

Queering Agricultural Education Research: Challenges and Strategies for Advancing Inclusion

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Abstract

For more than 30 years, the field of agricultural education has grappled with complex questions of how to recruit, support, retain, and teach diverse youth. Yet the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community is rarely included in published agricultural education research. This philosophical paper addresses the immediate need for understanding more about LGBTQ youth in agricultural education, while identifying opportunities and specific strategies to shift the culture of agricultural education research towards inclusion. Queer theory is leveraged to reveal a nascent body of literature related to sexuality in 4-H and school-based agricultural education. LGBTQ youth in agricultural education face significant challenges: educators ill prepared to meet their needs, a lack of policies to inform decision making, active homophobia from teachers and peers, among others. Agricultural education researchers face methodological and disciplinary barriers to conducting LGBTQ research. Authors employ unique tactics to conduct and disseminate their work. Understanding these strategies and analyzing the conditions that necessitate their use contributes to the disciplinary knowledge of how to conduct inclusive research – not just for LGBTQ youth – but for the profession writ large.

Keywords: lesbian; gay; bisexual; transgender; queer; LGBTQ; inclusion; diversity; agricultural education; 4-H; FFA

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Introduction

For more than 30 years, the field of agricultural education has been grappling with complex questions of how to recruit, support, retain, and teach diverse youth. These questions are frequently cited as “one of the biggest challenges facing agriculture and natural resource professionals and educators” today (Outley, 2008, p. 139). Traditional models of youth agricultural education – inclusive of school-based agricultural education, FFA, and 4-H – recognize the imperative of delivering high quality education for *all* students. Decades of institutional messaging reflect the urgency of this priority. For instance, Cooperative Extension extends a vision of eliminating discrimination across the system and ensuring that “recognition, power, privilege, and opportunity are extended to all people because

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they are valued for all aspects of their age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other dimensions of human diversity” (Strategic Planning Task Force on Diversity, 1991, p. 9). This vision is again articulated in the National 4-H strategic plan (4-H, 2017), goals of agricultural education societies (National Council for Agricultural Education, 2019; National Association of Agricultural Educators, 2013), and in FFA bylaws (FFA, 2018).

The American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) has issued continued charges to make the field of agricultural education research more inclusive, underscoring how these priorities are mirrored in the academy. The first goal of the 2017-2020 AAAE strategic plan is to “build a more inclusive culture within the society” such that “AAAE membership and activities will reflect the broader discipline and provide a coordinated response to social science issues affecting agriculture and related sciences” (AAAE, 2017, p.1). AAAE’s core value of inclusivity (AAAE, 2017) is reflected in AAAE’s (2016) National Research Agenda, which guides the *Journal of Agricultural Education*. According to the National Research Agenda (AAAE, 2016), one of the highest priorities for the field of agricultural education is to determine strategies for recruiting diverse populations into agricultural and natural resources careers. As a field, agricultural education, AAAE, and the *Journal of Agricultural Education* have called upon researchers to conduct and publish studies that address social issues and inclusion.

Despite this ongoing commitment to promoting inclusion, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) community is frequently overlooked in agricultural education and remains understudied in agricultural education research. For example, sexuality is not included in the analysis in key papers that investigate diversifying the agricultural workforce (e.g., Hoover, 2016); agriscience classrooms (e.g., Denson, 2017; Alston et al., 2010; Roberts et al., 2009); nonformal agricultural education programs, such as FFA or 4-H (e.g., Martin & Kitchel, 2015; LaVergne, 2015; Lawrence et al., 2013); and postsecondary agricultural education (e.g., Esters, 2007). LGBTQ-specific analyses are omitted from research related to cultural proficiency (e.g., Turley, 2017); teacher attitudes towards diversity (e.g., LaVergne et al., 2011; Warren & Alston, 2007); diversity in secondary agricultural education (e.g., Luft, 1996); and culturally competent pre-service teacher preparation (e.g., Talbert & Edwin, 2008; Wakefield et al., 2006). Even systematic reviews of diversity-related literature in agricultural education fail to incorporate sexual orientation as a social identity (e.g., Tubbs, 2015). The lack of published research related to sexual orientation in the field’s primary academic journals – *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *Journal of Extension*, and *Journal of Youth Development* – was first documented by Soder (2009) and has continued uninterrupted over the last ten years (Poliseno, 2019).

