

Eastern Kentucky University

Encompass

Online Theses and Dissertations

Student Scholarship

2023

Gender, Sexuality, And LGBTQ+ Identities In General Education Literature Courses: Three Major Conceptual Frameworks

Josiah Coleman

Eastern Kentucky University, josiahco18@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://encompass.eku.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Coleman, Josiah, "Gender, Sexuality, And LGBTQ+ Identities In General Education Literature Courses: Three Major Conceptual Frameworks" (2023). *Online Theses and Dissertations*. 788.
<https://encompass.eku.edu/etd/788>

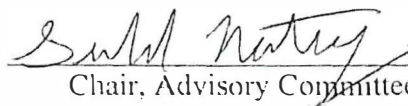
This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Encompass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Online Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Encompass. For more information, please contact laura.edwards@eku.edu.

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES IN GENERAL EDUCATION
LITERATURE COURSES: THREE MAJOR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

BY

JOSIAH D. COLEMAN

THESIS APPROVED:

 4/8/2023
Chair, Advisory Committee

 4/7/2023
Member, Advisory Committee

 4/7/2023
Member, Advisory Committee


Dean, Graduate School

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in English degree at Eastern Kentucky University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this document are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgements of the source are made. Permission for extensive quotation from or reproduction of this document may be granted by my major professor. In [his/her] absence, by the Head of Interlibrary Services when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this document for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature:

X *Fosick Coleman*

Date: 3/30/2023

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES IN GENERAL EDUCATION
LITERATURE COURSES: THREE MAJOR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

BY

JOSIAH D. COLEMAN

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

2023

© Copyright by JOSIAH D. COLEMAN 2023
All Rights Reserved.

DEDICATION

For queer voices, loud and proud

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank brilliant individuals on my thesis committee, Dr. Gerald “Jerry” Nachtwey, Dr. Heather Fox, and Dr. Brent Shannon, for all the enormously helpful feedback and guidance they provided during this experience.

I also thank my father, for reading my draft and providing clarifying feedback.

Finally, I would like to thank Sarah, Lauren, Tara, and all my other friends and colleagues at the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity, for the emotional support, needful feedback, and countless reassurances they have provided throughout the process of researching, drafting, and polishing this thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how three major conceptual frameworks can allow instructors of literature courses to explore, define, and utilize their understanding of queerness. For instructors who possess little experience in queer discourse, the three major conceptual frameworks – LGBTQ+ identities, gender critical paradigms, and the sexual episteme – are outlined, with major subfields, lenses, and authors detailed for further research. To demonstrate the veracity of utilizing these three major conceptual frameworks in the existing pedagogical praxis of instructors, a study was conducted. The study was a survey of six instructors who taught general education literature courses in the past five years (Fall 2018 to Fall 2023 semesters). Responses to the survey show that instructors are able to recognize and categorize their own understanding of and pedagogical experiences with queerness within the three major conceptual frameworks. Data from the study also suggests that general education courses taught at the institutions surveyed follow certain patterns of concern for LGBTQ+ and gender representation, which are absent in portrayals of sex/uality. The three major frameworks explored in this thesis offer instructors – particularly those of general education literature courses – an opportunity to explore how their knowledge of queerness does and can affect how they create their pedagogy to include or elide queerness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Introduction	1
II. Three Major Conceptual Frameworks.....	5
LGBTQ+ Identities	5
Gender Critical Paradigms	14
Feminism.....	15
Intersectionality and Queer Theory	18
Queer of Color and Quare Theory	26
Pedagogy and Gender Critical Paradigms	31
The Sexual Episteme.....	32
Foucault and the Sexual Episteme	33
Sex Acts and Discursive Manifestations of the Sexual Episteme.....	39
Pedagogy and the Sexual Episteme	44
III. Gender, Sexuality, and LGBTQ+ Identities in General Education Literature Courses	45
Methodology	45
Results	47
IV. Conclusion	57
Works Cited	61
[Appendix A: Survey Questions from “Gender, Sexuality, and LGBTQ+ Identities in General Education Literature Courses”].....	67
[Appendix B: Cover Letter Sent to Initial Pool of Prospective Participants].....	71

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
Table 1 Responses to Question 2 ^a	49
Table 2 Responses to Question 3 ^a	49

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
Figure 1. Responses to Question 4 “When selecting texts for this course, how often did you consider each of the following:”	52
Figure 2. Responses to Question 5 “When designing course materials and assignments, how often do you consider each of the following:”	52

I. Introduction

My intention for this document is to explore various frameworks and broad perspectives on queerness as it can be encountered and conceived of within the pedagogical environment of general education literature courses. As someone who identifies as queer, I consider it vital to my pedagogy that I seriously consider when, where, how, and why Queerness intersects with my roles as an instructor and scholar. While this is partly for my own benefit of my own understanding of my sexual and gender identities in the context of my work, I also seek to explore this knowledge and questioning for my students' wellbeing and with due consideration for their academic and social education which occurs within my classroom. Regardless of whether my students identify as queer, lesbian, gay, non-binary, trans, asexual, or any other sexual and gender identity, I desire that my pedagogy seeks to affirm their gender and sexual expressions, and to develop deeper understanding of how heteronormativity is cultural, and heterosexism is therefore institutional. I desire especially that my heterosexual and cisgender students develop this understanding, so that they are able to be considered with critical thought and awareness of how sexual and gender expression varies across human cultures in time and space; this will enable them to more fully recognize the rhetorics which seek to displace and forbid non-heteronormative sexuality and gender from academic spaces. To that end, it is also my intention to discuss and explore queerness in ways that instructor colleagues— who perhaps feel they cannot penetrate the sheer depth and breadth of queer scholarship — can use accessibly. To those instructors who feel that as heterosexual and cisgender individuals it is not their place to engage with questions and topics on queerness in their own classrooms, I would like to

explore how considerations of identity, gender, and sex already form elements of their pedagogy, and how those elements can be acknowledged to combat harmful rhetorics of heterosexism within their classrooms.

A necessary acknowledgment I must make in this endeavor, and a concept to foreground within any attempt to explore the queerness of our pedagogies as instructors, is that queer does not mean any one thing, does not possess any one definition that encapsulates the whole of what can be meant by “queer.” In this thesis, I use and refer to queer and queerness within the general context in which the terms have been institutionalized and embedded into academic discourse. This context originates in the 1990s and is best understood by the critical paradigm of queer theory which emerged in that decade. As Kadji Amin asserts in their article, “Haunted by the 1990s: Queer Theory’s Affective Histories,” the term queer is intentionally ambiguous, undefined, and changeable; they say, “[q]ueer theory has long celebrated *queer* as an almost infinitely mobile and mutable theoretical term that, unlike *gay* and *lesbian* or *feminist*, need not remain bound to any particular identity, historical context, politics, or object of study and, for that very reason, promises a cutting-edge political intervention” (Amin “Haunted” 175). Key to this conception of queerness is the political agency and social combativeness which the term enables; the act of reclaiming, repurposing word queer from an insult into a tool is indicative of not only queer theory’s past and current aims but illustrates the operational definition of queerness as resistance against heteronormativity and heterosexism. While I will use queer and queerness to mean such resistance, both culturally and in theoretical discourse due to the breadth in which I survey queer topics and concepts for this thesis, I must agree with Amin’s final

assertion in this article: queerness and queer theory are not appropriately universal terminology and critical paradigms for all cultures and contexts in which we discuss gender and sexuality, even when those contexts can be understood from our cultural perspective of being heteronormative or non-heteronormative. As Amin states, “what queer studies has institutionalized, above an object of study or method, is a set of historical emotions generated within U.S. queer culture and politics around the early 1990s, and indeed, that these historical affects propel the inchoate method that animates what objects may be claimed as *queer*” (Amin “Haunted”184). These emotions are not universal to all contexts of gender and sexuality, as will be discussed in depth within the sections on gender critical paradigms and sexual epistemes; rather than seeing this particularity of context for queerness as a barrier to understanding how queerness can and does manifest within our academic and pedagogical spaces, I propose that understanding and acknowledging our assumptions and internalized systems of thought – the patterns of knowledge which I will frame as the sexual episteme – surrounding queerness, gender, and sexuality can allow instructors to better articulate and frame how modern conceptions of – and resistance to – heteronormativity can be understood as contextualized to time and place. This thereby undermines the rhetoric that our cultural concepts of gender and sex, normative and non-normative, are universal to the human experience.

This thesis explores the construction of three major conceptual frameworks by which queerness can be understood, engaged, and studied. Each framework has particular strengths and uses within the context of general education literature courses. For example, LGBTQ+ identities provide a framework that operates under identarian

political discourse and manifests the complicated socio-political meanings by which we as a contemporary culture understand queer and sexual minorities. At the same time, gender critical paradigms incorporate the numerous academic theories, paradigms, and movements of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries into a perspective of parallel and specialized modes of thought, often designed and engaged with a social justice purpose. Because there are many such paradigms in use today, this section will briefly survey the most relevant ones-as they relate to queerness in higher education. Finally, the sexual episteme provides a framework which explains how such disparate meanings and discourses about sex/uality and gender can co-exist within the same societal and cultural spheres. I also extend this concept towards the past and explore how this framework allows academics – be they instructors, students, or otherwise – to understand and contextualize how the sexual episteme under which they operate as a cultural and social knowledge-making interface differs from the sexual epistemes presented in texts and voices from other times, places, and cultures. I then describe a study which surveyed instructors from state institutions of higher education who have taught general education literature courses in the past five years. Through this study, I find that these three proposed frameworks are both already in practice in these courses, and that the frameworks, as proposed, map into the instructors’ conceptions and implementations of queerness within the instructors’ pedagogies.

II. Three Major Conceptual Frameworks

I organize this overview of scholarship to illustrate the three major frameworks of: LGBTQ+ identities, critical gender paradigms, and sexual epistemes. These frameworks are not intended to be read as mutually exclusive, but instead denote the broad concerns and understandings which operate and drive the various conceptions and purposes which can be seen within the varied language and topics of queerness. Through these three major frameworks, I propose that general education literature instructors are able to construct and reconstruct the presence of queerness within their classroom curriculum and their personal pedagogical perspectives.

LGBTQ+ Identities

The academic discourses and socio-cultural media of our current day most prominently and visibly debates on queerness under the framework of LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and additional labels) identities. Concern over how LGBTQ+ identities are represented and acknowledged in our classrooms is a frequent subject of contemporary scholarship; John Hudson's discussion the abysmal state of LGBTQ+ representation in composition readers and textbooks for our first-year writing courses, and Jacqueline Bach's study of pre-service teachers' interactions with LGBTQ+ works in YA literature courses are both examples of how scholarship is currently exploring and questioning the presence of non-heterosexual and transgender identities in our curriculum, our class texts, and our pedagogies as English instructors. This framework is primarily concerned with adjusting and accounting for distinct sexual minority identities within pedagogical and institutional considerations, as a result of

wider calls in our society for more diversity and inclusiveness of marginalized identities in discourse and for representation roles (Howard and Chan 347; Hudson; Renn 135). In this framework, I propose LGBTQ+ identities as discourse are inherently focused on how identitarian politics of sexual minorities is being discussed and enacted within the academic institution.

