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Homophobia and sexuality diversity in South African schools: A review

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ABSTRACT

Post-apartheid, there has been an increase in research on issues of gender and sexuality diversity in South African schools. To build upon and advance gender and sexuality diversity studies, I conducted a review of the literature that addresses how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth experience schooling and how schools, if at all, respond to gender and sexuality diversity. Of the 27 publications reviewed, the findings show how schools proliferate compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity. The proliferation makes explicit gender and sexuality binaries in the curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture that assume that learners identify as heterosexual and embody heteronormative gender expression and expectations. In a nutshell, the corpus of research describes the challenges LGBT youth face in schools and points to the need for change. I conclude by offering ideas about schooling, teacher education, and future research on gender and sexuality diversity in South African education.

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Introduction

Schools are not merely sites for the learning of academic subjects but also places where young people and their teachers do a great deal of work on the construction of their identities in a whole range of ways, notably, around issues of sexuality which is intimately connected with struggles around gender (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Epstein, 1997; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Mandel & Shakeshaft, 2000; Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2005; Pattman, 2005; Unterhalter, Epstein, Morrell, & Moletsane, 2004). To the extent that schooling influences the academic success of all learners, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students (Black, Fedewa, & Gonzalez, 2012; Kosciw, Gretak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Richardson, 2009), school climate remains largely unexplored spaces. Yet no studies in South Africa have synthesized the corpus of research and literature on how LGBT youth experience schooling. In this article, I review published articles

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on gender and sexuality diversity in South Africa schools and address the following questions: How do LGBT youth experience schooling and how do schools, if at all, address gender and sexuality diversity? Schooling, one of the most important socializers in society, is used to describe the character and climate of schools inclusive of the curricular and social-emotional experience. In fact, Fields and Payne (2016, p. 1), in their “Editorial Introduction: Gender and Sexuality Taking up Space in Schooling,” ask how attention to schooling might broaden our analysis of the many lessons about gender and sexuality circulating in contemporary schools beyond policy, curriculum, and pedagogy. Clearly, there is a need to deepen our understanding of schooling, especially as it pertains to making critical connections among anti-heterosexism, teaching, learning, and learner support.

In post-apartheid South Africa, a review of the primary research on gender and sexuality diversity and schooling is necessary. It enables us to monitor the possible gap between schools’ espoused democratic ideals, as articulated by South Africa’s progressive constitution, and LGBT learner experience of their schooling. Second, LGBT learners’ educational experiences and how schools respond to gender and sexuality diversity have the potential to show us where the levers of change lay, particularly whether change is required. Not to engage with these possibilities for change would not only intensify the impact of heterosexism on LGBT youth but be damaging in a variety of ways to all learners. Evidence drawn from a sample of primary research can snowball genuine processes for teachers, school leaders, parents, and policy makers to collaborate toward creating socially just and inclusive schools for all learners. Finally, the review has potential implications for thinking about and advancing the methodological orientation used in understanding gender and sexuality diversity in South African education.

The introductory section has provided an overview of gender and sexuality diversity and schooling in South Africa. In the sections that follow, I first detail the methodology used in the review of the articles. Next, I engage with how the various articles respond to the two research questions. I conclude and bring the paper together in the discussion.

Method

Research Index, ERIC, Multicultural Education Abstracts, Social SciSearch, PsychINFO, and Sociology of Education Abstracts were consulted. More than 10 key terms were used to search for relevant books, book chapters, and articles ranging from the general (e.g., sexual orientation, sexuality diversity, sexuality education, non-normative sexualities, homophobia, heterosexism, heteronormativity, and LGBT) to the more specific (e.g., pedagogy, curriculum, youth, schools, schooling, citizenship). I also employed a snowball technique whereby additional studies were identified through review of bibliographies of studies identified through the initial search. This manual search process was useful in generating “grey literature,”

which included primary research published outside journals included in computerized bibliographic databases. Reviews of bibliographies yielded two additional studies, characteristic of grey literature, that met the selection criteria.

Sources used for the desktop review include published reports, research in peer-reviewed journals, books, and book chapters on gender and sexuality diversity and schooling known by the author. By using these sources, I worked with the assumption that the publications included in the review attain at least a basic level of research quality and rigor. A total of 69 studies were screened and assessed for eligibility, and 27 were included in the review. Publications were excluded if they focused on LGBT issues outside of schooling. For example, articles that paid attention to LGBT issues and higher education (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Johnson, 2014; Msibi, 2015; Nzimande, 2015; Richardson, 2004), LGBT youth outside of schools (Bagnol et al., 2010; Reygan & Lynette, 2014), or same-sex-parented families (Breshears & Beer, 2016), among others, were excluded. The present research review article is not an update of a previous review. All articles were published between January 1999 and December 2016. Table 1 summarizes the 27 publications that constitute the sample of articles reviewed. All the articles reviewed were published in English.

To increase my familiarity with the literature, I read all the articles and made notes on a spreadsheet. Once all the articles were read, I cross-referenced themes and adopted a within- and cross-case analysis to generate preliminary thematic codes that were created based on the initial patterns observed (Merriam, 1998). To provide an overview of general trends and patterns, I have categorized the literature into three sections: (a) heterosexism and schooling, (b) the teaching and learning of gender and sexuality diversity, and (c) researching LGBT youth (see Table 1). Each section was also further broken down into subsections. For example, section 1—heterosexism and schooling—was subdivided into the perspectives of (a) LGBT youth, (b) teachers, (c) school leaders and managers, and (d) peers. In categorizing the published literature into these sections, there was certainly overlap. After reading each source, I collated the data onto a spreadsheet that responded to the research questions. One of the dilemmas in writing a review based on a small sample of published writing is the presentation. The conundrum is how to present each article in a way that allows for a comprehensive analysis of context, sample, methodology, and findings which are necessary but with the cost that it produces a truncated article. In some cases, truncation was necessary, but this is after all a characteristic of within- and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998).