The lack of published, peer-reviewed, research about LGBTQ youth is particularly concerning given increased practitioner demand for resources to understand and support LGBTQ youth in agricultural education. Agricultural educators are increasingly organizing conferences (e.g., Ohio 4-H LGBTQ+ Summit, Rainbows Over the Rockies), magazine articles (e.g., Ermis, 2018), white papers (e.g., Hamilton-Honey, 2017), poster presentations (e.g., Ryan et al., 2018), professional development sessions (e.g., Cultivating Change Foundation), resource websites (e.g., New York State 4-H, 2019) and blog posts (e.g., Boehm, 2019; Global 4-H Network, 2017) in an attempt to meet the urgent need for research and best practices for supporting LGBTQ youth in agricultural education. This need is echoed across disciplines, such as in public health, where research priorities call for studies of LGBTQ youth support in positive youth development contexts, specifically 4-H (Johns et al., 2019).

The number of agricultural education students impacted by the need for research on LGBTQ issues is not insignificant. There are approximately 1,000,000 youth enrolled in secondary agricultural education (NAAE, n.d.) and nearly 6,000,000 youth in 4-H (4-H, 2020). With current estimates that 4.5% of the population actively identify as LGBT (Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2019) it

stands to reason that somewhere in the realm of 315,000 agricultural education students and 4-Hers are LGBTQ. Research into LGBTQ youth has the potential to impact hundreds of thousands of youth in agricultural education.

Agricultural education has already responded to similar charges to take up new research topics around inclusion, such as the 40-year movement to produce more scholarship on race and ethnicity in agricultural education in response to decades of segregation. Early research on race and agricultural education first emerged in the 1980s (e.g. Findlay & Rawls, 1984) and began being published in the *Journal of Extension* more regularly in the 1990s (e.g. Cano & Bankston, 1993; Escott et al., 1996; McCray, 1994). It was not until the 2000s, a full decade later, when similar research on race and ethnicity began regularly appearing in the *Journal of Agricultural Education* (e.g., Croom & Alston, 2009; Esters & Bowen, 2004; Roberts et al., 2009) and the *Journal of Youth Development* (e.g. Forman et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2007). These studies have continually pointed to ways that marginalized students experience agricultural education differently than their peers, and the critical importance of advancing equity and inclusion. These modern experiences have their root in historical precedent: Black students were only integrated in 1965, when the New Farmers of America was absorbed into FFA as a result of the Civil Rights Act (Wakefield & Talnert, 2003) and women were only allowed membership in FFA in 1969. A culture of discrimination in agricultural education existed for decades. The profession has since taken a more active role in working to end discrimination by conducting research on inclusion. It is little surprise then that emergence of scholarship around race and ethnicity in the 1980s and 1990s coincided with increased focus on research methodology and research agenda development (Kitchel & Ball, 2014). Similarly, such advances present the opportunity to leverage novel theories, such as queer theory, to extend research into sexual orientation in agricultural education.

Purpose

Despite the clear practitioner demand, documented transdisciplinary interest, and established precedent, there has been a lack of published, peer reviewed research on sexual orientation in youth agricultural education. In addressing this problem, the purpose of this paper is to lay the philosophical underpinnings for a more inclusive approach to agricultural education research. Doing so addresses the immediate need for greater understanding about LGBTQ youth in agricultural education, while identifying opportunities and specific strategies to shift the culture of agricultural education research in a way that promotes inclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Through this philosophical paper, we leverage queer theory to identify and analyze a nascent canon of literature on sexuality in agricultural education. Philosophical studies in agricultural education seek “to develop canons for what is ‘real, true, and of value’ for a profession” (Kitchel & Ball, 2014, p. 188). Therefore, in keeping with goals of other philosophical papers, queer theory is used for the “analysis and synthesis of concepts and theories” (Baker et al., 2012, p. 2). Rather than arguing for an irrefutable truth, this philosophical paper provides further insight and discussion into an often ‘hidden’ phenomenon.