This framework focuses on what I will term the *legacy* of Lesbian and Gay studies in contemporary discourses on queerness in academic, social, and political disciplines. For clarity, I refer to Lesbian and Gay studies as the academic discourses which emerged as a direct result of the Lesbian and Gay rights movements of the last half of the twentieth century, which centered on efforts to normalize and make visible non-heterosexual sexualities to wider society. The terminology of Gay and Lesbian reveals the dominant presence of men-loving-men (MLM) and women-loving-women (WLW) as the most visible of the identities which were successfully brought into mainstream conversations through this movement. I use the term LGBTQ+ to conform to contemporary terminology for this genre and topic, as I discuss how this view on queerness has come into the twenty-first century. This change in terminology largely reflects the increased attention given to distinct sexual and gender identities which are not represented in the terms gay and lesbian; I chose to use the term LGBTQ+ over other variations (LGBTQIA+, LGBTQ2, LGBPTTQQIIAA+, and other “alphabet soup” acronyms) both for brevity, and because each component of this acronym (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and the + representing expanding understandings of sexual and gender identities) aligns with the original homonormative intention of the Lesbian and Gay rights movement (“GLAAD Media

Reference”; “LGBTQ Glossary”). Kadji Amin defines homonormativity as the attempt to consolidate homosexuality into “familiar gender, racial, and geopolitical hierarchies” (“Haunted”183), and I argue that the component terms of LGBTQ+ confirm the established Western cultural concepts of male/female binary for sex and gender, while tokenizing those who identify outside of this binary. The use of queer is particularly tokenizing, in this sense, as it requires all those who identify outside of the established terms and conceptions to be categorized together, and while certain individuals (myself included) prefer to identify as queer to make use of this ambiguousness and non-restrictive meaning, its use in identitarian politics is effectively a catch-all to prevent further alienation within these communities; that the Q is also often said to also mean questioning (“LGBTQ Glossary”) is further evidence for the deliberate othering of *queerness* as something outside of the accepted scheme of sex and gender. The + is the current evolution of this rhetoric, with the need for a sign to include those whose identities are not yet normalize-able to the accepted conception of sex and gender, but whose presence is necessary for the future politicized discourses of normalizing sexual minorities.

The language of sexual minorities is political in origin and reveals the core principles of political action within queerness. Amin identifies the origins of Queer theory in the 1990s’ politically transgressive movements, which criticized homonormativity in social and political policies (Amin “Haunted”). This was an evolution of the Gay Pride movements which were more prominent in the politics and social action in earlier decades, and which had made a space within academics under Gay and Lesbian Studies (Amin, “Genealogies” 18). Amin asserts that a partial

assimilation between the newly established Gay and Lesbian studies and the emergent Queer theory occurred over the millennium decades, resulting in the contemporary paradoxical, dual-prominence of both identity-based theories and concerns, and more anti-identitarian approaches to queerness, in accordance with the resistance to stable categorization of queerness which defines queer theory. This partially-successful merger can be seen as the result of both movements' core belief in social justice against heteronormative conceptions of sexuality and gender, as discussed by Christian D. Chan and Lionel C. Howard in their article "When Queerness Meets Intersectional Thinking: Revolutionizing Parallels, Histories, and Contestations" within the historical, synergistic parallels between LGBTQ studies, Queer studies, and other social justice movements such as intersectionality, critical race theory, and feminism (352; 346). These politically charged theories and frameworks make protection of minorities/diversities a central goal of social justice through two broad goals: to define their subject minorities and to express the need to make transparent both diversity and fear/hate paradigms.

In scholarship concerning queerness in higher education, the political currency of identitarian concerns is prominent. Nudo Nodin's "Queering the Curriculum: Reflections on LGBT+ inclusivity in Higher Education," is a recent example of how the focus on sexual and gender identities dominates contemporary discourses on queerness within educational spaces. They not only use language of "sexual minorities" in their call for further inclusivity of LGBT issues in curriculum and policies but give the refrain of these actions as beneficial to students not of sexual minority status through a heightened awareness of diversity and diverse representation in the academy (21). By

foregrounding concerns over the representation of sexual minorities, we see the idea that by making visible the multitude of sexual and gender identities will reduce the prevalence and frequency of queerphobic attitudes, speech, and actions. This article accurately displays how inclusion, diversity, and representation are the by-words of the identity-based LGBTQ+ lens on queerness in politicized academic contexts.

Identitarian politics are constantly concerned with representation. Who is represented, who is not, why are they represented or not? What directives and rules exist to promote or restrict representation of certain identities, populations, and categories of people? In English studies, this is increasingly tied into conversations occurring around the idea of a “canon,” given that the nature of a “canon” is to house and promote those texts and authors who are essential to the field. Such a concept plays dangerously with identitarian politics, as scholars and instructors vie for space to include certain texts and author in such a (supposedly) lofty company, with accusations of racism, sexism, US-American and European-centrism, and the whole familiar host of negative -isms and discriminatory phobias that dominate conversations of identitarian politics in every field and corner of the academy. Such accusations are often justified, I find, as the concept of a singular “canon” of indispensable literature implies that other literature (and the cultures and peoples that literature embodies and represents) is therefore dispensable. The question of canonicity is tied to valuing certain cultures and ways of being above others. In the roots of general education, I find similar disquieting values; W.W. Charters, in discussing the recent (at the time) rise of survey courses and the potential “fad” that general education programs might be, frames the concept of general education around this supposedly-agreeable assumption: “The general idea that

college graduates should be informed about *the culture of the race* is sound. And at one time it was possible for a student to secure a distillate of what *man* had achieved” (Charters 1). The language, as I emphasize here, is grossly exclusionary to the modern, politically correct ear, and the sentiment is hardly a better swallow. The question of queerness in the “canon” is no less complicated and fraught with social landmines. John Pruitt, in “LGBT Literature Courses and Questions of Canonicity,” expressly demonstrates the literary benefits of LGBT-focused literary courses, but ends ambivalently on whether a “canon” of LGBT literature is worth assembling and upholding.

Establishing such a list could ensure that the field carries some integrity, on one hand, and that the field might be more than the sum of its parts on the other: rather than fulfilling a conservative function, as canons often do, identifying a set of principal works or methods can encourage a more progressive interdisciplinary paradigm of LGBT literary research. My ideal canon would offer a range of positions on which LGBT literary scholars might draw. (Pruitt 102)

The undeniable allure of a “canon” is that it automatically serves to legitimize the field, authors, and texts it contains. For LGBTQ+ studies, rooted in notions of social and political adversity, such legitimizing and institutionally entrenching effects are difficult to reject. While I do agree that we, as instructors of higher education, should be working to legitimize and represent LGBTQ+ authors, texts, and voices as much as possible, whether we have to do so through the concept of a “canon” is up for debate.

The other prominent language of this framework is the topic of LGBTQ+ *issues*. The core belief in social justice present within this particular framework on queerness frequently necessitates the discourse to focus on issues manifested by fear/hate cultures that targets sexual minorities in macro-and-micro aggressions (Howard & Chan 352). This is visible from the foundational texts of queer theory, such as Sedgwick’s lengthy

engagement with “gay panic” legal defenses in “Axiomatic” (18-22). However, even in current examples of LGBTQ+ scholarship, we continue to insert and utilize the issues surrounding the contact of hate culture with sexual minorities; Nodins, for example, finds it necessary to explain to their students that a fair number of terms which refer to LGBTQ+ identities possess either derogatory or empowering connotations, depending on the audience (26), as Howard and Chan also acknowledge (349). “Queer” is a reclaimed term, an insult empowered by those it has been used upon to oppress (“GLAAD Media Reference”), and as I assert in this section, many people and institutions find this doubled-meaning unsettling and outside of acceptable categories for their purposes in incorporating sexual minorities into their micro-culture. As instructors, we navigate and attempt to maintain a balance between professional and personal respect for others’ opinions and thoughts, and the guidelines imposed by our institutions regarding appropriate language and terminology; much of the growth in LGBTQ+ language and terminology has grown out of tense issues such as the appropriateness of “queer” in various settings, including educational spaces (Howard & Chan 349). Concerning terms which originate in homophobic and aggressively heteronormative culture, our use of those terms in the classroom is tense with both the original and reclaimed meanings, and LGBTQ+ issues regarding terminology and language are not only prominent but can form the foundation of how queerness is engaged with and represented in our classrooms and pedagogies.

It is natural that consideration of issues and controversies is dominant in our discourse on LGBTQ+ identities, especially in English courses that utilize debate, argument, and research in the curriculum and coursework. However, under the

framework of LGBTQ+ identities, most of this discourse falls along certain issues, like same-sex marriage or (more currently) transgender rights and queerphobic hate crimes which appear in news stories and on social media. Scholarship reflects this. John Hudson, in studying how LGBTQ+ representation can be useful in composition readers, discusses how invoking instances of hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people, such as the death of Matthew Shepard, can be powerful in discussing the queerphobic harassment and assault which LGBTQ+ individuals face with increasing frequency, even in the age of safe space ideologies (par.12). John Gray in discussing the pedagogical potential of queerness and LGBTQ+ identities in the ELT classroom, invokes the opportunities presented from the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida (Gray 144) and the 2019 homophobic attack on Melania Geymonat and Christine Hannigan in London, England, “as means of encouraging students to think about the way in which same-sex displays of affection are met with violence in some settings” (145). Hudson also discusses the high frequency of LGBTQ+ political issues represented in composition readers; they cite Travis Duncan’s research, “Silent Outsiders: Searching for Queer Identity in Composition Readers,” which found “a focus on gay marriage... accounting for 43% of all queer-identified readings in his study” (Hudson par.4). Hudson agrees with Mariana et al. (*Cruising Composition Texts*) that a less politicized and controversially-based selection of texts should give more focus to queer individuals as complex, living voices from diverse backgrounds – and therefore with highly diverse opinions and topics – and gives the particular suggestion to include more coming-out narratives as powerful personal narratives, and to give, “readers unfamiliar with LGBTQ experience to gain access through reading to one of the defining experiences of

LGBTQ life” (par.21). I would agree with this suggestion, with the amended understanding that coming-out stories, particularly when transformed into narratives for others to engage with, are less couched in political language and connotations but are certainly not apolitical portrayals of queerness. This is outlined when Sedgwick asserts that the terminology and metaphor of “the closet” and “coming-out of the closet” almost entirely depends on our queer culture which was built on the political waves and movements born of the Stonewall Riots in 1969 (Sedgwick 14). In truth, examples of queer narrative are often shaded by pain, tragedy, and the inherent otherness that heteronormativity and heterosexism use to define non-normativity and queerness, and as instructors we must acknowledge those negative emotions as crucial not only to the notion of queerness, but as a focus for why LGBTQ+ identities are categorized as sexual minorities in the wider social justice turn of our societies.

As I outline it here, the framework of LGBTQ+ identities views and employs queerness in the format of sexual minorities within the larger civil rights movements of the latter half of the twentieth century and the social justice movements of the twenty-first century. This framework extensively uses identitarian politics as the basis for discussion and argument concerning specific identities of sexual orientation and gender not only in cultural and legal considerations, but in how those identities and applications come into our classrooms and pedagogies. It should be kept in mind that the framework of LGBTQ+ identities is the most current language and tangible interface for queerness in our academic and social discussions.

Gender Critical Paradigms

LGBTQ+ studies primarily concerns itself with critically examining the normalization of particular identities; this occurs in terms of examining both heteronormativity and its consequent exclusion of other identities and how those marginalized identities might become normalized outside of a paradigm of oppression against them. Queer theory, in contrast, is largely resistant to the need for centering on individual, discrete identities. Therefore, through the framework of gender critical paradigms we are intentionally viewing the study of queerness in context with other identity-based critical paradigms, namely queer theory, feminism, intersectional theory, and critical discourses which overlap these major paradigms, such as queer of color theory, black feminism, and geopolitical theory. We, as academics and post-secondary instructors, should be able to also contextualize the theories and paradigms which I group under this framework as social justice discourses which motivate many of the conversations surrounding societal concepts of gender and sex – which, in turn, allows the framework of LGBTQ+ identities to operate using some of those concepts.

Throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, parallel movements for critically examining the established orders of power, privilege, and presence have come to be established within the academy. The points of paralleling differ from discourse to discourse, yet the literature, on the whole, illustrates the tension between these critiques of the establishment and the establishment itself, as each seeks to redistribute and change the perception of power into the format and purposes of particular paradigms. Each of the specific critical paradigms discussed in this section

builds towards the larger framework of gender critical paradigms, but with each discussing, defining, and utilizing gender in different ways and for different purposes.