There is not an abundance of writing on the schooling experiences of gender and sexuality minorities, and this is acknowledged by researchers who write about the difficulty of researching LGBT learners in South Africa (Richardson, 2008a). Given the culture of compulsory heterosexuality promoted by schools and families, as well as peer policing of heterosexuality, it is not always possible to deliberately seek out LGBT learners within the school (Reddy, 2005; Richardson, 2008a). This difficulty is evidenced in the available studies that deal with the experiences of

Table 1. Gender and sexuality diversity and schooling (articles in chronological order).

Sections	Year	Author(s)	Title	
1. Heterosexism and schooling	1999	Deacon, R. A., Morrell, R., & Prinsloo, J.	Discipline and homophobia in South African schools: The limits of legislated transformation	
	2011	Human Rights Watch	"We'll show you you're a woman." Violence and discrimination against Black lesbians and transgender men in South Africa	
	2003	Butler, A., Alpaslan, A., Allen, J. G., & Astbury, G.	Gay and lesbian youth experiences of homophobia in South African secondary education	
	2005	Astbury, G., & Butler, A.	Youth, education, and sexualities	
	2006	Kowen, D., & Davis, J.	Opaque young lives: Experiences of lesbian youth	
	2008	Butler, A., & Astbury, G.	The use of defence mechanisms as precursors to coming out in post-apartheid South Africa: A gay and lesbian youth perspective	
	2012	Bhana, D.	Parental views of morality and sexuality and the implications for South African moral education	
	2012	Bhana, D.	Understanding and addressing homophobia in schools: A view from teachers	
	2012	Msibi, T.	"I'm used to it now": Experiences of homophobia among queer youth in South African township schools	
	2013	Francis, D.	"You know the homophobic stuff is not in me, like us, it's out there." Using participatory theatre to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity in a South African school.	
	2013	Sigamoney, V., & Epprecht, M.	Meanings of homosexuality, same-sex sexuality, and Africanness in two South African townships: An evidence-based approach for rethinking same-sex prejudice	
	2014	Bhana, D.	Under pressure: The regulation of sexualities in South African secondary schools	
	2014	Bhana, D.	"Managing" the rights of gays and lesbians: Reflections from some South African secondary schools	
	2015	Langa, M.	"A boy cannot marry another boy": Adolescent boys' talk about "gay" boys at school	
	2015	McArthur, T.	Homophobic violence in a Northern Cape school: Learners confront the issue	
	2016	Francis, D. & Reygan, F	"Let's see if it won't go away by itself." LGBT microaggressions among teachers in South Africa	
	2016	OUT LGBT Well-being	Hate crimes against lesbian, gay and bisexual transgender (LGBT) people in South Africa, 2016	
	2. The teaching and learning of gender and sexuality diversity	2009	Richardson, E.	Considering the lives of LGBT youth in HIV & AIDS education efforts
		2012	Francis, D.	Teacher positioning on the teaching of sexual diversity in South African schools
2012		Potgieter, C., & Reygan, F. C. G.	Lesbian, gay and bisexual citizenship: A case study as represented in a sample of South African life orientation textbooks	
2013		Potgieter, C., & Reygan, F. C. G.	Representations of LGBT identities in textbooks and the development of anti-homophobia materials and a training module	
2014		Wilmot, M., & Naidoo, D.	"Keeping things straight": The representation of sexualities in life orientation textbooks	
2014		DePalma, R., & Francis, D.	South African life orientation teachers: (Not) teaching about sexuality diversity	
2015		Reygan, F., & Francis, D.	Emotions and pedagogies of discomfort: Teachers responses to sexual and gender diversity in the Free State, South Africa	
3. Researching LGBT youth	2016	Francis, D., & Reygan, F.	Relationships, intimacy and desire in the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in South Africa	
	2017	Francis, D.	Troubling the teaching and learning of gender and sexuality diversity in South African education	
	2008	Richardson, E.	Researching LGBT youth in post-apartheid South Africa	

LGBT youth from the perspectives of teachers (Bhana, 2012b, 2014b; Deacon, Morrell, & Prinsloo, 1999; Francis, 2012; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Reygan & Francis, 2015), preservice teachers (Johnson, 2014), school managers (Bhana, 2014a, 2014b), parents (Bhana, 2012a, 2014b), and peers (Bhana, 2014b; Francis, 2013; Langa, 2015; McArthur, 2015). Although the research with teachers, preservice teachers, school managers, and parents do not reflect the lived experiences of LGBT youth in South Africa in any straightforward manner, they do highlight the complex ways in which sexual orientation and gender are made explicit in schools and how heterosexuality is normalized. These publications provide an abundant description of the social context of schooling and how heterosexism is enacted within this context.

