is a binary set up, and as a result there is at the very least the perception of exclusion. GSA represents another example. The same could be said about the groups Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Children of Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (COLAGE), and similar organizations. These organizations have done a tremendous service, but how can we make them even better in terms of casting a broader net to include a variety of sexually and gender non-normative students, including those who resist being gender or sexually labeled? There are many youth who resist such labels (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Conceptualizations of Bisexual Youth: Some Complexities and Realities of Bisexuality

A critical aspect that has been missing in schools—and in a lot of scholarship, for that matter—is an earnest treatment of intersectional forces that shape

individuals' experience particularly regarding oppression and privilege. As a matter of fact, this is an issue in the curriculum and in GSAs. Additionally, this is an important factor for school nurses and counselors, for example, to understand and consider when working with bisexual youth. For instance, it is critical to know that not all bisexuals experience the world in the same way. An upper middle-class, able-bodied White bisexual young man is likely to have different experiences than a working-class Latino bisexual male. Even though they both self-identify as bisexual, their worldviews will likely be different given not only issues of socioeconomic class, social location, race and so on, but also how they experienced privilege and/or oppression. Similarly, an upper-class African American bisexual young woman would experience the world differently than a working-class Asian American, or White young bisexual woman. It is critical that various vectors (e.g., race, class, sexuality, gender, ability, etc.) be marked and that a conscious effort to begin to undo oppression, invisibility, injustices, inequities of not only bisexual youth, but of other vulnerable populations across the sexual and gender continua.

A good place to begin such efforts would be to interrogate Whiteness in school culture. Writing about the problematic aspects of White privilege, Kevin Kumashiro (2001) asserted, "...we insist that white-privilege is invisible, unspoken, and normalized in U.S. society" (pp. 3–4). It is important to mark and disrupt the status quo of Whiteness when teaching about bisexuality or otherwise working with bisexual youth in schools. This is important in general, but perhaps even more pressing when working in urban school settings with diverse populations. GSAs and similar extracurricular support groups for sexual minority youth face specific challenges particularly in serving students of color, and/or non-native English speakers; issues of racial segregation and the 'normalization of Whiteness' are barriers to serving students who could otherwise benefit from participating in such school-based organizations (McCready, 2003). Continuing to sound the alarm about sexual minority youth of color, Blackburn and McCready (2009) declared "we are concerned about how GSAs, in particular, seem to be inadequate for LGBTQ youth of color" (p. 227). While working toward making bisexuality more visible and inclusive, it is imperative that we do so very consciously and carefully so as to not reproduce the kind of racism, classism, sexism and sexual prejudice that continues—however unwittingly—to be part of schooling in the United States. Chun and Singh (this issue) provide a tool for conceptualizing various aspects of experience and identity for bisexual youth of color.

Another far-reaching critical issue is the lens through which we view bisexual youth, namely, as individuals who need to be protected from themselves and others, as individuals on the precipice of doom, or contrarily as hearty, creative, resilient young people with a vigor for sexual openness. This is debated in the literature. What it centers on is yet another binary

of resilience (protective factors) versus risk factors. Stephen Russell (2005) noted that historically research and programmatic concerns focused on individual risk factors, which was based on a genuine concern for the welfare of sexual minority youth. It is a philosophically contested issue, about which researchers, teachers, school administrators, parents and youth argue. An exemplar on the resilience side of the debate is Savin-Williams (2005) who believes that many sexual minority youth are self-assured and able to handle the vicissitudes of their lives as *LGBisexualTQ* youth. He went on to say “[w]ithout minimizing the experiences of those in distress, I wanted to suggest that there is another side to being young and gay. Not all such adolescents were suicidal. I wanted to argue against a problem-centered approach and for a perspective that celebrates the promise and diversity of gay teens” (p. 62). Talburt (2004) argued along similar lines in favor of a more resiliency approach, adding that what adults view as risky behavior might well be interpreted in a positive light as imaginative and workable by others. She also claimed that sexual minority youths’ needs are no more transparent than their heterosexual counterparts. Other researchers are quick to be concerned with such issues as school failure, homelessness, substance abuse, discrimination, suicidality and other risks (see Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Von Wormer & McKinney, 2003). A plethora of research studies highlight the risk factors associated with being a sexual minority (*LGBisexualTQI*) youth. In fact, the majority of the commentaries and scholarly writings focus more on risk factors than on resiliency (protective factors). Interestingly and somewhat predictable, however, in keeping with the dearth of specific information on bisexual youth, the vast majority of the work conducted in this area lumps all of the youth (*LGBisexualTQQI*) together.²

