

A Mixed Methods Study of Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes toward  
LGBTQ Themed Literature

While gay rights activists laud recent strides in granting protections and rights to same sex couples across the United States, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning) students do not often reap the rewards of those achievements. On a daily basis, many LGBTQ students are focused on just trying to survive another day at schools that often marginalize them and are sometimes active participants in creating a culture of violence designed to bully, harass, and shame them into behaving “like everyone else.” Homophobic bullying is a form of bullying that is directed toward individuals who are or who are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (Prati, 2012; Rivers, 2001). Homophobic bullying is rooted in homophobia, which while akin to prejudices such as racism and sexism, has been defined as a negative attitude, belief, reaction, or action toward homosexuals (Bernat, Calhoun, Adams & Zeichner, 2001; Herek, 2000).

Perhaps the most frequent form of homophobia that LGTBQ teens are regularly subjected to is homophobic language; 84.9% of students have heard “gay” used in a negative connotation and 71.3% have heard other types of homophobic remarks (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). Beyond hearing themselves described in negative terms, the use of directed homophobic epithets is the most frequent form of homophobic bullying as 81.9% of LGBTQ students have been verbally harassed; however, harassment is not restricted to verbal abuse as 38.3% have been physically harassed, and 18.3% have been physically assaulted in school (Kosciw et al., 2012). The traumatic effects of homophobic bullying are well documented as victims have been shown to be at an elevated risk for depression, absenteeism,

eating disorders, drug use, and suicide attempts (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002). Clearly, schools bear a responsibility to create a safe learning environment for all students, including those who identify as LGBTQ.

Since 1990, GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) has been at the forefront of the effort to end the culture of violence that LGBTQ students have faced at school (GLSEN, n.d). GLSEN has been instrumental in forming Gay Straight Alliance Clubs (GSAs) at schools and the presence of GSAs has been shown to be correlated with lower levels of bullying and increased attendance (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011; Kosciw et al., 2012). In addition to GSAs, improvements in school climates for LGBTQ youth have been associated with enumerated LGBTQ anti-bullying policies (Kosciw et al., 2012) and with schools that have staff who are supportive of LGBTQ students (Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Beyond these measures, including LGBTQ themed curricula in coursework has been associated with lower levels of homophobic bullying (Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub, & Manke, 2006). While LGBTQ themed curricula is often described as ideal for inclusion in sexual education and multicultural education classes (Greytak & Kosciw, 2013), it has also been included in content areas such as social studies (Crocco, 2001; Jennings, 2006), art (Lampela, 2005), music (Garrett, 2012; Knotts & Gregorio, 2011), and English language arts (Seiben & Wallowitz, 2009). While all of the above subjects have promise for addressing LGBTQ issues, because of the recent proliferation in quality LGBTQ themed young adult literature (Banks, 2009), there may be no better place to address these issues than English language arts.

The incorporation of LGBTQ themed literature into English classes is not a new idea. Almost twenty years ago Athanases (1996) described using *Dear Anita* with tenth grade students, and since then there has been a cavalcade of articles chronicling the use of LGBTQ themed

literature with various populations and places such as elementary students (Schall & Kaufmann, 2003), middle school students (Hamilton, 1998), high school students (Athanases, 1996; Hoffman, 1993; Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009), school libraries (Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, & Harris, 2013; Rauch, 2011), and even youth centers (Blackburn, 2003). Many other articles have been published that detail instructional methods and/or resources for incorporating LGBTQ materials specifically in English/language arts classes (e.g., Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Lopez-Ropero, 2012). While there are myriad resources that provide ideas for incorporating LGBTQ themed literature into a variety of educational settings, if teachers are not willing to utilize these materials, then perhaps all of this research is for naught.

Perhaps the starting point for educators is a willingness to confront homophobia in the classroom. Before even taking attendance on the first day of class, a teacher may hear “that’s so gay” used by a student, and how the teacher handles this may set the tone for the rest of the school year in that classroom. Unfortunately, researchers have found mixed results when examining pre-service teachers’ willingness to confront homophobia in the classroom (Bellini, 2012; Mudrey & Medina-Adams, 2006; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001; Schmidt, Chang, Carolan-Silva, Lockhart, & Anagnostopoulos, 2012). In one study, Puchner and Klein (2011) interviewed 15 middle school teachers on the topic of sexual orientation and found that most of the teachers avoided LGBTQ topics in the classroom, that some actively repeated homophobic messages and others even “blocked student attempts to disrupt the dominant discourse” (p. 236). While three teachers were described having anti-homophobic stances, they were mostly passive due to fears of retribution from their communities.

More promising, researchers have recently chronicled interventions that have been effective in making pre-service teachers more receptive to working with LGBTQ students, issues, and curricula (Elsbree & Wong, 2007; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Riggs, Rosenthal, & Smith-Bonahue,

2011). Furthermore, several articles have examined teachers' and pre-service teachers' attitudes specifically toward utilizing LGBTQ texts (e.g., Clark, 2010; Herman-Wilmarth, 2010). While the recent research is encouraging, others have found a great deal of resistance in pre-service and in-service teachers to using LGBTQ themed literature.

Haertling-Thein (2013) gathered data from 20 in-service teachers enrolled in an online graduate multicultural literature course to investigate their willingness to teach LGBTQ themed texts. The results of this qualitative study were not promising as analysis showed the majority of participants offered arguments against the inclusion of LGBTQ themed texts and contained what Haertling-Thein (2013) labeled as an "anti-stance" which represented the belief that "LGBTQ texts could not or should not be taught in language arts classrooms" (p. 172). Haertling-Thein (2013) identified six categories of justifications for participants' stances: (1) That is was not the job of the teacher to address issues related to sexual orientation; (2) Fear of reprisal from parents, communities, and fear of inciting inappropriate behavior in students; (3) Fear of losing one's job; (4) Belief that it would cause more harm than good; (5) Belief that it would discriminate against "students and parents who hold anti-gay views" (p. 176); and (6) Lack of knowledge in LGBTQ issues and texts.