To help frame this conversation, we provide below a list of terms that may be less familiar – or used in less familiar ways – to the reader, then an overview of queer theory, and finally a discussion of how queer theory can be applied to organize and think differently about a field’s body of literature.

Table 1*Terms and Definitions Employed in this Paper*

Term	Definition
Binary	A way of classifying information as consisting of two distinct, symmetrical, opposing items.
Canon	A collection of works that are generally recognized as authoritative or important in a field.
Citational practices	Methods of choosing specific authors or pieces of work to attribute credit to for an idea or collection of knowledge.
Deficit framework	A way of viewing a marginalized or minoritized group as less than, lacking, or deficient when compared to their majority peers (Ladson-Billings, 2006).
Queer	A broad group of culturally marginalized sexual and gender identities; or an elastic theoretical model used to interrogate what is deemed 'normative' and 'non-normative' (Jagose, 1996).
Rhetorical strategies	Persuasive language used by authors to support claims and construct arguments (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005).
Scavenging methodologies	The use of indirect or nontraditional strategies to produce information from different data sources to study a population that has been purposefully or accidentally excluded (Halberstam, 1998; Murphy & Lugg, 2016).

Queer theory originated in the gay and lesbian movement and draws on decades of work in poststructural theory, sexuality studies, and women's studies. The term 'queer' can be differentially employed to refer to a broad group of culturally marginalized sexual and gender identities or as an elastic theoretical model used to interrogate what is deemed 'normative' and 'non-normative' (Jagose, 1996). As a theoretical tool, queer theory can be applied to deconstruct normative systems by teasing out the internalized, openly acknowledged, hidden, and contested tensions and contradictions (Mohanty, 1988). To 'queer' something, then, is to apply this theoretical model that makes strange what is taken for granted and rendered as normal.

The lack of peer reviewed, published research in the field's primary academic journals might be traditionally thought of as a 'gap' in the literature, but that gap can be queered. These 'gaps' in the literature are less reflective of a lack of intellectual ability, capacity, urgency, or interest of academics to publish on these issues. Instead, they reflect the state of a system that often excludes these ideas from the academy (Bhattacharya, 2015; Love, 2019).

Queer theory can be used to analyze a discipline's body of literature in a way that makes LGBTQ texts and themes visible. First, through a minoritizing view, queer theory can assemble "alternative canons of lesbian and gay male writing *as* minority canons, as a literature of oppression and resistance and survival and heroic making" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 51). Second, through a universalizing view, by "making salient the homosocial, homosexual, and homophobic strains and torsions in the already existing master-canon" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 51). These methods, however, are not binary opposites. There is generative space *between* each of these threads: it is "not by the suppression of one model and the consequent withering away of another, but instead by the relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models" (1990, p. 47). There, we use queer theory to identify literature by and about LGBTQ people in agricultural education to create a new body of literature; to identify queer themes in the existing body of agricultural education literature; and, to examine the spaces between.