Feminism

Feminism is at the heart of gender critical paradigms, especially from the US-American historic and cultural standpoint. While first-wave feminism was a major social-political movement in many regions of the West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modern feminism is more closely tied to the second-wave feminists of the 1960s – which as Estelle Freedman characterizes as reiterating, “[t]he old feminist calls for economic and *political* equality, and [with] a new emphasis on control over reproduction, resonated deeply across generations, classes, and races” (5). This wave – which drew heavily on psychoanalytic theory to support various theoretical concepts and arguments – initially used the banner of “women’s liberation,” and came to be defined by not only the arguments that women are equals to men, but that women are inherently *different* to men, on the basis of both biological sex and social gender roles (Freedman 4-5). The third wave of feminism – the emergence of which is contemporaneous to several important other gender critical paradigms – is less concerned with such gender essentialism, and its origins in the early 1990s aligns in the timeline of several of the other critical paradigms which we will discuss in this section. Third-wave feminism is by no means the stopping point in the evolution of feminist thought, as the anti-essentialism – yet continued privileging of the category of *woman* – of third-wave feminism has found resonance in other political frameworks and critical concepts, such as postmodernism, Marxism, and postcolonial formations of thought.

Central to this work's consideration of feminism and feminism's connections to queerness is the definition and differentiation of gender and sex. As Sedgwick defines the distinction, "'sex' has had the meaning of a certain group of irreducible, biological differentiations between members of the species *Homo sapiens* who have XX and those who have XY chromosomes," and typically draws signification from, "dimorphisms of genital formation, hair growth (in populations that possess body hair), fat distribution, hormonal function, and reproductive capacity" (27). Through this definition, we can look at "sex" as a primarily biological dimension, although the recent increased visibility of intersex persons – those who are born with the sex characteristics of multiple sexes – and the gender-affirming (previously termed transexual) surgical procedures involved for many transgender and cisgender people complicate the binary of the definition. Regardless of the complications, feminist thought and theory on the distinction between sex and gender is one of the hallmarks and foundations for many of the gender critical paradigms in existence today. Christie Launius and Holly Hassell, in *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies*, specify that, "our gender identities are socially constructed and not immutable. Key to this concept is that ideas and constructions of gender change across time, between and within cultures, and even within one's lifespan," and they further describe that, "feminist scholars focus on how gender is socially constructed, and to what ends, and they are simultaneously interested in how social constructions of gender are shaped by issues of race, class, age, ability, and sexual identity" (31). Whereas second wave feminism focused intensely on how sex revealed differences between men and women through biology and constructed the concepts of cultural gender differences and power imbalances from this sexual

difference, third wave feminism is less gender-essentialist (as a general rule) and has taken a, “more global turn, with the identification of issues that transcend national borders,” and a stronger focus on eliminating barriers to gender equality and dismantling sexist policies and institutions within our cultures (Launius & Hassel 16).

One of the ways in which I am particularly interested in engaging with feminist thought as a gender critical paradigm – other than its historical importance to social justice movements in the West – is the opportunity it presents in historicizing gender and sexuality within culture. I draw, for this concept, from the work by Penny Tinkler and Carolyn Jackson, “The Past in the Present: Historicising Contemporary Debates about Gender and Education.” In this article, Tinkler and Jackson argue that the particular desire for and ability to enact change through scholarship on gender, which is essential to feminist thought, ought to be manifested into scholars’, “‘historical sensibility’, by which we mean a keen awareness that history matters,” continuing, “[t]he emphasis on sensibility brings into focus a heightened sense that questions about the past are valuable to researchers who are attempting to understand the present, and that historical insights often shed new and interesting perspectives on the present day” (70-1). One of the challenges to understanding queerness is that elements which we think of as inherently queer, such as same-sex attraction or non-binary presentations of gender, are only queer to us because of our cultural paradigms of heteronormativity and cisgender essentialism. In different cultures, times, and places, the definition of what could be considered queer, or non-conformative in terms of sexuality and gender, will differ in both major and subtle ways from our own; tied into this is the problem of developing a sense and understanding that not only are those definitions and signs

different, but our ability to conceive of these differences as a result of cultural knowledge and environment must also come into being and practice. Under Tinkler and Jackson's proposed strategy of "historical sensibility," we are able to "[attend] critically and constructively to the uses of history in contemporary public discourse – presences and absences, explicit and implicit – and for generating convincing and critical academic discourse or arguments on contemporary issues," and therefore better frame our considerations of what and how our understanding of sex, gender, and queerness functions within our cultures, so that our conceptions and cultural biases are more readily recognized as potential anachronisms being projected into other cultures, times, and places (73). The study of literature, especially in classroom contexts that cover a wide range of times and places through the content, would greatly benefit from this strategy. Survey-type courses, in particular, could benefit from discussing and foregrounding texts with more than the general historical context, which might be familiar from broad-strokes history courses. Through a centering of feminist thought's differential definition of sex and gender as biological and cultural dimensions, we would be able to locate ourselves and our own cultures' concepts of gender and sexuality within the untold diversity of gender and sexuality in human cultural history.

Intersectionality and Queer Theory

Gender essentialism was not the only exclusionary and problematic feature of second wave feminism. Amongst other elements race, socio-economic class, sexuality, and language continued to be intimately tied to sexism, yet many white, middle-class, cisgender feminists ignored, sidelined, and silenced such concerns in mainstream

conversations. Out of this environment, several parallel gender critical paradigms have emerged from and alongside broader feminist thought.

Black feminism is an example of this paralleling. Black feminist thought is not simple feminist thought by Black women, but feminist thought that concerns and focuses on Black and African American women's unique challenges, oppressions, and culture, particularly in the United States. Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* is a seminal work in this paradigm. Writing in the same period where queer theory began to also amass as a critical paradigm in the academy, Collins asserts, "Much contemporary U.S. Black feminist thought reflects Black women's increasing willingness to oppose gender inequality within Black civil society," and also asserts that Black feminist thought is currently critiquing the academy's tendency to omit the work and efforts of Black scholars (7). Eric R. Jackson, in surveying Black and African American women's history in the United States, gives four primary themes for Black feminist thought:

First is the relationship among racism, sexism, and classism, which highlights the differences, not the commonalities, in the experiences of Black women in America in an attempt to transcend normal classifications. Second is the search for an authentic voice by challenging traditional, negative stereotypes and replacing them with images of the true condition of Black women in America. Third is the relationship between intellectual inquiry and political action as activists attempt to realize their goals. Fourth is the empowerment of Black women in their everyday lives, linking individual struggles to a broader, collective enterprise. (Jackson 128)

One of the most crucial and influential products of Black feminist thought in recent decades is the critical paradigm of intersectionality. Intersectionality is the overlapping of identities, or rather how the overlapping of identities creates complex personal experiences of oppression, which scale up into the systemic patterns of oppression for entire identity-groups (Howard & Chan 354). Intersectionality theory, as

Howard and Chan describe, “maintains a longstanding history rooted in feminism, specifically Black feminism, and critical race theory to connote both a social justice agenda and a prioritization of equity” (353). One of the 'pioneering texts (Launius 152) of intersectional theory was Kimberle Williams Crenshaw's "'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color". In this work, Crenshaw looks from a legal perspective at how the intersectional identities of women of color create specific conditions, locations, and patterns of violence against them (Crenshaw 1245). In examining the 1990 amendments made by Congress to the Immigration and Nationality Act (1246), Crenshaw finds that immigrant women are being positioned between their identities and physical vulnerabilities as women (to domestic abuse) and their uncertain/unclear legal status as immigrants, which often prevents them from seeking official protection against domestic abuse (1246-9). They say that this example,

illustrate[s] how patterns of subordination intersect in women's experience of domestic violence. Intersectional subordination need not be intentionally produced; in fact, it is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment. In the case of the marriage fraud provisions ... the imposition of a policy specifically designed to burden one class-immigrant spouses seeking permanent resident status-exacerbated the disempowerment of those already subordinated by other structures of domination. By failing to take into account the vulnerability of immigrant spouses to domestic violence, Congress positioned these women to absorb the simultaneous impact of its anti-immigration policy and their spouses' abuse. (Crenshaw 1249-50).

Although intersectional theory claims and maintains its history with Black feminism, unlike this critical paradigm it is continually widening its focus to other identities and groups. Crenshaw's examination of immigrant women's intersectional legal status and issues to domestic violence is but one example of the wide web of disciplines, identities, and connections which is touched by and examined under

intersectional theory. In “Toward a Field of Intersectional Studies,” Crenshaw, Sumi Cho, and Leslie McCall assert, “intersectionality has proved to be a productive concept that has been deployed in disciplines such as history, sociology, literature, philosophy, and anthropology as well as in feminist studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, and legal studies” (787). By analyzing the connections between identities, rather than viewing these identities as separate components of a social experience, intersectionality reveals its usefulness in nearly every discipline. General education literature studies is one area where pedagogy informed by intersectional theory is especially apt, considering the multitude and multiplicity of identities which occur in both the literature and in the student population of these courses.

Deborah Carlin, in 2006, designed and taught a general education English course which implemented an intersectional approach to the course’s topic, “Gender, Sexuality, Literature and Culture” which fulfilled the University of Massachusetts’ mandate, “to meet a global and cultural diversity requirement” through the content of the course (55). Through this course, Carlin sought to provoke thought and analysis on how the identity-based categories of gender (male/man and female/woman) and sexuality (hetero-, homo-, and bisexual) are in fact unstable, and are culturally dependent for meaning and implementation (Carlin 55, 61). In choosing texts for this course – both novels and films – Carlin implemented an intersectional approach to building the syllabus; they say each text, “presented a complex, intersecting web of social, historical, and political forces within which these norms acquired meaning and were both expressed and experienced in ways unique to the setting of each text” (59). Carlin’s definition of intersectionality is perhaps slanted differently than most instances

of intersectional theory, as they do not privilege conversations on social justice or extended focus on particular intersections of identities; however, this instance of intersectional pedagogy allows and encourages students to consider a globalized perspective on the various intersections of multiple cultures' gender and sexual identities and norms. The end-of-semester anonymous evaluations given by students on the course reveal the notable feedback that through this course several students were introduced to many of these concepts, and "how 'delicate' and 'touchy' many of the issues raised in the course were" (Carlin 63); these particular comments communicate an gained awareness on the students' part for the multiple instances of conflict and oppression which take place in the text's towards characters whose intersecting identities of gender and sexuality when connected to, "nationality, race, ethnicity, class, religion, abilities, geography, and historical era," (56) sets them outside or in specifically taboo locations of social identity and participation. Although Carlin does not report this specifically, it would be reasonable to expect that these realizations would prompt students to consider how identity, specifically in regard to gender and sexuality, intersect and place individuals under multiple forms of oppression and conflict within their own home cultures.

Carlin's course is also an example of a general education literature course utilizing a queered pedagogy. Quoting Annamarie Jagose ("Queer Theory: An Introduction"), Carlin frames that, "queer defines those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability—which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect—queer focuses on

mismatches between sex, gender and desire” (Jagose 3, quoted in Carlin 56). This destabilization of stable categories of identity, this queering, extends into every part of the course; the curriculum (as already discussed) focuses in on instances of unstable identity in a variety of contexts and cultures, and Carlin also describes the attempts to destabilize their own identity as the instructor – “my own singular authority as the instructor and primary voice in the room” they specify (57) – by enabling students to vote on pre-written questions and to share their thoughts via microphone, both acts guiding the conversation in the classroom. [Note: Carlin describes the particular context of this classroom as a lecture hall of three hundred students.] Carlin’s express desire to queer this general education literature classroom and course is an admirable example of the principles of queer theory in action.