The available studies that do focus directly on LGBT youth are not exclusively about young people attending school. The sample in these studies include tertiary students and post-school youth (Butler, Alpaslan, Allen, & Astbury, 2003; Butler & Astbury, 2008; Kowen & Davis, 2006; Msibi, 2012; Wells & Polders, 2006), out-of-school youth (Butler et al., 2003; Butler & Astbury, 2008; Reygan & Lynette, 2014), and young people in employment (Reygan & Lynette, 2014; Wells & Polders, 2006). The diversity in these youth samples might have to do with Richardson's argument about the challenges of conducting research with youth in schools. Richardson (2008a, p. 137) writes, "one of the major obstacles that researchers of LGBT youth encounter in South Africa is the lack of access to these adolescents." And so, while the available studies are not drawn directly and exclusively from school-attending LGBT youth, they are useful in giving us a sense of the schooling experiences of young gender and sexuality minorities.

How do LGBT youth experience schooling?

LGBT youth in schools experience significant homophobia and transphobia in school environments. Butler et al. (2003), in a qualitative study conducted over a 3-year period on the coming out experiences of 18 South African gay and lesbian youth, reported that all participants experienced discrimination, isolation, and nontolerance within their high school contexts. The 18 sexual minority youth detailed how they experienced harassment, inflicted by peers teachers and school administrators, avoidance, rejection, and isolation. A gay participant in the study tells about two gay friends in the school who had committed suicide after the headmaster threatened to expel them because of their sexual orientation (Butler et al., 2003, p. 13). The research, done by Butler et al. (2003, pp. 9–19), provides insight on the heterosexism experienced by the LGBT participants in their high school settings that had a detrimental effect on their psychosocial development and education. Related, McArthur (2015, p. 4) writes about homophobic violence in a Northern Cape school:

The extent of homophobia and homophobic violence in the school leaves many boys vulnerable. They feel alone and isolated, to the extent that they are frequently absent from

school. When asked about their experiences of homophobia and homophobic violence, I could hear anger as well as a deep sense of sadness.

McArthur (2015) concludes that there is a clear sense of unhappiness and frustration, which is linked to the workings of an oppressive milieu operating at the school in which a culture of violence thrives.

In another study in the Gauteng region, Wells and Polders (2006) report on victimization and homophobia experienced in school. Their findings highlight that victimization on the basis of sexual orientation was widespread and included verbal and physical abuse including rape. Similarly, a study by the Human Rights Watch (2011) provides empirical evidence that schools perpetuated and reinforced social prejudices and discrimination toward LGBT learners. For example, the following narrative of Tanesha, a 13-year-old lesbian, describes how a teacher victimized her: “She tried to chase me from the class because she didn’t want to teach an *istabane*.¹ I try to ignore all this because I have to finish school and support my family. ... There’s no one at school I can talk to” (Human Rights Watch, 2011, p. 61). Like the Wells and Polders (2006) study, the report also draws attention to how school managers and teachers enforce heteronormative dress codes for the learners, which contribute to a hostile school environment, forcing many LGBT and questioning learners to leave and end their school education. Suma, referring to her challenge of the schooling authorities to allow her to wear trousers, tells: “I gave up. I didn’t finish matric. If I can get a job this year, next year I can go back to finish school.” Chipo, another lesbian, was also often sent home from school for wearing trousers and faced constant harassment from teachers and students. Chipo dropped out of school in grade 10, at the age of 16 (Human Rights Watch, 2011, pp. 60–62). Kowen and Davis (2006), too, highlight the rampant heterosexism lesbians experience in schools and the communities in which they live. They report that “in the South African context, coming out means confronting a range of punitive social controls, including, among others, abandonment, rape, physical violence, censorship[,] and accusations of witchcraft” (pp. 82–83).

While the primary source of victimization was fellow learners, teachers and principals were also perpetrators. Msibi (2012) writes about teachers being central in spreading the idea that homosexuality was contagious, and therefore heterosexual learners were seen as being in danger of being “infected” by LGBT learners. One of the participants in his study noted: “I was at school, and Mrs. Nhleko called me to the staffroom. She started shouting at me and was telling me to stop acting like a boy. She said I need to stop this lesbian thing because I will start making other learners like me” (Msibi, 2012, p. 524). Seven of the studies reviewed reveal how LGBT youth are victimized and harassed and yet lack the protection and support of teachers and school leaders (Bhana, 2012b, 2014a; Butler et al., 2003; Francis, 2012; Kowen & Davis, 2006; Msibi, 2012; Wells & Polders, 2006). Kowen and Davis (2006) disclose how educators condone hostility at school. In many of the studies, teachers and school administrators express personal prejudice (Bhana,

2012b, 2014a; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Reygan & Francis, 2015) and avoid the issue of same-sex sexuality (Bhana, 2012b; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2012; Reygan & Francis, 2015) or alternatively make their heterosexist views known to pupils (Msibi, 2012). In Bhana's study with 25 teachers, coming out as homosexual was not regarded as appropriate in schools and relegated to the realm of the private outside the school. Denying the existence of sexuality diversity in schools, Bhana (2012b, p. 312) argues, meant that teachers did not have to deal with nonheterosexuality. Msibi (2012) found that LGBT youth had negative experiences of schooling that ranged from punitive actions expressed through derogatory language to vicious reactionary hate, often expressed through violence and often perpetrated by teachers. A gay learner in Msibi's (2012, p. 525) study tells: "I am used to it now ... Mr. Mncube dragged me by my neck and told me to stop bothering them in the staffroom. He had done this to me before. He likes pushing me and shouting at me in front of other teachers whenever I go to the staffroom. He always says he doesn't like *istabane*. Other teachers just laugh and do nothing." Often teachers are not equipped or are ill-informed to deal with gender and sexuality diversity, and this leads to a lack of response by them or failure to respond in a meaningful, constructive way to the hostility (Bhana, 2012b; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2012). Teachers and school leaders who do not act on homophobic bullying show their complicity and send a message that such violent and verbal acts are acceptable.