While many of the aforementioned studies provide valuable insights into teachers' attitudes toward LGBTQ curricula, more research is needed that examines pre-service teachers' attitudes toward LGBTQ themed texts. The results from this type of research could assist teacher preparation programs to develop coursework intended to increase the willingness of pre-service teachers to use LGBTQ themed young adult literature in the classroom.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to gather data and generate typologies in order to inform teacher education programs as to specific areas that can be addressed to increase pre-service English teachers' willingness to utilize LGBTQ themed young adult literature in future instruction. To achieve that goal, this study asked the following research questions:

1. What are the typologies of pre-service English teachers in relation to their attitudes toward utilizing LGBTQ themed literature?
2. What do pre-service English teachers cite as reasons not to include LGBTQ themed literature in curricula?
3. What do pre-service English teachers cite as reasons to include LGBTQ themed literature in curricula?

### **Method**

This inductive mixed methods descriptive study utilized a partially mixed concurrent equal status design (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009) in order to develop a deeper understanding of pre-service teachers' attitudes toward including LGBTQ themed literature in English language arts instruction. Data were gathered from a researcher created survey that contained 12 Likert style questions and two open ended questions (see Appendix A for survey). The surveys were given to undergraduate students who were enrolled in courses required for teacher licensure at a mid-sized Southeastern university. Analysis of the Likert style questions was conducted using Q factor analysis (Cattell, 1978), while analysis of open ended responses was conducted using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **Participants**

Surveys were completed by 76 undergraduate students enrolled in courses required for licensure in secondary English certification at a medium sized Southeastern University. Participants age ranged from 20-51 years ( $\bar{x} = 22.3$ ,  $s = 5.09$ ) and were predominantly women (female = 55, 72%; male = 21, 28%), White (see Table 1) and heterosexual (see Table 2).

Table 1

*Participant Characteristics by Race*

Statistic	Race						Total
	White	Black non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian	Other	
Frequency	62	3	3	4	2	2	76
Percentage	81.6%	3.9%	3.9%	5.3%	2.6%	2.6%	100%

Table 2

*Participant Characteristics by Sexual Orientation*

Statistic	Sexual Orientation					Total
	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Pansexual	Don't Know	
Frequency	69	2	2	2	1	76
Percentage	90.8%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	1.4%	100%

**Inventory**

This study utilized a researcher created survey (Appendix A) to assess attitudes toward LGBTQ themed literature. The survey featured 12 Likert style questions related to willingness to use LGBTQ themed literature in English language arts classrooms and two open ended questions that asked about reasons to include and not to include LGBTQ themed literature in English language arts curricula. Analysis of the 12 Likert style questions revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .94, indicating a very high level of reliability. The survey was developed through interviews and focus groups with English Education majors, public school English/language arts teachers, and university faculty involved with the preparation of pre-service English language arts teachers.

**Q Factor Analysis**

Q factor analysis (Cattell, 1978) is a multivariate method for data reduction that is considered a mixed method technique (Newman & Ramlo, 2010). Q factor analysis is closely associated with Q methodology (Stephenson, 1953), which is “a set of procedures, theory, and philosophy that focuses on the study of subjectivity” (Newman & Ramlo, 2010, p. 507). Specifically, Q methodology measures an “individual’s feelings, opinions, perspectives, or preferences” about a specific topic (Newman & Ramlo, 2010, p. 507) by asking participants to place statements into a rank order sorting grid that represents their views on a specific topic and then using factor analysis on the sorts to derive factors that have similar characteristics (Newman & Ramlo, 2010). This use of factor analysis is known as Q factor analysis, and while this technique is almost always a part of Q methodology studies, Q factor analysis can also be utilized on its own without sorting.

Q factor analysis perhaps can be best explained by comparing it to its closely related and better known mathematical technique: R factor analysis. Consider that while R factor analysis computes correlations between statements in order to categorize items into groups, Q factor analysis computes correlations between respondents across a set of statements in order to group people into factors (Brown, 1991; Danielson, 2009; Yang & Bliss, 2012). In Q factor analysis, these factors are known as *typologies* and while factors in R factor analysis consist of items, factors in Q factor analysis consist of people who load significantly into each factor and are known as *defining respondents*. In addition to grouping people into factors/typologies, Q factor analysis calculates normalized factor scores (i.e., *z* scores) that represent an average of scores on each specific statement by all of each factor’s defining respondents (Yang & Bliss, 2014).

Thus, Q factor analysis allows for the grouping of people who share similar views on a topic into typologies, and in this study, these typologies represented beliefs about the use of

LGBTQ themed literature in English language arts classrooms. Typologies are described by three main characteristics: *extreme rankings* (statements with z-scores of greater than +/- 1), *distinguishing statements* (statements that have a z-score difference between typologies of greater than +/- 1), and *consensus statements* (statements with a z-score difference between typologies of less than +/- 1). While all three of these items provide key characteristics that differentiate typologies, perhaps the most important are the *extreme rankings* as they strongly define a typology (Yang & Bliss, 2014). Q factor analysis also identifies defining respondents for each typology, these are respondents who “loaded strongly on a factor and thus defined that factor” (Yang & Bliss, 2014, p. 439). These defining respondents are also critical to understanding the typologies because these participants’ “shared behaviors are the primary representation of the underlying patterns of the group” (Yang & Bliss, 2014, p. 439).

### **Open Ended Questions**

In order to answer research questions 2 and 3, open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to develop themes from two open ended survey questions: (1) What are some reasons you would **NOT want** to include LGBTQ literature as part of your class?; and (2) What are some reasons you would **want** to include LGBTQ literature as part of your class? Responses to each question were analyzed separately.

