Research Memorandum
AERA LGBTQ Workshop September 2010
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1. From your area of expertise, what is the state of knowledge of LGBTQ issues? What are the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to address these issues? Provide complete citations.

Historians of education lag behind other historians and other education scholars in producing work that addresses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues.\(^1\) Still, very few conference sessions at the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the History of Education Society (HES), and regional associations of education historians include scholarship on LGBTQ issues. Having served on a number of program committees, my experience is that the absence of LGBTQ history at these conferences reflects a lack of proposals targeting such study. Three scholars account for most of the historical analysis of LGBTQ issues presented at HES and AERA (Blount, Lugg, and Graves).

For the purposes of this study I restrict “education history” to the study of schools, school workers (including teachers, administrators, and other staff), students, and related policy issues. Although a more comprehensive definition of education history includes institutions within the broader culture such as film, music, religious and social organizations, military, and prisons, I believe most of the historians working in these fields would not describe their scholarship as education history, and they do not generally address the educational aspects of their studies explicitly.

Using this standard, I am aware of five books in education history that adopt LGBTQ issues as the central theme. All address legal issues to some extent, three focus on purges of school workers and students, and two are broad canvasses of LGBTQ people and their experiences in schools or universities (specifically, Harvard). All five books are studies in U.S. history (listed below in chronological order of publication).


\(^1\) I address all seven questions from my perspective as an education historian.

In some cases, historians have published chapters on educational issues in edited books on sexuality or the converse, chapters on sexuality in books on education. The pioneer in gay history, John D’Emilio, has published one collection of essays that examines universities, and the prominent education scholar James Sears focuses on education in a few chapters in his work on lesbian and gay southern history.


Vicinus, Martha. “Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships, 1870-1920.” In *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past,* edited by


Coloma, Roland Sintos. “Que(e)r(y)ing Nationalism: History, Nation, and Imperialism.” *JCT* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 51-70.


Early attention to LGBTQ issues in education history emerged through biographical work on Progressive Era women educators. Study of the first generation of women college professors and presidents led to debate among historians in the 1970s and 1980s on how to approach issues of sexuality.


2. In your area of expertise, who are the scholars that are making the strongest methodological and empirical contributions to how we understand LGBTQ issues in education?

Jackie Blount, Roland Sintos Coloma, Karen Graves, Karen Harbeck, Catherine Lugg, Alison Oram, James Sears, Kathleen Weiler

3. What are the research method and data adequacy issues and concerns addressing LGBTQ research questions? What are the measures commonly used in this research and what are the measurement issues that merit examination?

For education historians the issue of sexual identity, shifting as it does over time and context, is an issue that demands careful consideration and precise articulation. That is, when we write LGBTQ history, whom are we talking about? The essentialist/social constructionist debates that dominated scholarship in the 1980s have not totally subsided.

Historians rely upon archival research (much of that concerning LGBTQ history intentionally destroyed, defaced, or simply not preserved) and interviews, primarily.

4. From your vantage, what are the greatest conceptual and methodological challenges and problems as they relate to studying LGBTQ issues?

My response here is an extract from my 2009 book, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers*.

“It is likely that the same problems of discrimination that dissuaded academics from doing research in gay and lesbian history in its early stages would have carried over to colleges of education where many education historians do their work. The claim that discrimination against gay and lesbian teachers has held on longer than prejudice directed against other professionals raises little argument. Nor is it surprising that some residue of this prejudice would cling to the teachers of teachers. In addition, the very subject matter of education history has made it difficult to examine gay and lesbian issues. Evidence relating to teachers’ lives, for instance, is hard to come by. Tracing the influence authoritative prescription had on actual behavior is difficult. The problems gay and

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lesbian historians encounter regarding evidence that is hidden, private, or unrecorded are intensified for education historians whose subjects were state employees under the watchful eye of the public.\textsuperscript{3} Ironically, it is especially difficult to uncover personal information for professionals who lived in glass houses for most of the twentieth century.

5. How and in what ways does extant research speak to the intersections of race, class, gender, and other areas salient to LGBTQ issues.

Early research on LGBTQ education history focused on English and American boarding schools, colleges, and universities, therefore, it dealt primarily with middle- and upper-class students, teachers, professors, and administrators. And as noted above, a good deal of this scholarship focused on women educators.

Since a considerable bit of LGBTQ education history focuses on twentieth-century teachers, a profession in which women have been the majority of practitioners, it addresses gender issues more explicitly, and more frequently than LGBTQ history in general (it seems).

The work on the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (1956-1965) includes race analysis, in terms of the motivations that spurred the committee’s development and because the targeted teachers included African Americans and whites. Roland Sintos Coloma’s work examines nationalism and racism from a global perspective.

6. What do we need to know in the next phase as we prepare a research agenda for scholars as they examine this LGBTQ issues in education.

A comprehensive bibliography of LGBTQ education history has yet to be published. Education historians need to move beyond the “famous people” and “repressive history” phases, although it should be noted that this is the trajectory that LGBTQ history in general, as well as women’s history and ethnic histories have taken. Education historians will need to draw what they can from queer theory to make sense of some of the identity questions that have been at play in the field since the 1970s.

7. From the vantage of policy, what are the strongest research findings on LGBTQ issues?

The history of discrimination against LGBTQ school workers is clearly documented. This research can be used to push for an end to employment discrimination. The history of hostile school climates and student activism should spur policy makers to demand safe and productive school environments for all. Curriculum, a sorely underdeveloped area, should include LGBTQ history, in general.