Of the 53 teachers responding to Deacon, Morrell, and Prinsloo's (1999, pp. 7–8) survey research on attitudes about sexual orientation, 6 of the 18 men participants answered that they would get angry, threaten, or assault the "offender" and 9 indicated that they would ignore the person. Nearly half of the women teachers said that they would ignore someone who was gay, lesbian, or bisexual, while over a third said that they would get angry or threaten such a person. Fewer than 20% said that they would talk to the person. Verbal discussion concerning sexuality diversity "demonstrated that 'talking to the person' would involve reference to the Bible and an attempt to draw the person from his or her evil ways" (Deacon et al., 1999, pp. 7–8). Deacon et al. (1999) highlight the lingering heterosexist attitudes in schools.

Bhana's (2014a) research on school managers and how they manage the rights of LGBT youth is particularly relevant given the absence of this sample in the gender and sexuality diversity research in South African schools. Principals and heads of departments remain of crucial importance for addressing social inequality in education. The school managers in Bhana's (2014a, p. 7) study betray the rights of LGBT youth, as one of the school managers states: "That's why I say as long as it's not a major issue, it is their situation, they sort it out ... I'm not saying they are not human beings, I'm just saying, don't put it in my face and expect me to do something about it, it's not what I believe in." Overall, the school managers' responses can be summed up as one of silence and denial. As one put it, "I haven't experienced anybody who is homosexual [at school], probably there are. Probably

they are still in the process, in the closet. I didn't see any in this school." Such denial and silence reinforce and contribute to making LGBT youth invisible in schools and society, and one of the manifestations of this is violence. On the other hand, when teachers and school managers are supportive, it makes life better for LGBT youth. In Msibi's (2012) study, learners reported that when they had a supportive teacher, they were more likely to complete schooling successfully. They noted that the friends they had and the great support from some teachers were enough for them to survive (Msibi, 2012, p. 529).

The literature also reveals learners' perceptions of and attitudes toward LGBT youth (Francis, 2013; Langa, 2015). Langa explored how 32 adolescent boys (31 straight and 1 gay) in two South African township high schools talked about "gay" boys in their schools. The key findings characterize homosexuality as "un-Christian, sexually aberrant, perverse, contaminating[,] and threatening to the institution of the heterosexual family" (Langa, 2015, p. 32). Largely determined by heteronormative traditional and religious beliefs, the participants' responses conflated gender and sexuality as one. William, a participant, tells: "[T]hey were born with a penis, and now they are not using it. So I feel that they should be punished." And Martin, another straight participant, said "[W]ith a 'gay' boy there is no magnet in him to get attracted to girls. He is just stiff." This sex-gender-sexuality rigidity pervades the narratives of the young participants, and there is an uncanny inciting of violence against gays because they are perceived as "a disgrace to males" or "contaminated" (Langa, 2015, p. 315). In addition, the participants misappropriate religious, specifically biblical, verses to argue against same-sex relations.

The learners in Sigamoney and Epprecht's study (2013, pp. 90–92) generated an index of pejorative labels used to discriminate against or talk about those who are same-sex-attracted. The learners tell that the labels are used for "talking about them in a bad way" and "not treating them like we treat us the normal people." Similarly, Francis (2013) writes about how 15- to 18-year-old learners in a coeducational school in the Free State experience and respond to heterosexism and heteronormativity. He concludes that the participants performed very fixed notions of gender and sexuality that reinforced heteronormativity and heterosexism. Like Langa's (2015) study, the participants demonstrated a fixed understanding of the sex-gender-sexuality configuration, disregarding the fact that there are, in fact, diverse aspects of gender and sexuality identity and experience.

In a rare national quantitative study conducted by OUT LGBT Well-being (2016, p. 8) and based on a sample of 638 LGBT youth at school, the study report shows that 55% of the youth experienced verbal insults; 35% were threatened with physical violence; 21% had objects thrown at them; 20% had personal property or possessions damaged or destroyed; 18% had been punched, kicked, or beaten; and 11% had been sexually abused or raped.

Bringing this section to a close, Msibi (2012), Bhana (2014b), and Richardson (2009) sum up the dire state of schooling for LGBT youth in South African schools. Msibi (2012) explains that while township schools in South Africa are generally

unsafe spaces for all learners, it is true that queer learners have an increased vulnerability due to the violence that is directly and indirectly perpetrated against them. Bhana (2014b), too, concludes that South African schools are not only a dangerous place for gender and sexuality minorities but also sites that are disrespectful, intimidating, and intolerant. In describing the cumulative impact of heterosexism on the lives of gender and sexuality minorities in South African schools, Richardson (2009, p. 186) highlights the consequences that LGBT youth experience from loneliness, isolation, identity crises, depression, high levels of anxiety, stress, and self-hatred. They may become infected with HIV or other sexually transmitted illnesses, turn to drugs or alcohol, get into trouble with the law, stay away from school, do badly at school, and experience eating disorders.

How do schools, if at all, address gender and sexuality diversity?