## **Results**

**Question 1. What are the typologies of pre-service English teachers in relation to their attitudes toward utilizing LGBTQ themed literature?**

Q factor analysis was conducted with PQMethod (Schmolck, 2012) using principal components extraction and varimax rotation. Nine participants chose one answer for all 12 items

on the surveys rendering them unfactorable; therefore, Q factor analysis was conducted with 65 participants. While this may be seen as a low number of participants, because Q factor analysis is an inductive and exploratory process, a sample size of 30-50 is considered more than acceptable (Brown, 1986; Yang & Bliss, 2014).

Analysis of data led to a three factor solution that accounted for 62% of variance with 47 defining participants (see Table 3). The eigenvalue and total explained variance for each factor was calculated using only the defining participants of each factor. In the three factor solution, 47 out of 65 participants functioned as definers for the three factors. Each typology had extreme statements and there were numerous distinguishing statements between all pairs of typologies; however, there were no consensus statements across all three typologies. See Table 4 for factor loadings of statements into all three typologies.

Table 3

*Three-Factor Solution with Number of Defining Respondents (n = 65)*

Characteristic	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Total
Number of Definers	18	18	11	47
Eigenvalue	16.84	13.10	10.22	
Percent of Variance Explained	24	19	19	62

Table 4

*Exact Factor Loading Scores for Statements in z-score Units*

Item	Typology 1	Typology 2	Typology 3
Q1 LGBTQ texts in school libraries	-0.17	2.01	0.43
Q2 LGBTQ texts in class instruction	-1.93	0.66	0.03
Q3 Comfort discussing homophobia	0.49	-0.52	1.37
Q4 Comfort discussing gay rights	0.66	-0.66	2.40
Q5 Text with LGBTQ main character	0.68	0.43	-0.61
Q6 Text with gay male main character	0.71	0.14	-0.82
Q7 Text with lesbian main character	0.83	0.11	-0.69

Q8	Text with bisexual main character	0.69	-0.11	-0.75
Q9	Text with transgender main character	0.30	-1.18	-0.99
Q10	Text with questioning main character	0.55	0.45	-0.14
Q11	Ask students to purchase LGBTQ text	-1.47	-1.91	-0.32
Q12	LGBTQ texts in classroom libraries	-1.32	0.59	0.10

### **Typology 1: It does not belong in schools**

Defining members of Typology 1 were characterized as believing that LGBTQ themed literature does not belong in schools in any capacity. Typology 1 explained 24% of total variance and was defined by 18 participants who had extreme negative rankings on Q2 (- 2.03; should LGBTQ texts be taught), Q11 (-1.42; would you ask students to buy LGBTQ texts), and Q12 (-1.35; should LGBTQ texts be in classroom libraries). The rankings indicate that Typology 1 defining members held negative views on these statements which measured the degree to which respondents agreed that LGBTQ themed texts should be in schools (see Table 5 for Typology 1 extreme statements). Beyond negative extreme rankings, this typology also had numerous distinguishing statements, perhaps most of note was a significantly lower score on Q1 ( $p < .01$ ,  $z = .10$ , should LGBTQ texts be in school libraries) than both Typology 2 and Typology 3, indicating a congruent set of beliefs among participants who loaded into this typology that LGBTQ themed texts should not be available to students whether in school libraries, classroom libraries, and especially not as part of classroom instruction.

Interestingly, this typology scored higher than other typologies on questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, & 9. Five of these statements measured how comfortable respondents would be teaching LGBTQ themed texts that featured protagonists with a variety of different sexual orientations, while two statements inquired how comfortable respondents were leading classrooms discussions of homophobia and LGBTQ rights issues. Thus, while defining members of this typology

displayed a firm belief that LGBTQ texts have no place anywhere in schools, they are confident in their ability to teach these texts and to manage discussions about gay rights and homophobia.

Table 5

*Typology 1 Extreme Statements*

No	Statement	z score
2	How important do think it is for students to read texts that depict people of varying sexual orientations as part of assigned readings in English/language arts classes?	-2.029
11	If your students could be required to purchase books, how comfortable would you be assigning the purchase of a LGBTQ novel?	-1.415
12	How important do think it is for students to have access to books that depict people of varying sexual orientations as part of classroom libraries?	-1.353

**Typology 2: Important to teach but unprepared to discuss**

Defining members of this typology were characterized as willing to use LGBTQ themed literature but were unprepared to manage discussions about gay rights and homophobia.

Typology 2 explained 19% of total variance and was defined by 11 participants who had extreme positive rankings on Q1 (2.06; should LGBTQ texts be in school libraries; see Table 6 for

Typology 2 extreme rankings), Q12 as a significantly higher distinguishing statement ( $p < .01$ , .81; should LGBTQ texts be in classroom libraries) and a very high score for Q2 (.72; should LGBTQ texts be taught). This typology had the highest loading of Q2 of all three factors (see

Table 5). Specifically, when compared to Typology 1, all of these statements were

distinguishing statements with  $z$ -score differences above 1  $z$  score: Q1 = +2.16, Q2 = +2.75, and

Q12 = +2.22. Clearly, this type contrasted strongly with Typology 1, and the results show that

Typology 2 defining members formed the group with the strongest belief that LGBTQ themed literature should be in all aspects of schooling including the school library, classroom libraries, and in English language arts curriculum.

Typology 2 placed in the middle of the three typologies in regards to teaching LGBTQ themed texts with protagonists of various sexual orientations. Questions 5 ( $p < .05$ , .31), 6 ( $p < .01$ , .08), 7 ( $p < .01$ , -.06), 8 ( $p < .01$ , -.25) were found to be distinguishing statements when compared to the other two typologies, and indicate that defining members of this factor show a cautious level of comfort in their ability to teach LGBTQ themed texts; however, this may not hold true for texts that feature transgender protagonists as this typology has an extreme negative ranking on Q9 (-1.31; comfort level teaching text with transgendered protagonist). This was the lowest factor loading Q9 of all three typologies.