Analysis with queer theory can be taken one step further by questioning what normally *counts* as 'the literature,' and what is made possible when researchers assemble a more complex, messy, and

queer version of ‘the literature.’ In other words, queer theory can provide an analytic tool to deconstruct normative ideas of what counts as knowledge (Sedgwick, 1990). Academic perspectives maintain clear divisions and boundaries in types of knowledge, between what is official knowledge – traditionally that which is peer-reviewed and published– and what might variably be referred to as practitioner, folk, lay, or common knowledge. This organization categorizes knowledge as belonging to one of two distinct symmetrical, opposite, binary pairs. These pairs are inherently unstable and incoherent because each paired term depends on its opposite for its meaning (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990). This philosophical approach oppresses knowledge on all sides – keeping academia from exploring cutting edge issues by failing to acknowledge community-situated truths, while holding back practitioners by delegitimizing other forms of knowledge. Traditional views of the literature hold that published, peer reviewed empirical studies are the most trustworthy forms of academic knowledge. Yet queer theory provides a framework for understanding how research outside of published, peer-reviewed journals, such as the *Journal of Agricultural Education*, must be considered as part of the literature, as they hold critical knowledge not otherwise represented.

Queering what counts as the literature is particularly important when openly LGBTQ topics and people are excluded from the literature. Sedgwick theorized that “men who write openly as gay men have also often been excluded from the consensus of the traditional canon” (1990, p. 58). While Sedgwick (1990) refers solely to authors, others have pointed to the ways LGBTQ topics – or research openly about LGBTQ people and issues – are similarly excluded from the canon (e.g. LaSala et al., 2008). Sedgwick’s (1990) assertion has at least two interpretations: that LGBTQ topics and people are not likely to be included in ‘the literature’, or, if they are, they will be in some way closeted or hidden. Maintaining binaries of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ knowledge in academia (and the positioning peer reviewed, published research over other knowledge sources) keeps LGBTQ topics hidden within ‘the literature’ and keeps open LGBTQ research outside ‘the literature’. Therefore, these LGBTQ literatures exist at the margins not because they are less important, but because there are broader systems that exclude openly LGBTQ people and research. We use queer theory in this paper both to examine the research that exists at the margins, while arguing for the need to confer status on the margins and bring these LGBTQ topics to the center through peer review and publication.

Results and Discussion

First in this section we provide an overview of the state of sexuality research in agricultural education broadly, then review specific literature related to sexuality organized by context: first 4-H, then school-based agricultural education and FFA. These papers together serve as a foundation for a broader discussion about queering agricultural education: or what can be learned from queering what counts as knowledge and assembling these works as a body of literature. In the case of this paper, analysis of this body of literature reveal both challenges to inclusion and the strategies authors use to advance inclusion within the context of the discipline.

Review of Sexuality in Agricultural Education

Scholarship around sexuality has existed at the margins and in the canon of agricultural education. There have been no empirical studies with a primary focus on sexuality published in any of the field’s major journals (Table 2). However, within these journals there was one empirical study that included a few questions about sexual orientation (Moore et al., 2001) and four non-empirical works, including two literature reviews (Soule, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2020) and two opinion articles (McKee & Bruce 2019; Meyers, 2008) that directly and indirectly address sexuality. The majority of research that directly addresses sexual orientation in the purpose and central research questions were unpublished master’s theses. While this paper specifically focuses on youth agricultural education, it is

worth noting the existence of two recent empirical papers that explore questions of sexuality in college-level agricultural education (Elliott-Engle et al., 2019; Martin & Hartmann, 2020).

Table 2

LGBTQ Agricultural Education Texts

Author, Year	Research Type	Sexuality focus	Focal Organization	Manuscript Type	Publication Status
Meyers 2008	Not research	Primary	Extension	Commentary	<i>Journal of Extension</i>
Soder 2009	Quantitative (survey)	Primary	4-H	Thesis	Unpublished
Moore et al. 2001	Quantitative (survey)	Secondary	School-based agricultural education	Journal Article	<i>NACTA Journal</i>
Swinehart 2013	Quantitative (survey)	Secondary	FFA / School-based agricultural education	Thesis	Unpublished
Rosenberg 2016a	Historical	Primary	4-H	Book	University of Pennsylvania Press.
Soule 2017	Literature review	Primary	Extension / 4-H	Literature Review	<i>Journal of Human Sciences and Extension</i>
Swires 2018	Mixed methods (survey, interviews)	Primary	4-H	Master's Project	Unpublished
Austin 2018	Quantitative (survey)	Primary	School-based agricultural education	Thesis	Unpublished
Poliseno 2019	Qualitative (interviews)	Primary	4-H	Master's Project	Unpublished
McKee & Bruce 2019	Not research	Secondary	Extension / 4-H	Commentary	<i>Journal of Extension</i>
Gonzalez et al. 2020	Not research	Primary	4-H	Literature Review	<i>Journal of Extension</i>

The sections that follow review the results these texts on sexuality in agricultural education, first in 4-H contexts and then school-based agricultural education.