Returning to the issue about whether researchers and those working with sexual minority youth should follow the resiliency (protective factor) model or the risk factor paradigm, I think we should stay completely away from the either/or proposition. Following one approach or the other is not only contraindicated, but downright dangerous. As Russell (2005) noted, historically there has been much focus on the risk factors of sexual minority youth. Currently there is research being conducted blending the risk factor and resiliency approaches. A cursory examination of the current landscape of such research reveals that there is a continuum ranging from those on the one side who are staunch advocates of the risk factor approach and in between there are those who, to lesser and greater degrees, blend the two approaches, and on the other side of the continuum are those who focus their research on resilience/protective factors. It is critical that anyone doing work in this area, academic or otherwise, should work with the tensions that are produced from both models. The truth is that many of these youth are sophisticated, savvy, ingenious and solid problem solvers, and at the same time we continue to confront the reality that heteronormativity still

reigns supreme and *LGBisexualTQ* people in general face enormous sexual prejudice, hostility, and shabby treatment in general. Specifically regarding bisexual youth, they often have to confront negativity directed at them from several fronts, including the 'gay and lesbian and straight communities' for reasons mentioned earlier. The bottom line is that those working in the area of bisexuality should not stay stuck in the 'ain't it awful' mode, which would keep bisexuality lodged in the victimology, pathological framework, and at the same time it is also important to not approach bisexuality entirely from the strengths-based perspective (absent of a real-world acknowledgment of the far-reaching biphobia), which would not be based in the reality that there is, indeed, ubiquitous binegativity. Logically, an amalgamation of the two approaches is the best way to proceed (Mufioz-Plaza et al., 2002).

SCHOOL AS A PRIME SITE FOR BI-INTERVENTION

Schooling is perhaps the single most significant institutional experience that youth from age 5 to 17 years share in common. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Statistics, in 2007 approximately 86% of school-aged youth attended public schools, 11% attended private schools and about 3% were homeschooled (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The main point is that given such a high percentage of youth attend school, it stands to reason that schools are necessarily well positioned to intervene in terms of creating an atmosphere in which bisexual students—and all sexual minority youth, for that matter—are safe, secure and productive. Private elementary and secondary schools are not in the public trust per se and have their own policies and procedures. They certainly operate more independently than public schools. Although administrators, teachers and parents can be encouraged to be more kind and inclusive to *LGBisexualTQ* students in these private school settings, there is no real leverage to hold them accountable; these schools are not subject to much public accountability and scrutiny. And, though public schools are in the public's trust, it is clear from the literature that they have a long way to come in terms of being safe spaces for *LGBisexualTQ* youth. Despite the fact that public schools do not have a particularly good track record of being safe and productive sites for *LGBisexualTQ* young people, it is awesome to think about the magnitude of positive change these schools could potentially make toward not only the eradication of binegativity—and sexual and gender prejudice (i.e., biphobia, homophobia and transphobia) in general—but also to effect positive social change regarding bisexuality. Achieving such a change toward more bifriendly schools would require that structural changes (reform) be made at the curricular and extracurricular levels.