Furthermore, this typology had an extreme negative ranking on Q11 (-1.74; would you ask students to buy LGBTQ texts). This score is also the lowest loading of Q11 into any of three factors and when comparing Typology 1 to Typology 2, Q11 becomes a consensus statement with a difference of only .39. It would seem that while this typology is in favor of LGBTQ themed texts being part of curricula and despite showing a moderate comfort level in teaching various types of LGBTQ themed texts, Typology 2 defining members were strongly averse to asking students to purchase LGBTQ themed texts.

The ability to managing classroom discussions was also a point on which defining members of this factor did not feel strongly. When compared to the other typologies, Q3 ( $p < .01$ , -.55; comfort discussing gay rights) and Q4 ( $p < .01$ , -.48; comfort discussing homophobia) were both distinguishing statements and this typology had the lowest scores on these two statements.

Table 6

*Factor 2 Extreme Statements*

No	Statement	<i>z</i> score
1	Students should have access to texts that depict people of varying sexual	2.060

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	orientations in public school libraries.	
9	I would feel comfortable teaching a text that featured main characters who were transgendered.	-1.305
11	If your students could be required to purchase books, how comfortable would you be assigning the purchase of a LGBTQ novel?	-1.738

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### **Typology 3: Willing to discuss but uncomfortable teaching**

Participants who loaded into Typology 3 were categorized as willing to engage students in discussions about LGBTQ topics but lacking confidence in their ability to teach LGBTQ themed texts. This typology was defined by 11 participants and accounted for 19% of variance. Typology 3 had extreme positive rankings on statements Q3 (1.38; comfort discussing homophobia) and Q4 (2.51; comfort discussing gay rights; see Table 7 for extreme rankings). This strong degree of comfort conducting discussions was unique to this typology as Q4 was a distinguishing statement across the three typologies ( $p < .01$ ) and Q3 was a distinguishing statement when comparing Type 3 to Type 2 with a difference of 1.93. While Q3 did not qualify as a distinguishing statement when compared to Type 1, the difference was nonetheless worthy of mention at .82.

On the other hand, this typology had an extreme negative ranking on statement Q9 (-1.07; teaching texts with transgender protagonist), and when comparing Type 2 to Type 3, Q9 becomes a consensus statement with a difference of only -.24 indicating that both of these typologies shared a lack of confidence in handling texts with transgender characters. Typology 3 scored the lowest of all typologies (all were also distinguishing statements) on Q5 ( $p < .01$ , -.68), Q6 ( $p < .01$ , -.86), Q7 ( $p < .01$ , -.60), and Q8 ( $p < .01$ , -.85). While this may seem to indicate a lack of willingness to use LGBTQ themed texts, this typology had positive scores on Q1 (.74; should LGBTQ texts be in school libraries), Q2 (.47; should LGBTQ texts be taught), and Q12

(.05; should LGBTQ texts be in classroom libraries); furthermore, when compared to Typology 1, all of these become significant distinguishing statements ( $p < .01$ ).

The comfort level in asking students to purchase LGBTQ texts for classroom instruction as measured by Q11 qualified as a distinguishing statement for Typology 3 (-.42,  $p < .01$ ); however, all three typologies had negative loadings on Q11. This is the only item that had a negative loading among all three typologies and may be indicative of a deep unease that was shared by most participants in asking students to purchase LGBTQ themed texts.

Table 7

*Factor 3 Extreme Statements*

No	Statement	z score
4	I would feel comfortable discussing gay rights issues in class.	2.151
3	I would feel comfortable discussing homophobia in class.	1.382
9	I would feel comfortable teaching a text that featured main characters who were transgendered.	-1.067

**Question 2: What do pre-service English teachers cite as reasons not to include LGBTQ themed literature in curricula?**

In order to answer this question, participants were asked to answer the following question: What are some reasons you would **not want** to include LGBTQ literature as part of your class? Of the 76 pre-service teachers who took part in this study, 14 left this item blank, leaving 62 responses for analysis. Responses were analyzed using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to develop themes. Analyst triangulation was completed by having data coded by a colleague and then by comparing results on a thematic level. Researchers achieved 100% agreement on four themes with the only variation occurring in the choice of words used to describe similar concepts. The four themes were: *Backlash*, *Student Reactions*, *Unnecessary to Teach*, and *Lack of Ability to Teach*.

**Backlash**

*“I don't want parents to come after me.”*

The preeminent reason given for not including LGBTQ themed literature in classes was a fear of backlash from parents, administrators, and the community. By far the most prevalent response was a fear of retribution from parents; this concern appeared in 43.5% of all responses and ranged from not wanting to go “against the wishes of their (students’) parents,” to many statements expressing the probability of encountering “angry parents” who may not “approve” or “like the idea.” Some participants raised concerns that parents would not just “object,” but would also “react very negatively,” and then begin to interfere with curriculum as they would “disapprove of literature choices.” One respondent summed up this theme clearly by writing: “I don't want parents to come after me.”

Fear of retribution was not restricted just to parents as it also extended to the community at large. Several respondents specifically cited fear of “backlash from the community” and “from groups against LGBTQ rights.” Furthermore, participants did not feel that their school administrators would support their decision to teach LGBTQ themed texts as participants noted being able to “foresee challenges with employers” because they lived in an area “which is vastly conservative.” Concern extended above the school administrative level as one participant worried that “the school board might strongly disagree” with teaching LGBTQ themed texts. Numerous high profile attempts to censor books have occurred recently in the South; furthermore, colleges have even been punished for using LGBTQ texts. For example, the University of South Carolina Upstate’s Center for Women’s and Gender Studies had its funding cut by the state legislature for choosing an LGBTQ themed text as its first year reading selection. Considering the aforementioned issues, it is reasonable to see why teachers may fear retribution.