In a study of how teachers taught issues of sexual diversity, Francis (2012) found that teaching about gender and sexuality diversity were mostly ignored or avoided by teachers and that when these topics were introduced in the classroom, it was framed in terms of “compulsory heterosexuality.” None of the 11 teachers indicated that they intentionally included issues related to same-sex love in their teaching on sexuality education. Three teachers mentioned that they would “discuss it only if the learners mentioned it or asked a question about it.” The majority of the teachers struggled to articulate the terms “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “homosexual,” although the researcher used these terms repeatedly during the interviews (Francis, 2012, pp. 6–7). Instead, they used the term “it” to refer to homosexuality and bisexuality. Their nonuse of these terms contributes to making LGBT identities invisible within the classroom, which lends legitimacy to compulsory heterosexuality. While in none of the 11 cases had a direct lesson addressing same-sex relationships, desire, and love been taught, these issues arose in learners’ questions and responses, revealing a need for a more defined framework within the curriculum (Francis, 2012, pp. 6–7).

In Bhana’s (2012b, p. 312) study, teachers emphasized the invisibility through silencing where the emphasis was placed on schools as places that have an academic purpose and nonheterosexuality is regarded as inappropriate: “[T]hey need to be taught how to behave. ... Why can’t they behave normally on the outside. ... They exaggerate even when they talk, they shout. ... They do things that will make you notice them ... they must just live their lives and stop seeking other people’s attention ...” Bhana goes on to explain the use of “normally” meaning acceptable heterosexual conduct, dress, and behavior. Bhana concludes that through such discursive practices, gender and sexuality diversity is silenced and made invisible. Similarly, in Francis’ (2017, pp. 57–70) study, LGBT learners were framed in two ways: as invisible or supravisible². For Francis (2017), both framings of visibility and invisibility spur on the dominance of heterosexuality and simultaneously downplay the need for educational reform.

DePalma and Francis' (2014) interviews with 25 in-service life orientation (LO) teachers revealed very little description of practice but widely divergent understandings around sexuality diversity that drew upon various authoritative discourses, including religious teachings, educational policy, science, and the powerful human rights framework of the South African constitution. When DePalma and Francis (2014) asked teachers who claimed to include teaching about nonheterosexuality to provide examples of practice, not a single teacher provided any concrete examples; responses to these requests were expressed in terms of describing children's prejudices or expressing their own beliefs about nonheterosexuality. One of the teachers in DePalma and Francis' (2014, p. 1693) sample noted that his teaching was driven by learner questions, but even then he did not feel confident to respond: "We touch on gay, lesbian[,] and bisexual issues because these are the things that would really come quickly in the minds of learners. We touch on them, but these are some of the things that I don't have much information on. These are the things that I really feel intimidated to talk about because I am not confident with within myself. ... It hasn't ... I really am not confident to talk about it because I am not well-informed. I tell [learners with questions] that I'll go and find out, which I don't always do."

Francis (2017), based on his interviews and classroom observations with 33 teachers, chronicles the prevalence of compulsory heterosexuality. He writes that there was no lesson plan or information on how LGBT youth would deal with puberty, sexual health, contraception, relationships, and sexual activities. The normalization of heterosexuality was evident in classroom discussion on dating, sex, marriage, and the family. The teacher's resources, personal examples, and textbook references centered on heterosexuality. The teachers in Francis' (2016) study worked with an assumption that all learners are heterosexuals, and none of the interviews or class discussions made any reference to same-sex practice until learners posed a question about same-sex relationships.

Grade 10 LO textbooks analyzed by Potgieter and Reygan (2012) show the perpetuation of the invisibility of LGBT learners in the classroom by denying the learners visual or textual representation of their LGBT identities and therefore stifling any related discussion in the classroom. Potgieter and Reygan (2012) found inconsistencies in the representation of these LGBT identities. Gay male identities are represented in some instances, lesbian and bisexual identities rarely so, and transgender identities not at all. Two of the four textbooks examined are almost entirely silent about LGBT identities. Potgieter and Reygan argue that the invisibility and silence of LGBT identities in textbooks lessens the possibility of full citizenship development among the learners. Similarly, Wilmot and Naidoo (2014), using a content analysis of grade 10 LO textbooks, report the dominance of heterosexual content in comparison to LGBT sexualities; the dominance of heterosexual references as compared to LGBT references in content on dating, marriage, safe sex, family and life roles and responsibilities; the dominance of illustrations projecting heterosexual sexuality and relationships compared to illustrations projecting

LGBT ones; and the association of LGBT sexualities with emotional disorder. Wilmot and Naidoo (2014) argue that classroom discussions of family, dating, sexual practice, safe sex, and marriage assume heterosexuality as the norm and thus achieve compulsory heterosexuality. Both Potgieter and Reygan (2012) and Wilmot and Naidoo's (2014) research point to the normalization of heterosexuality through the exclusion of LGBT sexualities in textbooks and therefore classrooms.

Many of the teachers interviewed in the research literature (Bhana, 2012b; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2012) stated that they did not see reference to teaching about non-normative gender and sexualities in the LO guidelines. Policy in the form of the LO Curriculum Statements (Department of Education, 2002) and Learning Programme Guidelines (Department of Education, 2006) do not provide for addressing homosexuality, as one of the participants in Francis' (2012, p. 7) study tells: "We don't address issues that children really want to know about because the policy doesn't open it up for us to. You might really want to discuss it, but if it's not in the policy ... someone might say to you 'what assessment standard is that?'" Similarly, In Bhana's (2012b, p. 315) study, one of the participants stated: "[T]here's no specific LO for homosexuality in any of the syllabus. ... We only deal with sexuality, male, female ... and that to me is, is frightening, especially with the fact that these, these people are being victimized, they're being murdered, there's suicide." Similarly, Kowen and Davis (2006) argue that the Departments of Education, directly and indirectly, contribute to hostility when they do not consider these issues serious enough to warrant any action or statement of policy. The invisibility of issues of gender and sexuality diversity are overwhelming, as one of the participants sums up the silence: "There's nothing in the school that would even show that gay people are appreciated. ... There's not like, books about it, or teachers don't speak about it, nobody speaks about it at school. There's nothing about it" (Kowen & Davis, 2006, p. 88). The literature reveals that the progressive legislation detailed in the South African Constitution and the educational policies for the teaching of sexuality diversity are out of sync. In fact, Francis (2017, p. 139) shows that the words homosexuality, bisexuality, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or even sexual orientation do not appear in any of the curriculum policies for the teaching of LO.