Sexuality in 4-H Contexts

Commentaries and Practitioner-Orientated Papers on Sexuality in 4-H. Outside of empirical research, two opinion articles (termed ‘commentaries’) and two review articles related to LGBTQ youth in 4-H have been published in the *Journal of Extension* and the *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*. All four articles advocated for the adoption of LGBTQ-inclusive practices. Meyers’s (2008) commentary detailed his personal experiences as a gay man working in Extension, ultimately arguing that he is deserving of the “same humanity as everyone else” (Meyers, 2008, para.

2). Soule's (2017) comprehensive literature review outlined basic terminology and suggestions for Extension personnel to create inclusive environments for LGBTQ youth, while arguing for the need for research into youth experience. Gonzalez et al. (2020) extend this work to recommendations for systemic advocacy, programming, and professional development. McKee and Bruce's (2019) commentary advocated for similar practitioner practices – such as using gender-inclusive language and normalizing pronoun-sharing– notably without ever naming how this best practice is designed to support 4-Hers in the LGBTQ community.

Historical and Empirical Research on Sexuality in 4-H. Some historical research on sexuality in 4-H has been published outside of the field of agricultural education. Gabriel Rosenberg's (2016a) pathbreaking work on 4-H, sexuality, and the State traced the history of the organization, arguing that gender roles, reproduction, and sexuality operate alongside agricultural technologies to produce the modern landscape of agribusiness and State control. 4-H began in 1902 and was designed to meet USDA and Cooperative Extension's priorities of disseminating technological innovations (Rosenberg, 2016a). 4-H clubs took off as models for successful rural outreach and have been leveraged over time to meet different ends. For example, in the 1930s, 4-H refocused to bolster the rural birth rate in response to USDA economists' assessment that, as cited in Rosenberg (2016b), "the nation faced a dire crisis of reproduction" which 4-H members could prevent by "starting their own healthy farm families" (Rosenberg, 2016b, p. 88). Starting in the 1930s, 4-H invested significant effort in training rural youth for wholesome marriages. According to Rosenberg (2016b),

[4-H] Club experts attempted to train rural youth for marriage and 'heterosexual relations,' to contrive rural heterosexual romance, and to educate rural youth about the sexual nature and function of their bodies. This effort circulated and ultimately normalized heterosexuality as a foundation of an idealized rural life. (p. 91)

In attempting to bolster the rural birth rate, 4-H played a pivotal role in creating and reproducing the concept of the heterosexual family farm (Leslie, 2017), where "the economic and biological union between a revenue-producing male 'farmer' and a nurturing 'farmer's wife' constituted both the ideal and normal form of organization for rural life" (Rosenberg, 2016b, p. 88). These values fostered agricultural education spaces that were specifically designed for heterosexual youth. Rosenberg's (2016a, b) work provides important perspectives on the historical structures that gave rise to modern barriers to inclusion in agricultural education.

Rosenberg's (2016) historical accounts makes way for other, similar studies of how sexuality organizes and permeates nonformal agricultural education. While outside the scope of Rosenberg's work (2016), FFA shares similar historical and ongoing practices that normalize and promote heterosexuality, such as the pairing of FFA Sweethearts with FFA Sweethunks or FFA Kings (Casey & Moore, 2013). Just as 4-H started investing in heterosexual marriages in the 1930s, all-male FFA memberships began beauty contests to select "pretty young lasses" and "hood ornaments" (as cited in Casey & Moore, 2013) to serve as chapter representatives in parades and fairs. For nearly 40 years the only role for women in FFA was FFA Sweetheart (Casey & Moore, 2013): a symbol of heterosexuality and male desire. Yet Rosenberg's (2016a) analysis of sexuality and agricultural history has not yet been modeled in agricultural education research nor in the context of FFA.