**Student Reactions**

*“It may offend or upset some students.”*

Participants believed that the reactions of students in the classroom would also be a major roadblock to using LGBTQ themed literature. Several respondents were concerned that incorporating LGBTQ texts “may make the students uncomfortable,” while others were worried that “some students would not take the texts seriously.” Backlash played a major role again as several wrote that they would be concerned that using LGBTQ themed texts “may offend or upset some students” and “cause controversy.” Clearly, respondents did not think this was a teachable moment type of controversy, and several displayed a belief that using LGBTQ themed literature could be harmful to students who identify as LGBTQ.

One respondent was concerned that “students might make comments that could be hurtful to LGBTQ students,” while several others thought that LGBTQ students may “feel isolated or uncomfortable.” Another respondent wrote that it would be important “to be careful not to offend students who identify as LGBTQ.” It seems that participants were concerned about backlash from not only parents and students who identify as heterosexual, but also from students who identify as LGBTQ. Furthermore, some participants argued that students who are not yet in high school “are too young...to be exposed to this,” while some felt that “younger students may not be mature enough.” While it seems that participants seriously questioned their ability to handle classroom management when using material that could be controversial, this lack of self-efficacy extended to their ability to teach LGBTQ texts.

**Lack of Ability to Teach**

*“I am not knowledgeable enough about those issues.”*

Perhaps providing flesh to the results of Q factor analysis, a small number of responses discussed participants' self-identified lack of ability to teach LGBTQ texts or handle concomitant issues. Several responses described a simple lack of knowledge of LGBTQ texts and issues, such as "it is not something I am well educated on," while others described being "uncomfortable teaching it because I could not relate to the character." While this theme described a lack of self-efficacy, perhaps most disturbing was the belief that there is no need to include LGBTQ texts in instruction.

### **Unnecessary to Teach**

*"I don't see LGBTQ specific literature as a necessity."*

Perhaps reflecting participants who loaded into Typology 1, there were several responses that demonstrated a belief that it was not necessary for educators to utilize LGBTQ themed literature. One participant did not "believe gay rights should be an issue" and that introducing an LGBTQ themed text "only adds to the controversy." Beyond avoiding gay rights, another participant wrote that "sexual orientation of any sort should be personally explored;" therefore, denying the need to discuss alternate sexual orientations in a heteronormative culture such as school. Interestingly, several participants expressed concern that using LGBTQ texts could somehow marginalize heterosexuality: "I would not want to seem I support only LGBTQ orientation - heterosexual would need to be supported also." One participant denied homophobia as real: "it isn't fear, it is a response to a stance that people do not agree with" and offered a solution to the entire issue: "Good god, just pay taxes, get married, and move on." While this theme may be disturbing to those who would like to use LGBTQ themed texts, some participants challenged the very nature of this question.

### **None**

*“There is no reason not to.”*

While it is not possible to know why the 14 participants who left this item blank did so, five participants wrote “none” and one wrote, “None. There is no excuse.” Clearly these participants did not feel there were any excuses not to utilize LGBTQ themed literature.

**Question 3: What do pre-service English teachers cite as reasons to include LGBTQ themed literature in curricula?**

In order to answer this question, participants were asked to answer the following question: What are some reasons you would **want** to include LGBTQ literature as part of your class? Of the 76 pre-service teachers who took part in this study, seven participants left the answer blank, leaving 69 responses for analysis. Responses were analyzed using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to develop themes. Analyst triangulation was completed by having data coded by a colleague and then by comparing agreement on a thematic level. Researchers achieved 100% agreement on three themes with the only variation occurring in the choice of words used to describe similar concepts. The three themes were: *Exposure to Diversity*, *Reducing Homophobia*, and *Helping LGBTQ Students*.

**Exposure to Diversity**

*“It's a part of our culture that can't and shouldn't be ignored.”*

*“Gay right issues are taking a forefront in civil affairs. Not only would it be literary enrichment, but also historical, social, and culturally enlightening.”*

The majority of responses argued that LGBTQ themed literature is “culturally relevant for the 21st century” and should be read “to show students diversity,” to foster an “awareness of varying sexual orientations,” and to “expose kids to the different types of lifestyles people have.” Participants clearly demonstrated a belief that schools should “promote diversity through

education.” This concept also appeared in many responses that addressed other themes, and it is evident that participants believed it was a teacher’s duty to “open students’ eyes to the diversity in the world” because “...sexual orientation has become a big discussion. To be better prepared for 'the real world' students have to understand that people are different and it doesn't mean that is a bad thing,” and “to open students' eyes and minds to a culture they may know little about.”

While opponents of discussing LGBTQ topics often argue that school is not the right context to engage in these discussions, several participants took an opposite stance and described how “in today's world everyone comes from a different home life,” and that schools provide “a safe controlled environment” in which to broach these topics. Several participants also addressed some “parents’ possible desire to shelter their kids,” but argued that “students are surrounded by images, movies, and music that discuss LGBTQ issues all the time.” Many participants noted that “gay rights is a very timely issue and students are aware of it but may not necessarily be exposed to it.” While the concept of exposing students to diversity was a major theme, many participants believed that this exposure could have benefits beyond just increasing awareness.

### **Reducing Homophobia**

*“The first step of conquering fear and ignorance is education.”*

The second most prominent theme was a belief that reading and discussing LGBTQ themed texts could have profound effects on students including increasing the acceptance of students who identify as LGBTQ, reducing homophobia, and reducing bullying. Participants repeatedly displayed beliefs that negative attitudes were rooted in ignorance: “a lot of people right now are homophobic and I think that is mainly because they are not informed to anything regarding the LGBTQ community.” One participant wrote that “hate is driven by a lack of

knowledge,” which was echoed by another who responded that “homophobia is caused by a lack of understanding.” Participants believed that when students interacted with peers who were LGBTQ, “that a lack of knowledge” led “students to judge each other very quickly.”