The 18 sexual minority youth in the Butler et al. (2003, pp. 17–19) study also communicated the lack of information and curriculum in high schools for gay and lesbian youth. Participants reported that they had great difficulty obtaining literature and information about being gay and lesbian in high school settings and their school libraries. Similarly, there was a complete lack of curriculum content regarding information about same-sex desire, love, and relationships.

When teaching and learning about sexuality and relationship education takes place in schools, nonheterosexuality is often excluded (Bhana, 2012b; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2012, 2017), portrayed in a negative light (Richardson, 2008b), or laden with oppressive stereotypes and misinformation (Francis, 2012, 2017; Richardson, 2008b). Research also talks about teachers who do not want to

consider the lives of LGBT youth because of deep-rooted beliefs about homosexuality being un-African (Francis & Msibi, 2011; Richardson, 2009; Sigamoney & Epprecht, 2013), sinful (Bhana, 2012a, 2012b; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2013), and unnatural (Francis, 2017; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Kowen & Davis, 2006; Reygan & Francis, 2015). Across the empirical research on how teachers addressed homophobia or taught about sexual orientation, teachers often viewed nonheterosexuality as deviant, sinful, or immoral and are reticent to deal with this issue in their classroom due to cultural and religious opinions (Bhana, 2012b; Deacon et al., 1999). For example, in Francis' (2012) study with secondary teachers, teachers' personal religious beliefs and values strongly influenced their approach in dealing with nonheterosexuality. In some instances, it became apparent that teachers' prejudices and misconceptions had never been confronted and thus were being disseminated in class. Religion was a dominant means through which nonheterosexuality is constructed as not only marginal but also actively regarded as wrong or sinful. One of the teachers in Bhana's (2012b, p. 313) study referred to homosexuality as "Sodom and Gomorrah," and another in Francis' (2012, p. 9) study mentioned that "God made Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve." By and large, LGBT youth are denigrated as sinners accused of being un-African and less than human.

Francis (2013) has documented an example of a school in Bloemfontein that has indicated in its prospectus that it "assists homosexuals with changing their sexual orientation." According to the prospectus, homosexuals will not be allowed to enroll in the school unless they were willing to embrace heterosexuality: "Creare will minister to those who want to change their sexual orientation" (Francis, 2013, p. 1). DePalma and Francis (2014) and Francis (2013) also report on similar religious discourses and the conviction that homosexuality can be cured or prevented, which gives way to an additional religious discourse of intolerance. Some of the teachers, in their study, expressed ambivalence over curative or conversion methodologies, even when they had expressed understanding nonheterosexuality as a sin or disorder. For example, one teacher described a poster that she had put on her wall that depicted the Christian's choice: two roads, a narrow one leading to heaven and a broad one leading to hell, with a Bible verse advocating violence toward homosexuals (who apparently have chosen the wrong road). Other studies found that teachers view sexuality as a private and moral issue that does not have any place in the classroom (Bhana, 2012b; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2012).

Another reason teachers avoided teaching about sexual diversity was the lack of support from school management and parents when teaching about sexual diversity. Francis (2012, p. 10) writes about how none of the 11 teachers were of the opinion that administrators, school governing bodies, or school colleagues would support them in teaching about nonheterosexuality. In fact, many of the participants believed that they were "walking a [tightrope] on the teaching of sexuality" and were under scrutiny by the school administration. Richardson (2009) writes about his experience of addressing principals in Gauteng on how to make schools

LGBT-friendly. He reports that many of the principals who attended the session said they had never before had the chance to discuss LGBT issues in education, and many felt that in spite of South Africa's progressive constitution, schools were not yet ready to deal openly with homosexuality and bisexuality (Richardson, 2009, p. 184). Furthermore, Richardson (2009, p. 184) details how one of the principals at the talk said that there were no gays and lesbians at his school. When the principal was asked how he would identify who the gays and lesbians are, he stated that gays are effeminate and lesbians are butch. The principal's comments highlight the heteronormative climate of South African schools strikingly. Both Bhana (2012b) and Francis (2012) also show how topics related to homosexuality were not taught due to a fear of parental reactions. In Bhana's study (2012b, p. 315), teachers were not so keen on teaching about homosexuality because they feared a backlash from the parents, as one teacher communicated: "It's gonna come from home, it's gonna come from home, parents are more problematic than the children ... well don't forget the [Governing Body] is run by the parents. And that has control over how the school is run, and that is a very strong ethos, particularly in our present Governing Body." In fact, Bhana (2014b) cautions against the view that parents would instantly support policies that introduce measures to safeguard gender and sexuality minorities in schools.

Teachers also reported avoidance of the topic because of fears of possible perceptions of being gay (Msibi, 2012). As one of the teachers in Msibi's (2012, p. 525) study tells: "I'm used to it now. Whenever these children come to the staff-room, the other teachers just look at me. I'm the one expected to help them. I'm sure if I were not married they would also think that I'm gay."