Queer theory is a particular gender critical paradigm which arose out of scholarship in the early 1990s, on which much of modern queer thought and scholarship is based. Kadji Amin (“Genealogies of Queer”) describes queer theory as emerging from this particular context in the 1990s, saying, “it articulated a critique of settled identities and assumed a posture of resistance to institutionalization and academic disciplinarity,” in response to the “identity knowledges” which were recently institutionalized after their political origins in the 1960s-70s, such as “Women’s Studies, Black Studies, Latino Studies, etc.” (18). This resistance took shape both as the assertion that queer theory was not defined by any object study or specific discipline, though the later emerging genre of Queer studies was initially housed in English departments (18). Amin’s assertion that Queer studies partially absorbed the nascently institutionalized Lesbian and Gay studies in most institutions during this period further

complicates what they describe as the tension inherent to our modern understanding of queer: a critical theory that resists stable identity categories is inextricably and culturally linked to the study of “dissident sexualities and LGBT identities”(18-9), which often results in the ‘objectless’ study being manifested in context of the very identitarian objects of study it seeks to destabilize.

The foundational texts of queer theory, like Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, reflect this tension of anti-identitarian and gender and sexual identity areas of study. In this work, Butler takes an, “antifoundationalist feminist approach to ‘sex.’ Specifically, it contributed to debates within feminist scholarship about how to conduct feminist inquiry while thoroughly critiquing all essentialisms, including those that ground the category ‘woman’,” and their use of queer culture, here the drag queen, as the eminent example of gender performativity in our culture firmly cements the text as both resistant to identitarian categories and appealing to those involved with queer social culture (Butler 174-5). Amin asserts that Butler’s lasting influence on queer theory in in their anti-foundationalist and anti-identitarian stances (19), which supports both queer theory’s gender critical principles and the political resistance key to many LGBTQ+ individuals.

Amin considers Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, as a second foundational text for queer theory. They assert that, “as a work of ‘antihomophobic inquiry’ within gay literary studies” it is both an uncomfortable reminder of queer theory’s tense marriage and shared origins with Lesbian and Gay studies, with its paradigm of homophobia haunting and propelling a social justice agenda, and the fantastically incoherent and contradictory definitions for homosexuality in Western

culture (Amin 20); this again supports both the tension and union between identitarian and anti-identitarian purposes, as we acknowledge that homosexuality simultaneously holds specific meanings for individuals and diverse meanings across time and place in our culture.

Finally, Amin locates Michel Foucault and the *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, as a third widely-cited foundational text for queer theory and Queer studies. They assert,

Queer theory needed Foucault's theoretical cachet to establish sexuality, not as some giggly, private joke, but as a consequential technology invested with the gravitas of modern biopower itself. Along with sexuality, Foucault influentially identified norms, normativity, and normation – based on the development of the nineteenth-century science of statistics and invention of the 'population' as a statistical entity – as crucial modalities of modern power. (Amin 21)

The “technology” of sexuality in the sense of biopower is used alongside the language, theories, and critical paradigms of psychoanalysis, Amin further details (Amin 21-2).

Foucault's work, as the oldest and most divergent of these three foundational texts, is often difficult to reconcile with the evolved forms and concerns of Queer and LGBTQ+ studies, not in the least because this work does not – and indeed seeks to disprove – the paradigm of a historical silencing of homosexual and non-normative sexualities in the wider, mainstream cultural consciousness and medias, what Foucault terms the “repressive hypothesis” (Foucault *The History of Sexuality Vol.1* 8-10). This goal to, in some ways, discredit the purpose and narrative of Gay Liberation is a site of major dissonance for many scholars and teachers in Queer studies, placing it at odds with the identitarian politics by which many people understand queerness as signifying sexual minorities. The concept of minorities exists only with the concept of a majority, a “normal” population where otherness and deviance exist only because of contrast.

Foucault's works, as I will explore in more detail in the next section, are particularly suited to historic and Western-centric considerations on queerness, and Amin's argues that this particular "genealogy" of queer theory and Queer studies which situates and privileges the theories of Butler, Sedgwick, and Foucault is most suited to analysis and scholarly work concerning certain populations. In their hypothesis in "Haunted by the 1990s: Queer Theory's Affective Histories" Amin claims, "what queer studies has institutionalized, above an object of study or method, is a set of historical emotions generated within U.S. queer culture and politics around the early 1990s," (Amin "Haunted" 184) with those historical emotions being informed by the political radicality, and the ambiguous and varied meanings of "queer" which defined the US-American and Anglophone political-academic communities of origin for queer theory (180). Amin's proposal that we recognize the affective histories and definitions of "queer" in queer theory and Queer studies is to the purpose that we can then explore with more clarity and freedom what *queer*, *normal*, and *otherness* mean in places, peoples, and cultures which are not directly related to the "political and transgressive charge of the early 1990s moment" in the United States and English-speaking cultures. In this case, we would recognize that Foucault's theories over what "technology" sexuality constitutes in Western history is not universal to all cultures and societies, even those within the "West."

Queer of Color and Quare Theory

Several parallel critical paradigms and theories have emerged from, and in tandem with, queer theory which act and think towards this un-essentialized queer

worldview within Queer studies. In particular, I will highlight a couple which speak towards the intersectional considerations of queerness, normativity, and race.

Intersectional theory forms and shares a large portion of the theoretical authorship and published scholarship in these critical paradigms, yet specific critical lenses have been created to investigate certain populations and confluences of marginalized identities of queerness and race.

Queer of color theory is an “epistemological intervention” which investigates how the cultural paradigms of queerness and heteronormativity, of race, and of economics, and of other marginalized identities and groups combine, multiply, and exclude forms of oppression for people whose identities intersect in these areas (Ferguson 3). Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* is cited as one of the most important texts to this critical paradigm (Duran 396) as it advances a materialist-based argument in the consideration of how oppression is layered into American ideologies of race, race-relations, socio-economics, discrimination, and non-heterosexuality. In the Introduction, Ferguson uses the visual of a “black drag-queen prostitute sashay[ing] down a waterfront,” in Marlon Rigg’s *Tongues Untied*, documentary film that attempts to explore the particularity of Black gay identity (Ferguson 1). In this visual, Ferguson exemplifies the intentions of queer of color criticism, arguing that this figure is an example of “a larger black culture as it has engaged various economic and social formations...[s]he is multiply determined, regulated, and excluded by differences of race, class, sexuality, and gender” (1) and “thus, represents the social heterogeneity that characterizes African American culture” (2). The intention to use figures such as this to explore how the individual experiences

of queer people of color (QPOC) map into the larger intersections of oppression and identity is at the heart of queer of color theory.

Antonio Duran, in their article, “Queer and of Color: A Systematic Literature Review on Queer Students of Color in Higher Education Scholarship” argues that queer of color theory can be particularly useful to higher education. They argue that the “advantages of the queer of color critique for educational research include its focus on systems of oppression within socio-historical cultures, as well as its emphasis on reconceptualizing the object of inquiry” (Duran 396). This would not only guide administrators in investigating how the policies and practices in the institution disenfranchise and marginalize QPOC students, teachers, and staff, but also encourage, “scholars to analyze women of color and queers of color as the starting point to understand the ways race, sexuality, and gender function in society” (396). With queer of color theory’s particular focus on historical materialism and socio-economic epistemology, in the classroom we are able to not only better center our analysis and discourse concerning QPOC literature, characters, and authors, but to resist discussing queerness and race as fully separate diversities and categories of identity.

As a queer instructor, when I consider texts that demonstrate how these particular intersections of sexuality, gender, race, and economics are portrayed to the wider audience both within and outside of queer communities. Jennie Livingston’s *Paris is Burning* is a film that is both widely referenced within the American queer communities, particularly drag communities, and is fairly well-known to people outside of queer spaces. This documentary focuses on the “Ballroom scene” of New York City in the late 1980s, and mostly prominently displays how black, latino, gay, and

transgender identities overlap and manifest into social and personal struggles, but also how these communities interact, cohabit, and create culture around the practices of ballroom competitions and conversations on family/pseudo-family relationships. Additionally, the socio-economic status, experiences, and discourse surrounding these individuals and communities is prominent; “Houses” or intentional families of performers often feature in these conversations, with names copied or inspired by haute-couture design houses, such as St. Laurent, which is contrasted against the dedicated section of the film where individuals discuss the practices surrounding theft or “mopping” that are common in their communities. A further text which can be added to the discussions and analysis of *Paris is Burning*, which contrasts and compliments the considerations on economics, drag performance, and gender affirmation surgery would be Mark Saxenmeyer’s *The Queens*, a 2018 documentary which follows the high-budget female impersonation competition which is the Miss Continental beauty pageant, in Chicago. This film explores many of the same themes as *Paris is Burning*, but with a greater focus on the individuals’ gender identities and their economic investments into both surgeries and performance packages for pageants. These two films as contemporary, queer, US-American texts in a literature course can serve as a dedicated unit of analysis and discussion on the intersectionality which queer of color theory asks us to investigate and explore in our own communities, cultures, and economic paradigms.

Quare theory occupies and operates in a parallel space to queer of color theory. In the seminal work of this critical paradigm, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” E. Patrick

Johnson proposes and outlines “quare” – a American Southern Black vernacular of “queer” – theory as a remedy and intervention to the hegemonically White state of Queer studies, as they see it (2-3). Like queer of color theory, quare theory focuses on the intersection of racial, sexual and gender identities, but is unlike in its stronger centering of race as a key site and epistemology of the queerness of people of color. In particular, Johnson explores how quare theory privileges racialized ways of knowing, sexuality, and the materiality of Black bodies and experience in African American and Black culture(s). One strength of quare theory is this focus on the material realities of QPOC, and how resistance is materialized through the historical and lived experiences of people of color in art, literature, folklore, and performance (4), which Johnson compares to overly discursively-focused forms of knowledge and analysis that characterizes primarily White Queer studies scholarship (7-9). Johnson’s work also constitutes a “manifesto” with regard to how quare theory is to be enacted in political and social change. Key to this activity is the assertion that, “[q]uare studies must encourage strategic coalition building around laws and policies that have the potential to affect us across racial, sexual, and class divides” (18); in this statement, Johnson speaks to both the intersectional identities of individuals and the particular dangers that meet those intersections, and to the necessity of working cohesively where those intersections do not appear, in those of our communities that often contradict or double-bind against the sexual and gender identities in context of race and culture (19). In the work needed to address and change racial oppression, Johnson states, “We cannot afford to abandon [non-queer POC persons in our communities] simply because they are heterosexual” (19). In the literature classroom – particularly in general education courses, due to the

wider range of the student population engaged – queer theory offers opportunities to focus on how race intersects sexual and gendered knowledge, and how performance of these identities is enacted through resistance materially and in the lived experiences of QPOC.

Pedagogy and Gender Critical Paradigms

In setting together these multiple related and frequently parallel critical paradigms, I attempt to consolidate the reality that many critical paradigms and theories are not only appropriate, but already in use in our classrooms. How each of these critical paradigms individually considers and incorporates a questioning of gender within their missions reveals the sheer breadth of options instructors that are available for their classroom pedagogy and their curriculum. Gender is the most visibly and accessibly queer element of these critical paradigms, which not only justifies the overall framework of gender critical paradigms for the purpose of this work, but also speaks to the needfulness of engaging critically with gender in our classrooms. Gender, as a category of identity, provides examples of how investigation of identity is nuanced for the individual, yet reveals the patterns of cultural and societal epistemology that not only create and give meaning to identity, but allows us to explore how those patterns manifest in personal experiences and in the material world in which we live. In the general education literature classroom, to ignore gender is to elide important conversations and texts which discourse on identity as it occurs in both the micro and macro perspectives of human experience. Judith Butler, in discussing the real-world applications of gender theory, asserts that the “structures of language and politics

constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices" (Butler 8). Under the framework of gender critical paradigms, we as instructors are able to encourage and generate critical and nuanced understandings of how gender and other identity categories, such as race, sexuality, Otherness and resistance to the normative expressions of these categories occurs in our texts, classrooms, and pedagogies.