Furthermore, numerous participants were clear that they believed “it is important to teach acceptance” and that “exposure to issues leads to understanding and acceptance.” Acceptance was a word used in many responses, and in contrast to those who protest schools addressing LGBTQ issues, many placed the onus of responsibility for teaching students about this squarely on the shoulders of schools and indicated a willingness to be a part of it: “I believe it should be taught,” “I want to encourage students to be accepting,” and “it's something students need to learn.”

One respondent brought up how students are at a formative stage and that LGBTQ themed texts should be taught “because young people are typically very impressionable and I think they should be taught, or at least exposed to the concept of equality.” For many students who are growing up in homes where LGBTQ peoples are depicted as deviants, sinners, and even evil, school may be the only chance for introduction to a counter narrative during their formative years. This belief was echoed by another participant who wrote that it was important to “expose children who may otherwise never be exposed to LGBTQ texts [to] help promote an open-minded attitude.”

While the implication in many of the above responses is that “reading them [LGBTQ themed texts] may also help reduce homophobia,” several participants displayed the belief that an increasing awareness of diversity could lead directly to a reduction in students’ homophobia. Several responses echoed one participant who plainly wrote that a reason to include LGBTQ texts was “to dissipate homophobia.” One respondent made a clear connection from

homophobia to bullying, writing that using LGBTQ texts would lead “to a reduction in bullying” because “access to LGBTQ texts would help show students that sexual orientation is like race or gender and not something to be afraid of.”

### **Helping LGBTQ Students**

*“It might help students feel normal when their peers/society don’t.”*

While increasing acceptance, reducing homophobia, and curtailing bullying are effects on or in others that would certainly make life better for LGBTQ students, numerous participants also cited direct benefits to LGBTQ students as reasons for including LGBTQ themed texts in instruction. The most frequently cited concept was the belief that LGBTQ students “should have access to literature that they can relate to.” Several participants wrote about this issue and it harkens back to arguments during the civil rights era that African-American students could go through high school and college and never read a Black author (Spears-Bunton, 1992). One respondent even wrote, “Just like it's essential to teach African-American texts, it's important to teach LGBTQ texts, too,” while another echoed this sentiment by stating LGBTQ texts should be taught because “after all we do teach Asian and African American lit.”

Beyond providing an opportunity for students to see themselves in literature, several respondents wrote that using LGBTQ themed literature could “make LGBTQ students feel more comfortable” because they would “feel like they're not alone.” Participants echoed Rosenblatt’s (1938) argument that transactions with literature could allow readers to sympathize or identify with the experience of characters and that may provide them with a broader sense of possibilities when faced with situations which are similar to those they have read about. For many adolescent readers who feel isolated, this may be a chance to find solace in knowing they are not alone. Participants further wrote about LGBTQ students, responding “some students are struggling with

their sexuality” and that those “who are questioning their own sexual identities would have something to relate to.” It appears that many participants would agree with Kaywell (1993; 1994) who argued that young adult literature is able to assist adolescents with specific issues such as alienation, abuse, disabilities, eating disorders, divorce, adoption, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and even suicide (e.g., Kaywell, 1993; 2004). One respondent summed up thoughts on this theme by writing “I think that it is important to have a strong self-identity which requires exploration. LGBTQ [themed texts] would simply aid in the exploration process.”

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this mixed methods descriptive study was to utilize Q factor analysis and analysis of open ended questions to paint a broad picture of pre-service English teachers’ attitudes toward incorporating LGBTQ themed literature in classroom instruction. The results echo Haertling-Thein’s (2013) study by showing a great deal of resistance in pre-service teachers’ willingness to use LGBTQ literature and further shows that even in those who are willing to use LGBTQ themed literature in English language arts instruction, numerous roadblocks remain.

The typology revealed through Q factor analysis that accounted for the most variance and had the most defining participants displayed what Haertling-Thein (2013) labeled as an anti-stance. In this study, Typology 1 members displayed a seemingly incongruous representation of themselves: they professed to be able to teach various types of LGBTQ themed literature, yet at the same time argued the most vehemently against its inclusion in classroom instruction, in classroom libraries, and in school libraries. These anti-stance beliefs were elucidated in many responses to the question that asked participants to give reasons why LGBTQ themed texts should not be part of instruction as many respondents argued that it simply was not necessary to

include LGBTQ themed texts. Furthermore, some respondents invoked “reverse discrimination” believing that they could marginalize heterosexual students by teaching an LGBTQ text. Of paramount concern is that these pre-service teachers were either unfamiliar with or in complete denial of the concept of heteronormativity and the historical role of schools in enforcing compulsory heterosexuality. While the findings presented here are from just one university, the results echo the few other similar studies done (Haertling-Thein, 2013; Puchner & Klein, 2011), strongly arguing that there remains a great deal of resistance to incorporating LGBTQ topics and texts in English language arts classes.

It may be premature to label the pre-service teachers who loaded into Typology 1 as homophobic, yet it is important to note that previous scholars have argued that schools are homophobic institutions and that many educators condone homophobia and homophobic bullying (Blackburn, 2004; Owens, 1998; Rivers, 1995). To counteract this, it is critical that pre-service teacher programs in both content and methods classes attempt to educate their students about LGBTQ issues. Considering students report that teachers condone homophobia and often make homophobic remarks themselves (Kosciw et. al., 2012), changing the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward LGBTQ students, issues, and curricula should be a central mission of every teacher education program.

While each typology showed a reticence in some specific area of utilizing LGBTQ themed texts, Typologies 2 and 3, which when combined accounted for more variance than Typology 1, provide hope and guidance to those who believe that LGBTQ themed literature should be incorporated into English language arts instruction. These typologies present a more nuanced view of pre-service teachers’ subjectivity as each share a belief that LGBTQ themed

texts are needed in classrooms, yet each provides insight as to what obstructions may remain even in the willing.