The exclusion of content on gender and sexuality diversity is compounded by the absence of appropriate sexuality and relationship education (Francis, 2010, 2017) and a heterosexist school environment that promotes compulsory heterosexuality (Francis, 2017). Schools seem to work from the assumption that all individuals, students, and staff are or should be heterosexual, which leads to inequitable practices. Despite all of this, there are no government departmental structures or policies regulating schools and teacher institutions, nor have the institutions been given guidance in terms of what they need to do to ensure that LGBT learners and educators who do not conform to gender/sexuality norms feel safe and welcome (Francis, 2017; Richardson & Archer, 2008). Despite the South African Constitution's equality clause regarding sexual orientation, the social reality in South African schools is very different. Little has been done to equip teachers to challenge and teach issues related to gender and sexuality diversity and anti-heterosexism in class (Bhana, 2012b; DePalma & Francis, 2014; Francis, 2012; Francis & Reygan, 2016; Reygan & Francis, 2015).

Discussion

What does the literature say about the prevalence of heterosexism in South African schools and its impact on learners? South African schools are heterosexist

environments and through privileging heterosexuality, they contribute to the vulnerability of LGBT youth. The literature evidences that heterosexist prejudice and discrimination results from attitudes and behaviors by peers, teachers, and school managers. The prevalence of heterosexism in schools makes explicit gender and sexuality binaries in curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture. These binaries assume that learners identify as heterosexual and embody binary gender expression and expectations (DePalma, 2011; Dinkins & Englert, 2015; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Sykes, 2011). The invisibility of nonheterosexuality within curriculum policies contradicts the goals of inclusive and equal education.

Various forms of social mistreatment, alongside the ill effects of internalized heterosexism, are well established in the literature. The research underlines the physical, verbal, and emotional anxiety that LGBT learners experience in South African schools. LGBT youth in search of a place of belonging and inclusion experience multilayered vulnerability. It is evident from the literature that LGBT youth have a lower level of school belongingness than their straight peers. The majority of the research studies on LGBT young people in South African schools have focused on heterosexist harassment and assault, the positioning of LGBT youth as invisible or too visible, and how LGBT youth have internalized heterosexism, leading to self-hate in schools.

The South African writing deals primarily with LGBT youth who are targets of heterosexual youth, teachers, and school leaders. While these research studies are necessary and important as they highlight the plight of LGBT youth and the need to create safe schools, there is not any research that pays sufficient attention to the resilience or resistance of LGBT youth (Blackburn, 2004) or their heterosexual allies, inclusive of teachers, learners, and school leaders, who challenge heterosexism and stand up against homophobic abuse and victimization (Griffin & Ouellet, 2003). Are we to believe, based on the South African literature, that there is nothing good or positive about being LGBT in schools? Msibi (2012, p. 518) argues that when one focuses exclusively on the negative experiences that queer learners are exposed to in schools, it becomes very easy to view this group as a helpless, powerless group that is victimized in schools and society. Are LGBT youth active agents with knowledge and skill to produce and reproduce life in their own environments, or are they powerless victims? Given all the literature on LGBT youth and the evidence on victimization, harassment, and suicide of LGBT youth, what are the social conditions in a LGBT person's life history that enable persistence through and successfully completing schooling?

Despite the recent but steady increase in research on how LGBT issues are included in education, in terms of the second question—How do schools, if at all, address gender and sexuality diversity?—the literature is clear that youth in South Africa do not have access to an LGBT-inclusive curriculum. In fact, the literature illustrates very clearly how education has done very little to address heterosexism and heteronormativity in schools. In all the research, there is silence or invisibility of non-normative gender and sexuality, and when issues related to LGBT are

raised or brought up in the classroom, teachers reinforced heteronormative and heterosexist constructions of gender and sexuality. All the studies outline the barriers that teachers face in teaching about gender and sexuality diversity. An interesting aspect of the reviewed research is that although teaching staff, school leaders, policy, and educational materials are silent on addressing LGBT issues, the youth did raise questions and responses suggesting that there is a need for a more inclusive curriculum framework. Furthermore, all research studies that focused on the teaching and learning of gender and sexuality diversity did so in the learning area of LO. One of the considerations for curriculum, especially in a context of high levels of heterosexism such as South Africa, is to establish how teaching and learning about nonheterosexualities happen in other learning areas such as history or science. In addition, ethnographic studies of the null curriculum (Eisner, 1985), what schools do not teach, such as school rituals—assemblies, sports events, matric balls, and prize-giving ceremonies—will also need to be considered in terms of how schooling focuses on changing teaching and learning environments for gender and sexuality minorities.

Nine of the 27 studies examined issues related to curriculum and non-normative sexualities. If education is fundamental to the social-political changes related to LGBT people in South Africa, future research will need to explore the following: What forms of knowledge teachers create that frame youth who identify as LGBT? How do youth, including LGBT youth, experience the teaching of gender and sexual diversity? How do they feel questions of gender and sexual diversity are dealt with in the curriculum and do they find the content useful? What aspects of gender and sexuality diversity content do youth want to be included in the curriculum? What pedagogical strategies are useful? These questions and specifically how they relate to pedagogy link to my next point on the critical need for teachers to be professionally developed to address non-normative gender or sexualities in schools.