The Sexual Episteme

Sex, I argue, is at the heart and foundation of all contemporary discourses on queerness. I mean “sex” in multiple definitions. I mean sex as the bodily counterpart to gender, viewed and categorized through chromosomal, biological, genital, and other physical forms of differentiation. I mean sex as the physical acts of reproduction, exercise, masturbation, and other forms of sexual activity. I mean sex as it connotes emotional ties, severances, violence, and power. Sex is at the heart and foundation of queerness because it is by sex, all forms and conceptions of sex, that sexuality as normal or non-normal, as biological, as emotional, and as cultural acts and signs is understood. In framing how queerness is engaged and conceived of in the work’s particular focus on the general education literature classroom, I frame sex through the idea of our sexual episteme, the collective understandings of sex that operate as the foundation for all aspects of sexuality, gender, and queer identities in our discourses, and systems of thought and meaning.

To set this framework in place, I must first discuss how Foucault’s writings identify the systems and operations of the sexual episteme. That analysis will be

necessary to see-how the two subsequent frames, LGBTQ+ identities and gender critical paradigms, are located within and made possible through the sexual episteme.

Triangulating the episteme in this way will allow me to show how biological sex and gender are complicated and revealed as non-essentialized by the particular fluidity of meaning of each category within the sexual episteme. All of this will lead to a discussion of how sexual acts and non-heteronormative desire are positioned as dangerous, and how epistemic notions of innocence, infection, and the rhetorics of fearmongering in major pedagogical and social discourses of the past centuries are revealed.

Foucault and the Sexual Episteme

The scholarship of Michel Foucault occupies a central space in many genealogies of queer theory and studies. *The History of Sexuality*, now published in four volumes, has propagated the many of the central theoretical and terminological elements of queer theory since its inception in the 1990s, namely “sexuality, normativity, and biopolitics” (Amin “Genealogies” 20). These terms are the products of Foucault’s rebuttal against the “Repressive Hypothesis” that sexuality has, until recent modern times, been primarily a discourse of the silenced and characterized by an all-encompassing oppression (Foucault *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* 10). Foucault looks at the historic-political movements and documents of discourse over the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, and instead of silence finds “around and apropos of sex, one sees a veritable discursive explosion” (17-18):

There was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex-specific discourses, different from one another both by their form and by their object ... the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.

For Foucault, power is at the center of why and how sexuality has become defined and used in our modern Western systems of thought. This power is enacted, controlled, and propagated through the institutions of society (28). Foucault traces these changes in the discourse of sexuality through institutions such as the Church, through increased focus on divulging sexual and desirous feelings in confession (19-20); through the legal system, where acts of sexuality and perversion became coded into law (36); through the medical and psychiatric systems, as sexual perversions entered (and later exited) the domain of mental illness (41); through the academy and education, where teachers, administrators, parents and students discoursed around the normality of sexuality and its place in the home and the school (27-30). The normality of sexuality – and by consequence the abnormality of sexuality – was (and is) a continuous conversation, carried out across all areas of society, where sexuality and its consequences interface not with culture, as I outline in previous sections, but with the nature of society itself.

I borrow Foucault's particular use of "episteme" from *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, where it used to describe the theoretical rules by which knowledge and the means of knowing operate. In the preface, Foucault describes his purpose as,

attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby *manifests a history* which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its *conditions of possibility*. (xxii)

To discuss an episteme in this way is to interrogate how knowledge has been historically made, what systems of thought allow certain knowledge to exist and other concepts to not exist, and how this historically informed knowledge creates possibilities of new knowledge in the present.

Our sexual episteme, I argue, is born and evolved from those discourses on sexuality which Foucault describes in Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*. All possible discourses, rhetorics, and communicable knowledge of sexuality in the modern “West” stems from this history of societally institutionalized power over sex. Indeed, I further argue that the two previous frames which I propose in this work, LGBTQ+ identities and gender critical paradigms, exist within this episteme.

LGBTQ+ identities, as I frame them, are the implementation of identity politics surrounding sexual minorities. Foucault provides evidence of the origins of the concept of sexual minorities and sexual identities in the discourse which created the “specification” of homosexuality (*The History of Sexuality Vol.1* 42). The term originates as a medical category in the late nineteenth century and marks a transition of sexual knowledge that transformed perversions from sinful *acts* to habitual *nature* within medical discourse on sexuality (43). “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species,” and not the only sexual species, at that; under what Foucault calls the “natural order of disorder” (44) numerous species and etymological neologisms sprang from the medical and psychiatric fields, without a coherent system of classification or sound scientific methodology. Indeed, even as the medical field began the process of leaving behind this understanding of non-normative sexuality as *disorders*, due to newer forms of scientific thought throughout the twentieth

century, “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified,” (101). The relationship of power, of identification of desires by a name and category under medical thought, transformed as those people who had been “specified” as homosexuals in a medically deviant sense reversed this rhetoric to identify themselves as homosexuals, as defined by the natural inclination of their desires. This has evolved into the familiar forms of identity politics and concepts of sexual minorities against the sexual majority (or normativity) in our own day.

Gender critical paradigms, besides also frequently citing Foucault in their theories and genealogies, are also evidenced as occupying a space within the sexual episteme. Elements and objects of analysis, such as race, have similar histories to sexual minorities in the origination and evolution from now incongruous medical knowledge of the past centuries. The separation of bodily sex from cultural gender, so rooted in feminist thought, is prominently foregrounded by Foucault’s example and analysis of Herculine Barbin, a “hermaphrodite” who lived in nineteenth century France. In the introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, Foucault historicizes the attitudes towards intersex people – those whose biological and/or chromosomal sex does not fall neatly into either male or female, often those born with sex characteristics of both “male” and “female” form – are defined by the increasing belief and knowledge of a “true sex” in each body (viii). Barbin, initially identified as female at birth and raised as such, as an adult was compelled to legally change their sex to male, and later committed suicide due to their “incapab[ility] of adapting [them]self to a new identity” (xi). This historical example of

gendering discourse – with the tragic consequences that are familiar to our modern discourses on transgender lives and rights – is evidence of how “naturalized” heteronormative sexuality is embedded in social, legal, and medical thought (Butler 31). “Although male and female anatomical elements are jointly distributed in and on this body,” Butler reads

that is not the true source of scandal. The linguistic conventions that produce intelligible gendered selves find their limit in Herculine precisely because she/he occasions a convergence and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire. Herculine deploys and redistributes the terms of a binary system, but that very redistribution disrupts and proliferates those terms outside the binary itself. (31)

Second-wave feminists’ struggle to articulate essentialized gender as separate from biological determinism (Butler 12) is a reiteration of the same gendering knowledge and discourse that was not only possible and but occurred in lives of people such as Herculine Barbin and other complexly-sexed and gendered persons throughout the past few centuries.

Butler’s contribution to our understanding of the sexual episteme concerns the logical progression of such questioning of gender and sex. In their attempt in *Gender Trouble* to explore and complicate the categories of “woman,” “gender,” and “sex” in feminist thought, Butler asserts that the logical conclusion of gender being separate from sex is not only that gender, then, does not need to remain tied in a dyad of male/man and female/woman, but also that the definition and categories of sex are also culturally-informed knowledges (10). Within the sexual episteme, the means of conceptualizing gender as a social element relies on the ability to recognize, differentiate, and categorize gendered behaviors and forms.

‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and

desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the “expression” or “effect” of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (23)

I quote Butler in full here, as this passage most fully articulates how gender and gendering operates under the sexual episteme. Queerness, separate from the connotations of LGBTQ+ identities and categories, speaks to those incoherent areas of gender, where the ability to understand and conceptualize non-normative gender nears the limits of the possibilities of knowledge in the sexual episteme. A male/female binary of sex facilitates normative functions of gendering and, under Foucault’s theory, is in turn facilitated by the systems of power which privilege normative conceptions of body, health, and population (*The History of Sexuality Vol.1* 25).

Butler’s meditation on the metaphysical relationship between substantive, or embodied forms of gendering and the “relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations” (15) that is gendering, in practice, ultimately leads to their proposal of performativity as a theoretical technology of gender and gendering. Butler describes gender as performance, a continuous series of acts which communicate conformance or non-conformance to certain cultural matrices of gendered behaviors and signs (178). This matrix of gendered understanding and social positioning is ever-changing, both for individuals and the society as a whole as the possibilities knowable within the sexual episteme are shifted, hidden, and revealed by the discourses of sex occurring in the given moment.

Sex Acts and Discursive Manifestations of the Sexual Episteme

Sex acts, like gender acts, are key elements of how we understand the sexual episteme of societies and cultures. As theorized by Foucault, conversation and debate on sex acts is far from silent, often forming key examples and instances of the resistance and tension between the normative functions of sexuality, as seen in heterosexism, and the non-normative elements of queerness, those events and ideas which push the standard flows of power into new or different spaces. While these heterosexist discourses, on the surface seem to stress, oppress, and attempt to re-narrativize queerness and queer knowledges, in truth they illustrate the shifting manifestations of possibility within the sexual episteme, and reveal the social anxieties and epistemological tensions that such changes bring to light in both the societal and individual perspectives.

Children, for example, are often the topic of sex (and gender) act debates. Foucault details the anxieties of infantile and childhood sexuality, the anxious epidemic of onanism or masturbation in the nineteenth century that is tied to cultural and medical thoughts on intelligence, morality, and sexual potency (*The History of Sexuality Vol. I* 121). The pedagogical field was a particular location where the “war against onanism” (104) was waged, where the academy as an institution controlled the flow of power through the discursive framing of sexuality as secret (42) and a rhetorical foundation of surveillance that controlled when, where, with whom, and how sexuality was enacted in the educational setting and in the home (28, 46). The discourses surrounding sex acts and children are still prominent today, not only in the established matters, such as masturbation and homosexual play, but in the legal field. In our time an increasingly

heterosexist and queerphobic conservative bloc in politics is attempting to narrativize queer individuals and culture as inherently sexual and inherently dangerous to moral development. House Bill 9, signed into law in March of 2023 in the state of Tennessee, classifies public drag performances as illegal, due to the supposed danger such events possess for children's moral upbringing, with a similar illogic being used to support House Bill 1, passed in the same state, which classifies gender affirming measures for transgender minors as illegal ("Human Rights Campaign"). Legal measures such as these have emerged from anxieties regarding the recent and increasing prominence of queer and LGBTQ+ individuals and culture in media representation in the United States, yet these styles of discourse over sex acts and apparently inherent dangers of sex acts is well established in the historical record of the sexual episteme.

This inherent danger of sex acts is prominent in the discourses surrounding HIV/AIDS, especially those occurring within the timeframe of the public health crisis of AIDS epidemic in the 1980s-90s. Leo Bersani's influential essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?" explores the implications of the public anxiety, homophobic actions, and heterosexist institutional distancing in reaction to the outbreaks and crisis. The Reagan administration's delayed and lackluster response to the crisis suggests heterosexism, as the public image of HIV/AIDS had quickly become connotated with the primarily gay and queer communities which were being ravaged by the infection (Bersani 198-9).