Typology 2 distinguishing members had the strongest belief that LGBTQ themed texts should be utilized in English classrooms and should be available in school and classroom libraries; on the other hand, this group shared a strong reticence with Typology 1 to ask students to purchase LGBTQ themed texts. Answers to open ended questions may provide some insight as the most cited reason for not wanting to include LGBTQ texts was a fear of reprisal from parents. Clearly, if teachers were to ask students to purchase texts, it is reasonable to assume that many would ask their parents for the money to do so. Perhaps teachers are afraid of being “found out” by parents who may then create problems for teachers. While it is not desirable, considering the lack of support teachers felt from administration, it is understandable that many teachers would not want to risk their jobs to teach an LGBTQ text.

Despite the fact that some advocates and allies may think that these teachers are using fear of retribution as an excuse, the current climate of education shows teachers have a real reason to fear for their jobs. Consider that this study was conducted in a right to work state where teachers have few workplace protections and virtually no academic freedom. Many states are attempting to pass legislation specifically designed to make it easier to fire teachers, and in many schools a principal can just forbid a teacher to use a text, and that teacher has little or no recourse. This is an effect of the war on teachers being waged on behalf of corporate educational interests where teachers are portrayed as inept and desperately in need of outside monitoring. Academic freedom, an important lynchpin in the civil rights movement, has been eliminated or enervated in many places, making teachers extremely wary of most of their curricular decisions. Moreover, many teachers do not have curricular choices as standardized curricula, district made

pacing guides, and scripted curricula continue to gain prominence and push aside teacher designed lessons and instructional choices (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, in press). The Common Core State Standards Exemplar Text List is another threat to curricular choices as many teachers fear this will become a de facto book list (Lesesne, 2010). Clearly, the ability to teach literature that some may consider controversial requires that teachers have academic freedom, which is a rare and endangered commodity.

This movement of curricular decision making from the classroom level to school and district offices has profound implications for programs that provide administrator certification and advanced degrees in educational administration. These programs should include coursework addressing controversial curricula of all types, including LGBTQ issues, so current and future principals and superintendents can be enlisted as allies. Furthermore, if schools and school systems are going to take issues such as bullying seriously, they need to make a commitment to purchasing texts that reflect the diversity of their students, and that includes LGBTQ themed texts. Teachers may find themselves much more willing to teach a text that can be found in the bookroom because they could rationally expect support from their administration or school board in case of a parent challenge. Without such changes, teachers will continue to engage in what Freedman and Johnson (2000) describe as self-censorship where the “distinctions between censorship and selection become blurred” (p. 357). This often leads to teachers eschewing texts that they feel would help their students and instead choosing texts that are less controversial. Thus, even in places where classroom teachers are willing to incorporate LGBTQ themed literature and where they still have the ability to choose reading selections, through this self-censorship they may continue to deny their students the opportunity to read many types of literature.

Another issue among the willing is the lack of knowledge or comfort in teaching texts with LGBTQ protagonists. Neither Typology 2 nor 3 displayed a strong level of confidence in teaching LGBTQ themed texts and considering that both were in favor of using these types of texts, this creates a Catch-22 where the willing are unable, but the able are not willing. While the confidence of the unwilling could be interpreted as false, considering their strongly negative views on including LGBTQ texts, the lack of confidence in defining members of Typologies 2 and 3 certainly seem more genuine.

To address this deficiency, English teacher education classes should include more LGBTQ themed texts. While the majority of LGBTQ themed literature falls into the category of young adult literature (Banks, 2009), it is not known how many LGBTQ texts are used in typical university young adult literature courses. These courses are often required of pre-service English teacher candidates as well as for in-service teachers seeking graduate degrees, and while it would be desirable to have several LGBTQ themed texts in these courses, it is also necessary to realize that LGBTQ themed texts are in competition with many other genres of young adult literature and that a one semester course can only use so many texts. Teacher education programs may want to consider the inclusion of LGBTQ themed young adult fiction into methods courses and/or courses that address multicultural education and diversity.

Within Typology 2 and 3's lack of confidence using LGBTQ themed texts was a much stronger self-doubt when it came to teaching texts with transgender protagonists. This could be due to a lack of exposure to texts with transgender characters such as *Luna*, *Almost Perfect* and *What Happened to Lani Garver?* The reticence to use texts with transgender protagonists could also be due to a paucity of opportunities to learn about constructs such as sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. For one who is not knowledgeable about

such issues, teaching a text with a transgender character could very well be an intimidating voyage into the unknown.

While the willing typologies shared some traits, there was a major difference in their disposition to engage in discussions with students. Typology 2's lack of confidence in conducting discussions about LGBTQ issues and homophobia echoes other studies that have found both student teachers and permanent classroom teachers to feel uncomfortable and/or unprepared to confront homophobia in the classroom (Meyer, 2008; Zack, Mannheim, & Alfano, 2010). Beyond confronting homophobia, Typology 2 defining members also had lower confidence conducting discussions of gay rights issues, which would naturally arise during the reading of LGBTQ themed texts. Teacher education programs should consider including more instruction on handling controversial issues in courses that address instructional methods and classroom management. Furthermore, English education courses may consider including concepts of dialogic instruction (Nystrand, 1997) that has been shown to increase students' performance (e.g., Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003) and to engage students and allow for the collaborative exploration of "conflicting ideas" (Caughlan, Juzwik, Brosheim-Black, Kelly, & Fine, 2013, p. 214). An excellent text for the applied use of dialogic instruction is *Inspiring Dialogue: Talking to Learn in the English Classroom* (Juzwik, Brosheim-Black, Caughlan, & Heintz, 2013).