Recognizing the pressures experienced by LGBT youth illustrates the significance for educators to teach in socially just ways by addressing difference around gender and sexual orientation in schools. The literature makes explicit that teachers lack content and pedagogical knowledge to teach gender and sexuality diversity. Without a preservice and in-service teacher education development strategy, it comes as no surprise that teachers are not adequately addressing issues of diverse sexual orientations in the classroom. Given the findings from the review, it is critical that teachers are skilled in integrating sexuality diversity in their teaching. In-service and preservice teacher education, therefore, remains pivotal for the teaching and learning of same-sex desires and sexualities in schools.

Many of the studies couch what happens to LGBT youth simply as bullying or harassment. Although this is useful tracking, as there are responses to deal with such violence in schools, much of the information about bullying and harassment fails to address the underlying social forces at work (Meyer, 2012).

The same can be said of using homophobia, as it does not engage with the structural nature of inequality and the normalizing practices that regulate gender and sexuality minorities. Many studies in the review use identities related to sexual orientation without a discussion of power and privilege or ways in which the unequal social contexts shape the lives of LGBT youth. Without recognizing the systemic nature heterosexism, the data can also be misinterpreted that school dropout, mental health, psychosocial adjustment, etc. are simply a consequence of being LGBT. These studies reveal reports of LGBT youth who come to notice because of their unequal status and social exclusion and not because they are LGBT. Although these research studies are necessary and important, as they highlight the plight of LGBT youth, they do not address the systemic nature of heterosexism that privileges and advantages heterosexuals. Griffin and Ouellet (2003), writing in the U.S. context, argue that the next generation of school-based initiatives to address LGBT issues must focus on systemic change principles that address the larger interrelated nature of systems of injustice and oppression.

The review of articles also identifies silences and gaps about gender and sexuality diversity and schooling, specifically identities and experiences that are underresearched. The available research focuses almost exclusively on lesbian and gay learners and no attention is given to bisexual and gender-nonconforming youth. Many of the publications reviewed use the acronym LGBT, which is inclusive of bisexual and transgender persons, revealing a glib use of the “B” and “T.” Bisexual and transgender experience and identity is an important area to explore because more youth are “coming out” and not enough is known. Inclusion of youth who are bisexual and transgender affects the school climate, policies, and population; therefore, the importance of education and research on the topic is clear. Perhaps this gap in the literature points to the need to recognize an important omission in the area of gender and sexuality diversity and hence a necessary and rich area for future research.

Moreover, the ways that race, social class, and other forms of difference that intersect with sexual orientation and gender also need to be explored in terms of how they contribute to marginalizing LGBT youth. The situated nature of oppression and intersecting difference in the identities of LGBT learners make ambitious any anti-oppressive effort that revolves around only one identity and only one form of oppression (Kumashiro, 2000; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). Researchers working with LGBT youth will need to shift focus and consider the interplay and disruptions that inform how social connectivity and intersections shape the life histories and identity work of their participants.

It is notable that the research is skewed, as it describes the enactment of gender and sexuality diversity in Further Education and Training settings and that LGBT youth in the General Education and Training are not researched.³ Given this notable omission, how are the experiences of LGBT and questioning youth in the

General Education and Training phase different, and how have schools responded to heteronormativity in these early socializing contexts? Future studies, therefore, will need to consider how younger LGBT youth experience and express their social contexts.

Although much progress has been made regarding gender and sexuality diversity in educational research, much work still need to be done. The available research is wholly qualitative, with a strong focus on the how and why of attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. While this is useful, what is needed is a more diverse research inquiry that not only is broader qualitatively but also pays attention to quantitative designs. Conducting studies that recruit larger populations of LGBT youth would establish causality patterns or correlation between variables and will move this area forward. For example, what can longitudinal and cross-sectional studies across a diversity of race, gender, socioeconomic and age of school-attending LGBT youth tell us about heterosexism and schooling? Is there a relationship between heterosexist related bullying, age, and gender? In addition, there is a need for more diverse qualitative designs that may deepen the evidence of the schooling experiences of LGBT youth. Case studies of schools that have committed themselves to creating inclusive schools for LGBT learners are equally needed, as they serve as important sources of inquiry and learning and as a catalyst for social change.

Limitations

My review article has some limitations. First, my review article is based exclusively on South African secondary data and this can be deemed as a limitation. Needless to say, though, understanding the context and background of many of the studies generated in post-apartheid South Africa has been beneficial in providing an overview of the field of how gender and sexuality diversity, heterosexism, and schooling are characterized and constituted. A second limitation is the inclusion of grey literature as a source of data. Some may raise questions about the validity of the grey literature. Scholars (Conn, Valentine, Cooper, & Rantz, 2003), however, have shown that methodological rigor does not differ between published and grey literature. Including grey literature has certainly broadened the scope to more relevant studies, thereby providing a more complete view of available evidence (Mahood, Van Eerd, & Irvin, 2014). A third limitation, as Bailey and Graves (2016, p. 683) argue, is that reviews such as the present article are inevitably partial and political, even as they provide useful insights into scholarly trends in both reflecting and creating the field. These limitations aside, a review of how LGBT youth experience schooling and how schools, if at all, respond to gender and sexuality diversity is an important contribution to education in South Africa in that it has provided a snapshot of the scholarly trends that constitute the field of gender and sexuality diversity in South African education.

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Notes

1. The term refers to a hermaphrodite figure, but in local day-to-day talk it is used as a derogatory word for gay and lesbian people. However, gay and lesbian people have reappropriated the term for their own use (Matabeni, 2011, p. 156).
2. Supra-visibility, or super-visibility (Brighenti, 2007).
3. The Department of Basic Education has grouped schooling grades into two phases called General Education and Training (includes grade 0 plus grades 1–9) and Further Education and Training (includes grades 10–12).

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