Curricular Interventions

The study of bisexuality should not be ghettoized in one particular aspect of the curriculum. As mentioned earlier, one logical place for teaching about bisexuality in the curriculum is in sexuality education, but bisexuality ought to be taught across the curriculum in a sustained way. Heteronormativity runs so deeply in the curriculum (e.g., in lectures, readings, discussions, textbooks, assignments, films, etc.) that often *LGBisexualTQ* issues are given little if any attention at all. In fact, not only are *LGBisexualTQ* students viewed as the other and coverage of sexual minority issues often reduced to one-time lessons, but also school books containing *LGBisexualTQ* content have been banned in the United States and Canada (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). Although the lack of *LGBisexualTQ* instruction in general subjects is somewhat understandable given the history of U.S. schooling (although wholly unacceptable), one would think that at least a fair amount of *LGBisexualTQ* education occurs in sexuality education. However, by and large this is not the case. In fact, very little is covered, especially due to the focus on abstinence-only-until-marriage approach, which has constituted the vast majority of school-based sexuality education for the past 15 years since the abstinence-only federal legislation was passed (Elia & Eliason, 2010a, b). The bottom line is that there is very little systematic *LGBisexualTQ* instruction happening. It is mind boggling that heteronormativity has continued to dominate the overt and hidden curricula. It is irresponsible for U.S. public schools to deny the existence of their sexual and gender minority youth. Writing about the importance of adopting a democratic approach to schooling, Ian MacGillivray (2000) observed,

In line with the ideals of a liberal democracy, schools should not advocate certain lifestyles, whether religious fundamentalist or homosexual, but they should provide information on both in a nonthreatening and tolerant atmosphere. This requires that the curriculum and practices of the school reflect all of the sexual orientations and gender identities its students represent. (p. 319)

For this sort of approach to be implemented a concerted and sustained effort—including, but not limited to political work at the local, statewide, and federal levels—needs to occur.

A commitment and an investment need to be made regarding full curricular inclusion of *LGBisexualTQ* issues and individuals. This translates to strong policies, and a commitment on the part of a school community, including all stakeholders. Parental engagement is a critical for such an effort to be successful. There needs to be an infrastructure in place, and schools can no longer afford to rely on ‘permissive’ or ‘cool’ teachers to raise issues about sexual and gender diversity. There needs to be a comprehensive approach to ensuring that these issues are taught across the curriculum. For such an

enterprise to be successful, a number of aspects need to be put in place and institutionalized. One important and overarching task is to develop and implement school district policies that specify nondiscrimination and inclusion of sexually and gender diverse students and employees (e.g., administrators, coaches, counselors, nurses, librarians, front-office staff members, security personnel, teachers and other staff members).³ Such policies should be based on democratic and nondiscriminatory values and should include all aspects of school culture from athletics, classroom instruction, performing arts, to extracurricular activities (e.g., school clubs and organizations, including their social events, need to be explicitly open to all students; Weiler, 2003). It is critical that such policies are threaded through every aspect of schooling. As part of the implementation process, school personnel need to be supported in making such a critical change in school culture. A specific example of this, for instance, is to offer regularly scheduled in-service workshops for teachers to learn innovative and effective ways of how to create curricula and gain classroom management awareness from democratic, multicultural and intersectional perspectives. All school personnel—from the principal to the custodial staff—should learn how to (and be expected to) intervene when sexual prejudice manifests itself as verbal taunts and harassment are directed at bisexual and other sexual minority students.

Another important facet of inclusion concerns teacher education (involving future teachers who are enrolled in credential programs). From the perspective of teacher education programs, it is time that professors of teacher education (and student teacher supervisors) equip future teachers with skills to teach about *LGBisexualTQ* issues from democratic, multicultural and intersectional perspectives. To date this is a subject that remains ‘under the radar screen’ with the exception of occasional and intermittent coverage of sexual minority issues in multicultural aspects of teacher preparation coursework. Given that *sexual minority* is generally code for gay and lesbian, it is critical that bisexuality be marked and discussed in a thoughtful and thorough way so as to not only avoid commonly-held misconceptions (leading to binegativity) about bisexuality, but also treat bisexuality in a positive manner.

Once in the classroom, teachers need to pay keen attention to the adoption of textbooks and other reading materials and create class activities and assignments that genuinely reflect *LGBisexualTQ* life. Examples of readings from literature include Petronius’ *Satyricon*, Sappho’s love poetry, Shakespeare’s sonnets numbers 20 and 42, Marlowe’s poem *Hero and Leander*, Lord Byron’s poetry, Oscar Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Gray*, E. M. Forster’s *Maurice*, Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, D. H. Lawrence’s novels, Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead*, James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country*, French novelist Colette’s works, Margie Percy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Norman Mailer’s *Ancient Evenings*. Although not all of these works portray bisexuality in a positive light, they nevertheless include bisexual themes and can be used