[Footnote 2 compares the administration's \$3 million budget for the commission investigating the Challenger disaster to the under \$1 million budget allocated for the AIDS commission.] The public response, however, reveals the more violent forms of heterosexism and queerphobia that dominated conversations in this crisis. Bersani

asserts that fearmongering about “innocent” heterosexuals being infected with the virus communicates not only the heterosexist public’s disregard for queer individuals, but that such rhetoric is used to justify legal and medical violence against groups that are disproportionately affected by the epidemic, such as gay men and drug users. Violent actions, such as refusal to give medical service to individuals with HIV, the barring of children with HIV from schools, and extreme violence, such as the arson a house in Arcadia, FL on the suspicion of the children residing there having HIV (199) speak to how these discourses of fear and the rhetoric that gay and non-normative sex acts could endanger “innocent” heterosexual bystanders (210) have come to dominate the public knowledge of HIV/AIDS. The evidence of this strain of discourse being evident in the sexual episteme lies in Bersani’s comparison to the historical discourses in the nineteenth century that blamed and focused on female prostitutes’ role in spreading venereal diseases, usually to “innocent” men (211). The prominence of this discourse surrounding contamination and purity is not limited to these examples, though the long-term effects and presence of these examples is very much still prevalent today, with public conversations on prostitution continuing to portray the profession as a public health risk, and the institutional ban on gay, bisexual, or MLM individuals donating blood due to the apparently high likelihood of those people endanger innocents with the consequences of their non-heterosexual sex acts.

Turning back the academy, sex acts are often categorized as inappropriate in the institutional and pedagogical discourses regarding sex. Oliver Davis and Tim Dean in “Does Queer Studies Hate Sex?” assert that the rise of Queer studies in the 1990s facilitated an exclusion of sex acts from theoretical discourses and communities

regarding queerness. They link this to the presence and prominence of identitarian politics within the emergent Queer studies, intersectional theory, and third wave feminism of the period (48-9, 54), with identitarian politics finding sex acts, rooted in vulnerabilities and powerlessness (69), as unusable elements in the attempts to establish itself within the academy (58, 64). The particular discourses that associate sex acts with violence nonetheless remain within the scope of the academy, often in the discourses of social justice and criminal law.

In my own coursework, I investigated the particular discourse of violence and assault which is attached to the discourses surrounding pederasty and the historical traditions of pedagogy in the academy. In looking at Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol 2: The Use of Pleasure*, I explored how the sexual episteme of ancient Greek and Hellenistic cultures was analyzed. In this volume, Foucault asserts that the sexual episteme of this Classical Greek culture conceived of sex acts in under the technology appetite (31, 35), and did not categorize identity based on the active, penetrative sex actors' choice in partner with regard to male or female body (14-5), nor to the class status of the partner beyond the ethics involved with penetrating a social equal or lesser. This sexual episteme organized positive (masculine) and negative social meanings to the active or penetrative actor and to the passive or penetrated body, respectively (85). The practice we define as pederasty, the cultural institution whereby (ideally) older, active male and (ideally) younger, passive male sex actors enacted sexual and playful desires, contains the discourse of this tension between active and passive roles in ethics. The younger male, or *eromenos* (196) while physically, due to age and experience, is lesser to the older male, or *erastes* (196) his futurity as an equal must be kept to the

forefront of public behaviors; the *eromenos*, although occupying the passive role in sexual relations (if and/or when they occur, always away from the public) must guard their future status as a citizen by not appearing to want (or perhaps more accurately, by being wanton about) being in this role, with the *erastes* also keeping this concern to prevent accusations of shaming or dishonoring their ‘beloved’ (197-8). The pederastic relationship and its institution has seemingly haunted the domain of pedagogy in the Western tradition ever since, both retaining the original tensions of passive/active from the ancient sexual episteme and gaining new tensions as the episteme of cultures shifts to new moral frameworks, such as Christianity, where non-reproductive sex acts – including those occurring between individuals of same sex - is embroiled in discourses of sin and heresy (14-6). The discourse of the fraught relationship between teacher and pupil, especially with interactions of affection (which can be construed as public signs of private sex acts, just as in public the *erastes* gives gifts and admiring interacts with the *eromenos*), remains an essential component of the academy and education in Western thought. The great irony of this research project is in the opportunity it provided to me to investigate, discuss, and dismiss the false accusations of pedophilia that have been spread against Foucault. In understanding the episteme which fostered the pederastic tradition, I was able to then explore and understand how the modern sexual episteme allows the possibility of leveraging the discourse of “dangerous” queer sex acts against queer individuals to discredit and violently target them, while working within the heterosexist paradigms of sex acts and desire.

Pedagogy and the Sexual Episteme

The importance of understanding and acknowledging the sexual episteme underlies all three frameworks that I propose in this work, but in particular I desire to know how experienced instructors for general education literature courses reiterate or redirect certain the discourses surrounding the sex/gender paradigm and sex acts in the texts and discourse of their classrooms. The sexual episteme by which we understand and create knowledge about these categories and actions is, naturally, dependent on the social and cultural environments that we are influenced by, but this episteme is constantly shifting to manifest new possibilities and to phase out older forms of knowledge as those societies and cultures change over time. In the general education literature course, where we often investigate and engage with works from a wide range of times, places, and cultures, our awareness of our own sexual episteme becomes the guiding principle by which we discuss how these texts and voices appear to us, but also how they appear and make sense to those of different cultures, especially that of the author or originating culture. This awareness of our sexual episteme in turn allows for a more nuanced perspective on the two other frameworks which operate within the sexual episteme of our modern “Western” societies.

III. Gender, Sexuality, and LGBTQ+ Identities in General Education Literature Courses

In an effort to explore how these three frameworks are present within the pedagogical and curricular environments of general education literature courses, I conducted a survey of instructors who taught literature courses that qualified as general education courses at their institution within the past five years (Fall 2018 to Fall 2023 semesters). This study sought to evaluate the presence and prevalence of Gender, Sexuality, and LGBTQ+ identities in the pedagogy of General Education Literature courses taught at state colleges and universities in the past five years. This study was conducted in February of 2023, and while the response size is limited, I observed a correlation through the results that responses accurately map out how instructors can and do use the ideas and concepts which form each of the three major frameworks which have been explored in the previous sections.

Methodology

The survey was created and distributed using Google Forms, with a total of nine questions. The landing page of the survey reminded participants of the purpose of the survey and the requirements necessary in order to be a participant, which is that they must have taught a literature course that qualifies under their institution's general education curriculum in the past five years (Fall 2018 to Fall 2022 semesters). This page also reminded participants that all responses would be anonymous, as no email information was collected and any identifying information volunteered would be anonymized by the researcher. Response formats included short answer texts, long answer texts, multiple choice (single response and multiple response variants), and multiple-choice grid responses. The initial participant pool for this study was the

English department faculty of the researcher's institution. All potential participants in this pool were identified using the institution's public website directory for the department, where email addresses were collected. This initial potential participant pool contained thirty-eight instructors. The survey asked participants to respond to nine questions [see Appendix i for full questions]:

- 1) At what institution did you teach this General Education Literature course?
- 2) Which of the following best describes your level of choice in the course design and text selection for this course?
- 3) Select any of the following genres/categories of literature which you think are a literary focus in the general education literature courses you have taught for this institution.
- 4) When selecting texts for this course, how often did you consider each of the following [Gender and Gender Theory, Portrayal of Sex and Sexuality, LGBTQ+ Identities]?
- 5) When designing course materials and assignments, how often do you consider each of the following [same categories as Question 4]?
- 6) Describe how you do or do not consider gender and gender theory in the content, text-selection, assessment, and/or pedagogy of your class.
- 7) Describe how you do or do not consider portrayals of sex and sexuality in the content, text-selection, assessment, and/or pedagogy of your class.
- 8) Describe how you do or do not consider LGBTQ+ identities and characters in the content, text-selection, assessment, and/or pedagogy of your class.
- 9) What, if anything, would prevent or discourage you from considering gender, gender theory, portrayal of sex and sexuality, and/or LGBTQ+ identities and characters in your course materials, selected texts, and pedagogy?

A crucial choice made in the design of this survey was to withhold definitions of the three frameworks from participants. This choice was to create a blind to the study, whereby participant's understanding of each framework's terminology would need to rely on previous knowledge and experience of sexuality, gender, and LGBTQ+ identities.

An email was sent to the initial potential participant pool which outlined the purpose and participation requirements for the study. They were asked to voluntarily participate in the study by taking the survey linked in the email. They were also asked

to forward the email to relevant colleagues at other state institutions to expand the response pool beyond a single institution. The response period of the survey lasted sixteen days, and at the end of this period the survey was closed to further answers.

Results

Several limiting factors came into play in the results of this study. At the end of the response period six participants had completed the required questions for the survey, and this number was well below the anticipated (maximum) response of one hundred participants. Each participant answered Questions 1-7 and 9, while one participant abstained from answering Question 8. Participants identified their general education literature courses as occurring in two state institutions, both located in the southeastern region of the United States; these will be referred to as Institutions A and B. Five participants identified Institution A, and one participant identified Institution B. The small sample size and prominence of a single institution precludes the results of this study from being truly representative of the larger pool of experiences of general education literature instructors. However, these results do demonstrate that, in the context of the two reported institutions, the three theoretical frameworks which I outline in this document do coincide and describe the pedagogical considerations of these instructors.

Despite this small sample size of both individual participants and number of institutions, the results illustrated a highly diverse range of curriculum and literary topics occurring in the reported courses. The majority response to Question 2, concerning instructors' level of choice in course design and text selection being, "any" appropriate materials (Table 1) indicates that the general education literature courses

taught at Institution A (where all five respondents chose this response) did not involve an in-depth level of needful permission from the department and/or general education program coordinators to use certain texts or pedagogical structures. The minority response to Question 2 belonged to the participant from Institution B of “some standardized materials and assessments...alongside non-standardized materials, texts, and assessments” and indicated that general education literature courses at Institution B had specific procedures, or potentially pre-selected course structures, that identified certain approved texts, assessments, and materials that must be used in these courses. In a general education course, this discrepancy between levels of instructor choice was potentially affected by many factors, including institutional policy for all general education courses and state policies/mandates on general education curriculum and course structures, with the second being possible due to the institutions identified by participants being located in separate states within the southeast region. However, responses to Question 3 (Table 2), reveal a wide range of topics and cultures represented in these instructors’ general education literature courses.

A pattern which emerged from these results was the apparent split between broader and narrower focus on certain cultures and topics in these courses. Half of participants selected at least five genres/categories in their response and half selected two genres/categories in their response. The responses with five or more selections could possibly be interpreted as indicating survey-style curriculum, as evidence by the response selecting “African and/or African American,” “American,” “British,” “Queer and/or Lesbian and Gay,” and “Women’s” literature as particular categories of literary focus in the course.

Table 1 Responses to Question 2^a

Response selected	Number of selections
Instructors are able to teach any materials or assessments to meet the course's objectives	5
Instructors use some standardized materials and assessments for this course, alongside non-standardized materials, texts, and assessments	1
Instructors only use the standardized materials and assessments for this course	0

a. “Which of the following best describes your level of choice in the course design and text selection for this course?”

Table 2 Responses to Question 3^a

Response selected ^b	Number of selections
African and/or African American literature	3
American literature	4
British literature	2
Indigenous and/or Native American literature	1
Regional literature	1
Queer and/or Lesbian and Gay literature	3
Women’s literature	3
World literature	2
Asian-American literature*	2
Latine literature*	1
Environmental literature*	1

a. “Select any of the following genres/categories of literature which you think are a literary focus in the general education literature courses you have taught for this institution (this includes courses that explicitly focus on these areas of literature and survey-type courses which deal with multiple areas):”

b. Note: * indicates participant-volunteered genres/categories

The two-selection responses could possibly be interpreted as genre-specific or topic-focused literature courses, as each response in this category possesses an overlap between selections, such as the response, “American” and “Asian-American” literature. Significantly, none of the two-selection courses also indicate the “Queer” genre as a literary focus for the course. This indicates that the three participants who did identify this selection were likely engaging with explicitly queer and/or LGBTQ+ texts, authors, or conversations within the suspected survey-style courses. Without further information, such as which texts, authors, etc. are explicitly queer in these courses and how they are being engaged, I am only able to speculate that these choices were being made to actively include queer presences in the curriculum, given that the responses indicated them as a literary focus in the course.