While Rosenberg's work is situated in the field of History, there are a small number of non-peer reviewed, unpublished studies that originate from within agricultural education that directly relate to sexuality and 4-H. One of the earliest studies was Soder's (2009) unpublished thesis, a quantitative survey of State 4-H Leaders in Ohio. Soder sought to assess leaders' readiness to support gay and lesbian youth, operationalized as basic knowledge of sexual minorities, measures of homophobia, and self-reported implementation of inclusive best practices. Soder (2009) reported that State 4-H leaders showed lower levels of knowledge about LGBTQ identities and issues than other educators, as well as varying levels of homophobia and best practice implementation, moderated by leaders' political

orientation and rurality. Soder's study, although only 12 years old, represents one of the earliest empirical works with a singular focus on serving LGBTQ youth.

Nearly ten years later, another unpublished master's project investigated questions related to sexuality and 4-H. Swires (2018) surveyed and interviewed Pennsylvania 4-H educators and volunteers to understand educator needs for serving LGBTQ youth. She found while most respondents reported feeling comfortable working with LGBTQ youth, participants generally overestimated knowledge of the community while scoring low in basic knowledge of LGBTQ terminology. This lack of knowledge contributed, in part, to a culture where sexuality was not discussed in public, and conversations about diversity did not include sexual minorities. Educators expressed the belief that "ag kids aren't gay" (Swires, 2018, p. 29), and that even if they were, 4-H was not "the right program to help LGBTQ youth come to grips with their own sexuality" (p. 31). Swires's (2018) work points to how research can explore the organizational structure of 4-H, how it constrains and empowers LGBTQ youth, and what can be done to make agricultural education more inclusive.

A third unpublished master's project explored modern barriers to inclusion in 2019. Using qualitative methods of county-level Florida 4-H Extension faculty, Poliseno (2019) found different levels of acceptance for LGBTQ youth based on the rurality of the program, religious and political beliefs of members and volunteers, and race of the youth, with White LGBTQ 4-Hers being generally more accepted than youth of color of any sexuality. While 4-H faculty spoke of the importance of sense of belonging for youth and had some level of familiarity with the LGBTQ acronym, participants lacked familiarity with LGBTQ terminology, skills to communicate with LGBTQ youth, and spoke of a dearth of university policies and practical guidelines to meet LGBTQ youth needs. Poliseno (2019) concluded with a call for systematic 4-H needs assessments with intersectional analyses of race, religion, and sexuality.

Research into Sexuality in School-based Agricultural Education and FFA

While a small number of studies directly address questions of sexuality in the context of 4-H, only Moore et al.'s, (2001) published study of teacher attitudes, along with Swinehart's (2013) and Austin's (2018) unpublished theses broach sexuality in school-based agricultural education. These studies identify barriers preventing the full inclusion for LGBTQ students. Generally, the studies found LGBTQ students encounter teachers who are uncomfortable working with them and peers that believe in inclusion 'in general' or in theory but are less likely to embrace LGBTQ peers or FFA leaders.

The only empirical, peer-reviewed study investigating any aspect of youth sexual orientation was Moore et al. (2001) survey of Michigan agriscience teachers' definitions of and attitudes toward diversity. The authors found high school agriscience teachers reported varied levels of comfort working with diverse students and colleagues. However, when asked if they would like to work alongside people with different characteristics, 65% of agriscience teachers said they would not like to work with students with a different sexual orientation, and 57% would not be comfortable talking to someone with a different sexual orientation. While most teachers reported appreciating differences between different racial groups, genders, and religions, the lowest appreciation for difference was between LGBTQ people and heterosexuals. Compared to all aspects of identity included in the survey (e.g. race, sex, etc.), agriscience teachers were the most uncomfortable and least likely to want to work with LGBTQ students. While teachers' attitudes may have changed over time, there has been no published research on the topic in the 20 years since Moore et al. (2001).