The data from the open ended questions provided insights into the reasons teachers would want to include LGBTQ themed literature in instruction and these results may be of value to teacher preparation programs that are committed to motivating pre-service teachers who are already somewhat willing to utilize LGBTQ texts and to opening the minds of those who are not. The most frequently mentioned reason to teach LGBTQ themed literature was to expose students

to diversity. This belief argued that students, in this case those who identify as LGBTQ, have a right to see themselves represented in the literature they read. Many of these teachers' responses echoed Alsup and Miller (2014) who argued that social justice education is the principal work of English educators at all levels. Placing LGBTQ issues and homophobia in context alongside topics that are frequently addressed in schools such as racism, gender discrimination, and religious persecution may convince educators that eschewing LGBTQ texts and homophobia is not an option.

The belief that utilizing LGBTQ themed texts could reduce homophobia in students is also noteworthy. Teachers not only believed that education could play a role in making students aware of diverse sexual orientations, but also believed that knowledge could lead to a reduction in homophobia, which would in turn lead to a reduction in bullying. While homophobic bullying has been explained using numerous theories such as scapegoating, social identity theory, deindividuation theory, social ranking theory, and status construction theory (Rivers, 2011), the participants' belief that transactions with LGBTQ literature could lead to a reduction in homophobia and bullying align with intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954) and specifically with an extended contact effect (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). While the extended contact effect has been investigated using children's literature to reduce negative attitudes toward the disabled (Cameron & Rutland, 2006), there are no known studies to this author that specifically measure whether instruction of LGBTQ themed literature decreases homophobia in students or reduces the frequency of bullying. This is an area ripe for future research and scholars should investigate the possible effects that instruction of LGBTQ themed texts could have on homophobia and/or bullying.

The results of this study also show a need for research that quantitatively examines the effects of interventions designed to increase pre-service teachers' willingness to use LGBTQ themed literature. Studies such as these could also be done longitudinally to examine whether or not participants actually incorporate LGBTQ texts into instruction once in the classroom. Similar studies could be done with in-service teachers to determine the effect on their willingness and then follow ups could explore the extent to which they actually utilized LGBTQ texts.

Beyond showing areas ripe for future research, this study offers methodological possibilities for increasing the amount and the variety of research conducted on young adult literature that has been cited by scholars as a serious need for the field (Hill, 2014, Kaplan, 2010). Hayn, Kaplan, and Nolan (2011) discovered there to be a dearth of empirical research on young adult literature when reviewing studies published from 2000-2010, and in a subsequent review, Hayn and Nolen (2012) noted that the majority of empirical research was qualitative. While it is easy to surmise that the field of young adult literature could benefit from more empirical research, perhaps it is equally critical to recognize that it could also benefit from a methodological expansion into the realm of mixed methods that offers a panoply of tools for data collection and analysis. This would allow researchers to ask a wider array of research questions and may open up new areas of inquiry in the study of young adult literature. This study's combination of Q factor analysis of Likert style survey data and open coding of short answer responses is an example of how mixed methods can provide results that neither qualitative nor quantitative methods could produce separately.

### **Limitations**

While some results echoed previous research, because this study was conducted with undergraduate students at one Southeastern university, readers should exercise caution when

generalizing findings. Similarly, this study featured a predominantly White, female, heterosexual sample, and while that is generally representative of the field of teaching, different results may be found with samples that have different demographic characteristics. Furthermore, this study only looked at the attitudes of pre-service secondary English teachers and results may be different with pre-service teachers of different subjects and at different levels.

### **Conclusion**

While the proponents of corporate education reform enjoy portraying the privatization crusade as the “civil rights movement of our time,” the real civil rights movement of our time is the fight to end the discrimination, hatred, and violence against LGBTQ people in all walks of life. Education has often played a major role in advancing civil rights and in order to continue preparing citizens for participation in a democracy, there remains a large amount of work to be done with preservice teachers. The results of this study show there are two main areas for teacher preparation programs to focus on: (1) providing information and experiences to those who are currently unwilling to teach LGBTQ themed texts and/or address LGBTQ issues in order to inspire them to reassess their beliefs; and (2) giving those who are willing the tools, knowledge, and support to feel comfortable engaging in this type of instruction. While this study focused on LGBTQ themed literature and pre-service English teachers, it is clear that there must be a much more inclusive conversation in education that also includes administrators, superintendents, and school board members if meaningful change is to occur.

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Appendix A

Survey

Please read the following statements and **circle** the response that best represents your belief, attitude or agreement with each statement. “**Students**” refers to K-12 public school students. “**Texts**” refers to any written works that are age appropriate for students.

1. Students should have access to texts that depict people of varying sexual orientations in public school libraries.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
Nor Disagree

2. How important is it for students to read texts that depict people of varying sexual orientations as part of assigned readings in English/language arts classes?

Completely unimportant      Unimportant      Neither Important or Unimportant      Important      Essential

3. I would feel comfortable discussing homophobia in class.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
Nor Disagree

4. I would feel comfortable discussing gay rights issues in class.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
Nor Disagree

5. I would feel comfortable teaching a text with main characters who are LGBTQ.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
Nor Disagree

6. I would feel comfortable teaching a text with main characters who are gay males.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
Nor Disagree

7. I would feel comfortable teaching a text with main characters who are lesbians.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
 Nor Disagree

8. I would feel comfortable teaching a text with main characters who are bisexual.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
 Nor Disagree

9. I would feel comfortable teaching a text with main characters who are transgender.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
 Nor Disagree

10. I would feel comfortable teaching a text with main characters who are questioning their sexual orientation.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neither Agree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
 Nor Disagree

11. If your students could be required to purchase books, how comfortable would you be assigning the purchase of a LGBTQ text?

Very Uncomfortable      Uncomfortable      Neither Comfortable      Comfortable      Very Comfortable  
 Nor Uncomfortable

12. How important is it for students to have access to books that depict people of varying sexual orientations as part of classroom libraries?

Completely unimportant      Unimportant      Neither Important Nor Unimportant      Important      Essential

What are some reasons you would **want** to include GLBTQ literature as part of your class?

What are some reasons you would **NOT want** to include GLBTQ literature as part of your class?