This speculation is supported by the results of Question 4 (Figure 1), which measured instructors’ considerations of the three frameworks of queerness when selecting texts for the courses. All two-selection courses coincided with a reported absolute lack of consideration for LGBTQ+ identities, which is logical when considered with the earlier acknowledgment that none of these courses indicate queerness or sexuality (or gender, as none of this category selected “Women’s” literature, either) as the primary literary focus of the course. This lends credence to the idea that the instructors of the 5+ selection courses purposefully included LGBTQ+ identities in the texts selected for the course, as shown in these participants’ indication of “often,” “frequently,” and “always” considering LGBTQ+ identities when selecting texts. This same pattern was indicated again in the responses to Question 8, where the participants explained how LGBTQ+ identities were or were not considered in their course. The

responses indicating consideration of gender and gender theory in text selection also supported this idea. While no participants selected “never” considering this framework, the two participants who chose “frequently” and “always” considering gender and gender theory in text selection both coincided with the 5+ selection responses and reported the same level of consideration for portrayals of sex and sexuality. Results indicated a definitive split in participants’ consideration of sex and sexuality; one participant indicated “never ” doing so, and while three indicate “sometimes”. Cross-comparison of indicators across frameworks showed that four participants rated their consideration of portrayals of sex and sexuality as below or equal to their considerations of gender and gender theory, LGBTQ+ identities, or both. While not explicitly shown in the results, based on my own experiences in literature courses, I tentatively would like to link this to the suspicion that portrayals of sex/uality are usually avoided in literature courses due to the perceptions of sex/uality as crass, as ‘lower’ forms of literature, or as simply too controversial or personal to discourse about in the classroom setting. Another factor might also stem from the difficulties in conceptualizing the sexual episteme, with more direct and tangible topics of discourse available under gender critical paradigms. As is usual when interrogating the involvement of the sexual episteme, multiple reasons for the decisions made about portrayals of sex/uality often coexist, even where those reasons seemingly contradict.

When selecting texts for this course, how often did you consider each of the following:

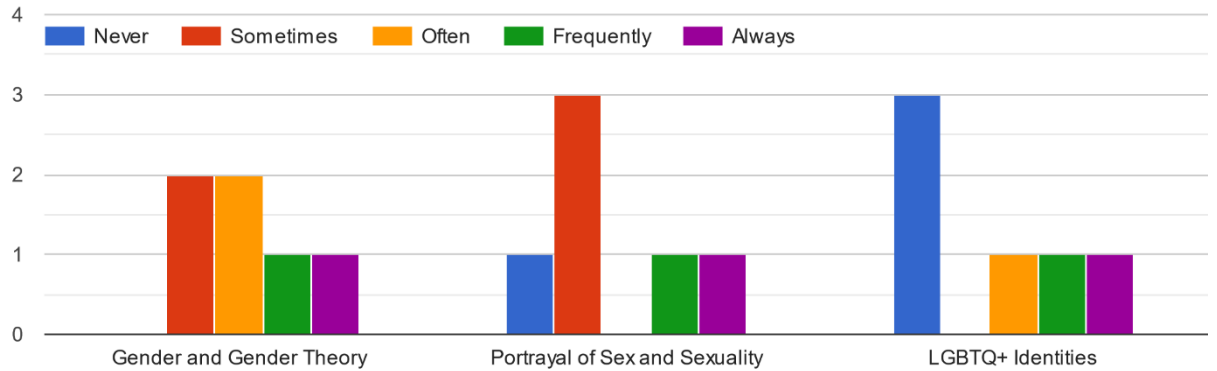


Figure 1. Responses to Question 4 “When selecting texts for this course, how often did you consider each of the following:”

When designing course materials and assignments, how often do you consider each of the following:

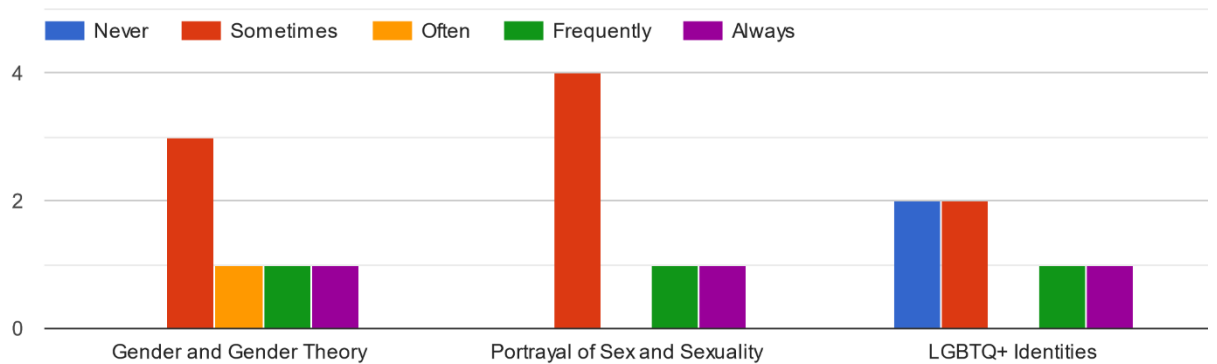


Figure 2. Responses to Question 5 “When designing course materials and assignments, how often do you consider each of the following:”

While the explicit difference between Questions 4 and 5 were the instructors' context for either text selection or designing course materials and assessments, the responses suggested that Question 5 (Figure 2) prompted two instructors to consider how they pedagogically connected LGBTQ+ identities to either representational politics or to the course's larger themes and purposes. While four participants responded to Questions 4 and 5 in exactly the same manner, the two participants' responses deviated between questions; one reported an overall increase in considerations of the frameworks, while the other reported an overall decrease, and each retained one level of consideration while reporting either a level higher or lower for the other two frameworks. For the participant who rated higher considerations in portrayals of sex/uality and LGBTQ+ identities, their response to Question 8 (concerning how the instructor does or does not consider LGBTQ+ identities and characters) suggested why they report an increased consideration of this framework. They explained, "I try to bring in as many multiple perspectives on the topic as possible, including these LGBTQ+ identities to help students develop a more full understanding of the different kinds of communities in America" indicating that an increased awareness of LGBTQ+ identities and communities was an element of the course's purpose; surprisingly, this does not correspond with their indication of genre/category of literary focus, as they did not select "Queer" as genre in Question 3. Nonetheless, this participant linked LGBTQ+ identities and the sex/uality experiences those identities are built on to the larger themes and purposes of the course. For the participant who indicated less consideration of gender and LGBTQ+ identities, their explanations in Questions 6 and 7 (concerning gender and sex/uality, respectively) suggested that this instructor has considered these

frameworks largely through criticisms of heterosexism. Their explanation, “(1) I think about how LGBT characters are *represented* in a work, and (2) whether the *exclusion* of LGBT characters or themes is significant” suggested that representation of LGBTQ+ voices and presences was an opportunity to discourse on how *normalized* such presences are in the given texts and the represented gender environments. Their explanation on their consideration of sex/uality, “I like to include at least one work that is explicitly about *LGBT issues*” further shows how prominently they used identitarian political language and concerns about heterosexism to describe how they considered queerness relevant to their particular course. The responses of these two participants provided an interesting insight into how the involvement of LGBT+ identities could conflict and become conflated with either of the other two frameworks. Although Questions 4 and 5 were designed to provide insight into different aspects of the instructors’ pedagogies, the majority pattern of reporting consideration of each framework in exactly the same levels across both text selection and the design of course materials and assessments suggested that those instructors were not approaching these distinct opportunities and tasks with intentions of nuancing how queerness could be involved (or not) in the different components of the coursework.

The divide between instructors’ consideration of gender and gender theory largely followed the divide between concern for how gender theory fits into the larger themes and purposes of the course, and how genders can be fairly (or unfairly) represented in the curriculum. One response, “I feel like gender is essential to any examination of the *human experience* -- and discussing how it works and what it can mean in literature can reveal important ideas” discussed how gender was a key feature

to any analysis of the literature, and therefore to forgo this framework would have hindered the analytical potential of the course. This was echoed somewhat by the response in which the instructor cited the level of the course as conducive to “introduce students to these concepts [of gender theory] and let them practice with their application” through the coursework. These responses were in contrast to the majority pattern of Question 6, which expressed consideration for how genders were represented within the course. This included the conscious act to “balance the range of genders of the authors,” and “mak[ing] sure that female authors and strong female characters are represented,” and an explanation that the instructor always included LGBTQ+ literature and women’s literature in their course. These responses were not patterned along the 5+ or two-selection groupings, and indicated that representation of what that instructor considers a fair balance of genders in the course is an important consideration to most of the general education literature instructors. I say what the instructor *considers* a fair *balance* of genders, since only two of the four responses in this category specify LGBTQ+ genders; the “strong female” response seems to imply that the course would, as a matter of course, include *strong male* characters and authors, and the “balance the range” of the authors’ genders elided the question of how that instructor defined those genders, which does not indicate if they included authors whose genders fall outside of the heteronormative binary. This lack of specificity could possibly speak to the general culture of consideration that gender critical paradigms receive, in that most of the instructors seem aware of how gender intersects with multiple discourses and theoretical lenses, yet the further interrogation of gender as essentialized bodily sex is largely absent from those considerations.

However, by placing portrayals of sex and sexuality as a separate category from gender, several participants were successfully directed to reflect on sex/uality as sex acts rather than more general definitions of biological sex or identitarian sexualities. While half of the responses to Question 7 used more vague definitions of sex/uality to discuss appropriateness to the larger topics and themes of the courses, three participants discuss sex acts. One portrayed sex as a natural (reproductive) act, one specified that they did not particularly select texts based on sexual content (but did encourage discussion when sex/uality intersected with other character elements), and one reported that they actively avoided texts that depict violent sexual acts. This provides support for my earlier speculation that sex acts in pedagogical literature contexts must either be portrayed as a technology (here in the reproductive sense) of the sexual episteme, or for the discursive potential sex acts bring to the classroom (which the instructor, here, admits to keeping out of the classroom). While these responses fell evenly across both the reported lower and higher considerations from Questions 4 and 5 for “Portrayals of Sex and Sexuality” these responses do continue the genres/categories pattern, with 5+ selections courses showing more vague considerations of sexuality and two-selection courses showing more considerations of sex acts portrayed and discussed in the course. While, again, there were many possible reasons and conflating decisions made about the portrayal of sex/uality in these courses, this pattern suggests that more specialized literature courses consider sex/uality in more nuanced and focuses ways than more generalized courses.

IV. Conclusion

In Question 9, the instructors presented a clear divide between their potential preventative discouragements or obstacles to including any of the three frameworks in their courses. Three participants cannot describe any potential barriers (other than no potential relevance to the themes of the texts). One says that only being forced to exclude them would be a potential reason for exclusion (although they do not specify who exactly that directive could come from in their situation). One cites the current political discourse against queer and LGBTQ+ existence, to “downplay or minimize such questions” as it is occurring in their state as a reason, although they plainly admit “I try to ignore that pressure.” Lastly, one instructor also gives current conservative rhetoric – though here specified as potentially disruptive conservative students in classroom – as a potential worry, and further clarifies their attitude with, “I work really hard to frame the material in a way that makes it safe for everyone to discuss.” This clear divide between the instructors’ perceptions of potential preventative forces does not follow any of the larger patterns established across the survey.