Swinehart's (2013) unpublished master's thesis surveyed students in three high school agriculture programs to explore how environmental factors impacts student participation. While sexuality was not a primary variable of interest, one item in the survey asked students to consider if

FFA was welcoming to students of different sexual orientations. While the participants expressed the general belief that “Agricultural Education *should* [emphasis added] welcome any student who is interested to participate in activities” (p. 49), students were less likely to agree agricultural education actually *does* welcome students regardless of their sexual orientation.

An unwelcoming environment for LGBTQ students in agricultural education classrooms was reaffirmed by Austin (2018). Austin’s unpublished master’s thesis surveyed Kentucky secondary agriculture students to understand how sexuality, race, and farm background moderate peer inclusion. She constructed mock profiles of students and asked participants to rate whether the mock students should be included in the school, agricultural education classroom, FFA membership, FFA leadership roles, or as a roommate on a trip. The ‘gay’ mock students were ranked lowest out of every other demographic combination, reflecting participants’ “dislike of mock student profiles labeled as gay” (Austin, 2018, p. 89). While survey participants were generally accepting of the existence of a hypothetical gay student in their school at large, students had particularly low levels of acceptance for gay students as FFA chapter president or as a roommate on a trip. Austin’s (2018) study extended Moore et al.’s (2001) work to document how teacher discomfort with LGBTQ students persists 17 years later among agricultural students, and how FFA’s social dynamics are often unwelcoming for sexual minority youth.

Queering Agricultural Education Research

The 11 commentaries, literature reviews, historical papers, and empirical studies reviewed in this philosophical paper are critical pieces of scholarship for educators and researchers aiming to understand the experiences of sexual minorities in agricultural education. Following Sedgwick’s (1990) framework and queering what counts as academic literature resulted in inclusion of five unpublished sexuality studies, four non-empirical publications, and one study published outside the field. These texts collectively identify persistent barriers to enacting inclusive environments for LGBTQ youth in agricultural education; data that are not represented in traditionally defined extant literature. Results of these studies address the immediate need for understanding more about LGBTQ youth in agricultural education.

Assembling these 11 works as a body of literature reveals how the authors navigate the landscape of agricultural education in a way that allows them to address questions of sexuality. When LGBTQ authors and subjects are not able to be ‘out’ and be published in the primary journals of the field, two broad responses emerge. First, direct studies of LGBTQ issues continue to exist outside the journals. Second, authors publishing in the journals address sexuality in coded ways. Authors employed queer citational practices by citing non-normative texts as legitimate sources of academic knowledge, and engaged in unique rhetorical strategies, such as naming and addressing discomfort to disarm a presumably unwilling audience. These responses are not mutually exclusive though, and many authors (e.g. Soder, 2009) employ a multitude of strategies to navigate the challenges of conducting research on LGBTQ topics. Queer theorists understand the forced maneuvering through open secrets, coded knowledge, the ‘unsayable’, secret knowledge as uniquely queer forms of oppression, distinct from racial, gender, or class oppression (Sedgwick, 1990). While the strategies employed by authors allow for this maneuvering, they are no substitute for addressing the root cause of the issues. In the sections that follow, queer theory is used to lay bare the tensions between root issues in the discipline (challenges to inclusion) and the strategies employed by authors (advancing inclusion) to navigate them. These challenges and strategies are highlighted in three topic areas: (1) the positioning of LGBTQ authors and subjects in the field, (2) challenges in the intersectional representations of queer topics and individuals, and (3) trends in conceptual framing.