as 'teachable moments' to explore the realm of bisexuality and potentially combat binegativity through discussions, written assignments and other class activities (for even more detailed information on examples of bisexual literature listed above, see Hall, 2002) The above-mentioned readings constitute examples that would generally be well suited for courses in American and English literature. It is also important to integrate and infuse instruction about *LGBisexualTQ* issues, concepts and individuals throughout as many classes and subjects as possible beyond literature and sexuality education courses and ensure sustained, in-depth coverage throughout the entire semester or school year. It is vital to infuse *LGBisexualTQ* content thoroughly rather than use a superficial additive approach in which content gets piled on top of a fundamentally flawed curriculum.

To support curricular innovations regarding bisexuality and other sexual minority content, it is important that school libraries contain substantial collections of *LGBisexualTQ* books, periodicals and academic and community resources for any student or staff member who wishes to read about, explore or do research on *LGBisexualTQ* issues; it is critical that the library contain such materials. Librarians need to make an extra effort to obtain as many bisexual books as possible given that bisexuality has gotten glossed over in teen literature, for example. In fact, Bjorkman (2010) noted that, "only eight out of the 200+ titles . . . have bisexual characters or themes. Until recently, the in-betweens hovered on the fringe of the literary rainbow world. For instance the Lambda Literary Award only began recognizing bisexual lit in 2006, though the award started in 1988" (para. 1). This underscores the importance of having a knowledgeable, committed and bifriendly librarian.

It is equally important to avoid adultist assumptions about the needs and interests of bisexual students and their fellow sexual and gender minority peers: allow them to co-create the curriculum and assist in the governance of school matters. Create an atmosphere in which these youth feel empowered and comfortable articulating their educational and social wants and needs. Getting *LGBisexualTQ* youth genuinely engaged in school would increase their visibility and make their school experience rewarding and productive.

Real-life engagement with the larger community (including theatrical performances with *LGBisexualTQ* themes, community-based organizations/social service agencies that serve sexual and gender minority individuals and families, guest speakers, etc.) would be a worthwhile endeavor. This translates to developing relationships with community-based *LGBisexualTQ* youth organizations such as the Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center [LYRIC], which is based in San Francisco. There are a number of such organizations nation-wide.

On the extracurricular front, organizations that are specifically supportive of *LGBisexualTQ* students (e.g., GLSEN's GSAs, except with a more inclusive title and mission statement—it is critical that bisexual and transgender aspects are highly visible, and a special focus ought to be placed on

being deliberately inclusive of students of color, non-native English speakers, people with disabilities and others who have been historically excluded in addition to their *LGBisexualTQ* status/identity) need to have a strong presence in schools. Extracurricular programming is important in schools, and as already mentioned, GLSEN's GSAs have been a mainstay for a plethora of sexual minority youth across the United States. In fact, they have been the most prominently featured organizations within schools that expressly support *LGBisexualTQ* youth and their allies. Although the spirit and intentions of GSAs are spot on, there is some fine tuning to be done to ensure inclusivity—and eliminate the binary—even if only to retitle GSA to signal a more comprehensive and an all-encompassing approach to supporting all sexual and gender minority students. Additionally, McCready (2003) sounded the alarm about the possible lack of inclusivity for urban youth or color and non-native English speakers in GSAs and similar extracurricular organizations. There are cosmetic and structural issues with GLSEN's GSAs that need overhauling.

Despite the concerns one might have about GSAs, the truth is that over a relatively short time span literally hundreds of GSAs are estimated to be instituted in schools across the country (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002). There is every indication that this proliferation of GSAs will continue into the foreseeable future. Besides the concerns I raised earlier about GSAs, another disconcerting factor is that GSAs have functioned more or less to correct and/or pick up the slack of the school. Pat Griffin and Matthew Ouellett (2002) pointed out that “GSAs are only part of the bigger picture. . . . Without change throughout a school's organizational setting, the gains of one year may be lost when GSA members graduate or club advisors retire, change schools, or move on to other work” (p. 2). U.S. schools have been inhospitable to *LGBisexualTQ* youth since the inception of schooling. School culture, including curricular and extracurricular programs, needs to be reformed to be truly inclusive. Just as the additive approach to covering *LGBisexualTQ* content in classrooms is inappropriate, it is wholeheartedly misguided to have GSAs or similar organizations operating in schools in which the daily functions of schools are in many ways working against the ultimate mission of GSAs, namely, to make schools safe spaces for *LGBisexualTQ* youth and their allies. On the whole, schools have functioned antithetically to GSAs. Schools and their extracurricular counterparts need to work in harmony toward inclusivity, and specifically to foster and ensure social and sexual justice in schools.