In this study, participants were able to reflect and respond on each of the three frameworks without a description of what that framework indicates in the larger scope of queer thought. Not only were they able to effectively understand what each framework’s terminology signified, likely based on previous knowledge and experience, but the patterns which emerged in the responses show that the three frameworks, as I propose them in this work, map onto how instructors of general education courses already consider queerness in their pedagogies. The prominence of considering LGBTQ+ identities through the lens of representation aligns with my

assertion that discourse over LGBTQ+ identities is manifested as a component of thought on identitarian politics in education. The major considerations of gender through gender critical paradigms are illustrated in the prominence of responses discussing gender as a component of analysis and of the authors' and characters' genders as points of intersectional identities being foregrounded in the texts and discourses of the courses. Finally, the polarizing patterns concerning sex/uality in the general education classroom speaks to how sex acts, bodily sex categories, and the technology of sex/uality in social discourse in the responses illustrates how these instructors find discussing sex is a tense endeavor due to multiple meanings of sex under the current sexual episteme. This alignment of patterns in instructors' knowledge regarding LGBTQ+ identities, gender critical paradigms, and what I term the sexual episteme supports my argument that these three frameworks are appropriate for instructors of general education literature courses to use in their classrooms to discuss queerness in multiple, nuanced perspectives.

Under the framework of LGBTQ+ identities, instructors are able to better contextualize conversations concerning representation, "canonicity," LGBTQ+ issues, and other aspects of identitarian politics as they occur within the classroom. These concerns are not limited to either discussion of authors, texts, or the students and instructors, but connect with and inform many of the assumptions and relevant conversations with which we are already familiar from contexts outside of our literature classrooms. This is the most visible and prominent framework because of this relevancy, and the major patterns of study suggest that instructors are aware of how

relevant LGBTQ+ identities are to their pedagogies, even as some acknowledge that they do not know how to incorporate them explicitly in their courses.

While gender studies and various forms of feminist thought are increasing prominent and established in the academy, how instructors link and manifest gender critical paradigms in their courses could strongly benefit from analyzing how queerness is incorporated into those frameworks and lenses. The numerous (and increasing) diversity of gender critical paradigms available to instructors allows for the tailoring of analysis and critical thought between the course curriculum and the relevant critical paradigms. Especially in general education literature courses that are designed to foreground certain genres and cultures, taking on the critical lens of these frameworks allows students (and instructors) to explore intersections between individuals and their experiences and the historical and social events which shape our views of the past, present, and futures. To consider gender critical paradigms is to acknowledge and understand our definitions of identity and gender, and how those do and do not connect with our perceptions of moral, ethical, and social justices.

In acknowledging the existence of the sexual episteme, instructors are able to take this exploration of meaning and category into a new dimension. This is to understand that sex (in multiple meanings) is sex because sex is cultural, and the cultural definitions of sex shift over time and place. Sex signifies and provides conceptual foundations for many of the necessary definitions of our understanding of humanity, society, and language. Through exploring sex under the sexual episteme, we are better able to identify those definitions and concepts, to then map out how they intersect, contradict, and support each other to form the whole picture of sex, as we

understand it. In the literature course, especially the literature course open to the wider population of the institution, to explore in this framework would not only allow the students to better understand their cultural concepts of sex/uality, but to then carry that understanding – and more importantly, that questioning – into their other courses and lived experiences. Through the framework of the sexual episteme, literature courses are better able to carry out their purpose of exploring the human condition, and how we create stories, records, and language to communicate our experiences and thoughts to others, across time, space, and culture.

This proposed triptych of frameworks through which instructors of literature courses can better identify, analysis, and understand their own conceptions of queerness is intended to ask instructors to reflect on they themselves *know* queerness, and how their knowledge does and can affect how they create their pedagogy to include or elide queerness.

Works Cited

- Amin, Kadji. "Genealogies of Queer Theory." *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*, edited by Siobhan B. Somerville, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, pp. 17–29. Cambridge Companions to Literature.
- Amin, Kadji. "Haunted by the 1990s: Queer Theory's Affective Histories." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 3/4, Fall/Winter 2016, pp. 173–89. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.libproxy.eku.edu/10.1353/wsqr.2016.0041>.
- Bach, Jacqueline. "Exploring Queer Pedagogies in the College-Level YA Literature Course." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, vol. 37, no. 6, Dec. 2016, pp. 917–32. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.libproxy.eku.edu/10.1080/01596306.2015.1071758>.
- Bersani, Leo. "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October*, vol. 43, 1987, pp. 197–222. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3397574>.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1999.
- Carlin, Deborah. "The Intersectional Potential of Queer Theory: An Example from a General Education Course in English." *An Integrative Analysis Approach to Diversity in the College Classroom*, edited by Mathew L. Ouellett, Jossey-Bass, 2011, pp. 55–64. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.libproxy.eku.edu/10.1002/tl.433>.
- Chan, Christian D., and Lionel C. Howard. "When Queerness Meets Intersectional Thinking: Revolutionizing Parallels, Histories, and Contestations." *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 67, no. 3, Feb. 2020, pp. 346–66. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.libproxy.eku.edu/10.1080/00918369.2018.1530882>.

- Charters, W. W. "General Survey Courses." *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1942, pp. 1–4. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1975398>.
- Cho, Sumi, et al. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2013, pp. 785–810. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/669608>. Accessed 28 Feb. 2023.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2000.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241–99. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>. Accessed 28 Feb. 2023.
- Davis, Oliver, and Tim Dean. "Does Queer Studies Hate Sex?" *Hatred of Sex*, University of Nebraska Press, 2022, pp. 45–86. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv29z1hpz.6>. Accessed 26 Feb. 2023.
- Duran, Antonio. "Queer 'and' of Color: A Systematic Literature Review on Queer Students of Color in Higher Education Scholarship." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, vol. 12, no. 4, Dec. 2019, pp. 390–400. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.libproxy.eku.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=eric&AN=EJ1236395&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Ferguson, Roderick A. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- Foucault, Michel. "Introduction." *Herculine Barbin*. Pantheon, 1980, pp.vii – xvii.

- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Random House, 1978.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Random House, 1985.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Random House, 1970.
- Freedman, Estelle B. *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*. Random House, 2002.
- Gray, John. "Addressing LGBTQ Erasure through Literature in the ELT Classroom." *ELT Journal*, vol. 75, no. 2, Apr. 2021, pp. 142–51. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=mzh&AN=202123317385&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- "GLAAD Media Reference Guide - LGBTQ Terms". *GLAAD*, 15 Mar. 2022, <https://www.glaad.org/reference/terms>. Accessed March 9, 2023.
- Hudson, John. "Breaking the Silence: Toward Improving LGBTQ Representation in Composition Readers." *Composition Forum*, vol. 29, 2014. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=mzh&AN=2014230270&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- "Human Rights Campaign Slams Governor Lee for Signing Anti-Drag Bill and Gender Affirming Care Ban into Law; TN Becomes First State to Criminalize Drag". *Human Rights Campaign*, <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/human-rights-campaign-slams-governor-lee-for-signing-anti-drag-bill-and-gender-affirming->

care-ban-into-law-tn-becomes-first-state-to-criminalize-drag. Accessed March 9, 2023.

Jackson, Eric R. "Black Feminism: The Construction and Development of Black Feminist Thought." *An Introduction to Black Studies*, University Press of Kentucky, 2023, pp. 125–40. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv32nxz74.12>.

Johnson, E. Patrick. "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, January 2001, pp. 1–25.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930128119>

Launius, Christie, and Holly Hassel. *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies: Ways of Seeing, Thinking, and Knowing*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2018.

"LGBTQ Glossary". *County of San Mateo, CA*, <https://www.smcgov.org/lgbtq/lgbtq-glossary>. Accessed March 9, 2023.

Nodin, Nuno. "Queering the Curriculum. Reflections on LGBT+ Inclusivity in Higher Education." *Psychology Teaching Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, Jan. 2022, pp. 21–30.

EBSCOhost, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.libproxy.eku.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=eue&AN=157294490&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

Paris is Burning. Directed by Jennie Livingstone, Off-White Productions Prestige Pictures, 1990.

Pruitt, John. "LGBT Literature Courses and Questions of Canonicity." *College English*, vol. 79, no. 1, 2016, pp. 81–105. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44075156>.

- Renn, Kristen A. "LGBT and Queer Research in Higher Education: The State and Status of the Field." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2010, pp. 132–41. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27764565>. Accessed 26 Feb. 2023.
- Sedgwick, Eve. *Epistemology of the Closet*. University of California Press, 1990.
- The Queens*. Directed by Mark Saxenmeyer, The Reporters Inc, 2018.
- Tinkler, Penny, and Carolyn Jackson. "The Past in the Present: Historicising Contemporary Debates about Gender and Education." *Gender & Education*, vol. 26, no. 1, Jan. 2014, pp. 70–86. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.libproxy.eku.edu/10.1080/09540253.2013.875131>.

APPENDICES

[Appendix A: Survey Questions from “Gender, Sexuality, and LGBTQ+ Identities in
General Education Literature Courses”]

**[Appendix A: Survey Questions from “Gender, Sexuality, and LGBTQ+ Identities
in General Education Literature Courses”]**

Please answer the following required questions as accurately as possible, and answer the optional questions based on your own comfort level. ^a

Question 1: At what institution did you teach this General Education Literature course?
(Institution names will be anonymized in the research)

Question 2: Which of the following best describes your level of choice in the course design and text selection for this course?

- Instructors are able to teach any materials or assessments to meet the course's objectives
- Instructors use some standardized materials and assessments for this course, alongside non-standardized materials, texts, and assessments
- Instructors only use the standardized materials and assessments for this course

Question 3: Select any of the following genres/categories of literature which you think are a literary focus in the general education literature courses you have taught for this institution (this includes courses that explicitly focus on these areas of literature and survey-type courses which deal with multiple areas):

- African and/or African American literature
- American literature
- British literature
- Indigenous and/or Native American literature
- Regional literature

- Queer and/or Lesbian and Gay literature
- Women's literature
- World literature
- Other [writable area]

Question 4: When selecting texts for this course, how often did you consider each of the following: [participants marked one answer per row]

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Frequently	Always
Gender and Gender Theory					
Portrayal of Sex and Sexuality					
LGBTQ+ Identities					

Question 5: When designing course materials and assignments, how often do you consider each of the following: [participants marked one answer per row]

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Frequently	Always
Gender and Gender Theory					
Portrayal of Sex and Sexuality					
LGBTQ+ Identities					

Question 6: Describe how you *do* or *do not* consider gender and gender theory in the content, text-selection, assessment, and/or pedagogy of your class.*

Question 7: Describe how you *do* or *do not* consider portrayals of sex and sexuality in the content, text-selection, assessment, and/or pedagogy of your class.*

Question 8: Describe how you *do* or *do not* consider LGBTQ+ identities and characters in the content, text-selection, assessment, and/or pedagogy of your class. *

Question 9: What, if anything, would prevent or discourage you from considering gender, gender theory, portrayal of sex and sexuality, and/or LGBTQ+ identities and characters in your course materials, selected texts, and pedagogy? *

a: Note: * indicates that the question was an optional question and not required for participation

[Appendix B: Cover Letter Sent to Initial Pool of Prospective Participants]

[Appendix B: Cover Letter Sent to Initial Pool of Prospective Participants]

Hello,

You are being invited to take part in a research study on the presence and prevalence of Gender, Sexuality, and LGBTQIA+ identities in the pedagogy of General Education Literature courses taught at state colleges and universities in the past five years. This study is being conducted by Josiah Coleman, a Masters in English and Writing Professions student at Eastern Kentucky University.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in the required questions within this survey, with optional questions to provide more information.

Your participation is expected to take no more than 10 minutes.

This study is anonymous. You will not be asked to provide your name or other identifying information as part of the study. No one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the results of the study, we will write about this combined information.

We will make every effort to safeguard your data, but as with anything online, we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet. Third-party applications used in this study may have terms of service and privacy policies outside the control of Eastern Kentucky University.

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer.

You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

This study has been reviewed and approved for exemption by the Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University as research protocol number 5082. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Josiah Coleman (josiah_coleman83@mymail.eku.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, please contact the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University by calling 859-622-3636.

By completing the activity that begins on the next screen, you agree that you (1) are at least 18 years of age; (2) have read and understand the information above; and (3) voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

LINK to survey <https://forms.gle/YT4uByArQiuTBMc66>