The time has come to include bisexual content throughout the school curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels. Of course, it goes without saying that it is important to teach about *LGBisexualTQ* issues in an age-appropriate manner, as a teacher would teach any subject. One example of an age-appropriate activity for elementary school students is to show *It's Still Elementary*, a follow-up documentary film on the original *It's Elementary*, which portrays elementary and secondary schoolteachers teaching lessons

about sexual minority people and issues. This could produce a plethora of teachable moments. Another idea would be to include reading children's literature with *LGBisexualTQ* themes. It would also serve teachers and administrators well to read and discuss William J. Letts and James T. Sears' (1999) *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue about Sexualities and Schooling*. This would serve to educate school personnel about the theoretical underpinnings and practical reasons for including such an emphasis in elementary schools. Introducing such controversial content into the curriculum would likely create uneasiness among many parents. To maximize understanding and support and minimize negative fallout, it is critical to engage parents in the educational process. It is important for teachers and principals to contextualize the importance of such educational interventions to parents, and to stress that ultimately *LGBisexualTQ* inclusion in the curriculum demonstrates a commitment to democratic, antioppressive schooling in which respect is given to all. The same principles apply when integrating such matters into the secondary school curriculum. Although it is not easy work, it is truly needed. Besides the curricular aspect of school, it is critical that schools complement their academic programs with extracurricular programming (particularly at the secondary school level) in support of *LGBisexualTQ* students and their allies.

CONCLUSIONS

Schools remain the most hopeful site of correcting the destructive forces of societal sexual and gender prejudice. In the scope of sexual and gender minorities, it is safe to say that bisexuality has been the most invisible inside and outside of the curriculum (Kangasvuo, 2003).⁴ This is alarming given the number of youth who defy labels and those who are questioning their sexual identities (see Hollander, 2000; Savin-Williams, 2005). And, many more declare that they are bisexual or queer. It is critical that bisexuality become much more visible in the curriculum and in extracurricular programming. It is, however, not simply a matter of visibility. It is the quality of visibility that remains of paramount importance. The manifestations of binegativity have included, but not limited to, giving bisexuals 'bad press' as fence-sitting, duplicitous, untrustworthy and confused individuals. What would be more positive and empowering is to portray bisexuals as cultural workers, who potentially have much to teach us about the malleability of sexuality. That is, teaching about bisexuality becomes an intervention in terms of not only combating the binary and rigid thinking that has dominated Western thought about sexuality and gender, but also affording us a genuine opportunity to examine the complexities and potentialities of gender and sexuality as well. It is much like trans folks being cultural workers in terms of demonstrating the flexibility of gender constructions and variations of gender presentations

and performances. We have a wonderful opportunity ahead of us to begin to undo the widespread binegativity and use teaching about bisexuality in schools as a vehicle to liberate us from constraining and negative views about sexuality. It is a worthwhile cultural and educational project, and schools are a prime locale to engage in such meaningful and fruitful work.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Rubin (1993). It offers a critical analysis of the system of sexual hierarchy and the politics of sexuality.
2. For a thorough description and analysis of the risk factor versus resiliency debate, see Fisher (2009).
3. For an explanation about the importance implementing statewide and local policies, see Griffin and Ouellet (2002). This essay provides a thoughtful and detailed account of the importance of policies to institutionalize safe schools for *LGBisexualTQ* individuals.
4. Although Kangasvuo's (2003) essay focuses on bisexuality in schools in Finland, from everything I have learned implicitly from the literature, there are uncanny similarities in terms of how bisexuality is (not) treated in schooling in Finland and in the United States.

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