Positioning LGBTQ Authors and Subjects in Agricultural Education

LGBTQ subjects largely exist at the margins of the field in unpublished manuscripts. It is difficult to advance more inclusive research when such studies are not readily cited, are published outside the field, or findings are selectively taken up to avoid discussions of sexuality. These challenges point to the issues that occur when LGBTQ research and researchers are not getting published in canonical journals in agricultural education, which are prioritized as the primary source of knowledge for the field. However, the authors of these texts queer agricultural education research by engaging in queer citational practices and rhetorical strategies to confer status on marginal texts and include LGBTQ-related analyses in canonical Extension journals, respectively. By queering the taken-for-granted philosophies of the profession, these authors forward research and writings on inclusion in the profession.

Challenges to Inclusion: Publication Status and Citation. A study's publication status, as variably unpublished, published in canonical journals in the field, and published in journals outside the field, may be the result of complex factors, but impacts the field nonetheless. All four empirical studies with a primary focus on sexuality are currently unpublished. Multiple factors influence whether studies get carried through to peer-reviewed publication, particularly master's theses. The particular reasons behind publication status of these papers are beyond the scope of this philosophical paper and cannot be answered through this analysis. Looking at the landscape of the field and the positioning of the texts, however, raises important questions about what kind of work is, and is not, published in agricultural education and then who it is, or is not cited by (Linder et al., 2020; Settle et al., 2020). Sedgwick's (1990) framework points to the ways that writing openly as a queer author – for example, Soder's (2009) identification of a partner with a traditionally masculine name in the acknowledgements section – can factor into what is included and excluded from the traditional disciplinary canon. Setting aside questions as to why, being unpublished negatively impacts the field's inclusion efforts.

Few of these authors cited each other despite covering remarkably similar questions, having similar objectives, and documenting extensive literature review methods. Yet, because most of these studies are unpublished, they are not peer reviewed, not in the field's major journals, and many are not indexed by major search engines. These factors, combined with historical issues around inadequate indexing of interdisciplinary journals that include women's, gender, and sexuality studies (Gerhard et al., 1993), suggest it is incredibly likely that other unpublished studies exist and were not reviewed in this paper for the same reasons. The lack of published, peer reviewed research and support documents often led authors to the incorrect conclusion that “the key objectives in this project have not been explored in the past” (Swires, 2018, p. 8), even though some studies with similar objectives were written since 2009. Publication status then impacts the ability of researchers to build upon prior findings or situate new research in a relevant body of literature. As unpublished theses, the findings are unlikely to be taken up by practitioners who seek to implement evidence-based interventions for inclusion. Lack of publication and citation negatively impacts researchers individually and the profession at large:

In addition to publication, citation is taken as an assumed proxy for measuring impact, relevance, and importance, with implications not only for hiring, promotion, tenure, and other aspects of performance evaluation[...] the choices we make about whom to cite – and who is then left out of the conversation – directly impact the cultivation of a rich and diverse discipline, and the reproduction of [disciplinary] knowledge itself. (Mott & Cockayne, 2017, p. 955)

These unpublished studies remain nearly invisible to the researchers and practitioners who have demonstrated interest in the findings and slow the discipline's movement towards inclusion.

Challenges to Inclusion: Disciplinary Silos and Selective Uptake of Work. Even if studies are published there are issues around disciplinary uptake of research published outside the field. Despite Rosenberg's (2016a) relevance to other academic fields his work has largely been ignored in agricultural education. *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* has been extensively

reviewed (e.g., Clark, 2016; Roberts, 2016) and cited (e.g., Gill-Peterson, 2018; Malitoris, 2019) in journals related to History and Agricultural History. While it does break through the ‘official’ disciplinary discourse of agricultural education, it is through a singular book review (Elliott-Engle, 2017) and passing reference by a single study (Arnold, 2018), where there was selective uptake of only the historical account, depoliticized and divorced from Rosenberg’s analysis of sexuality. The result is that Rosenberg (2016a) is largely not referenced in the papers that address questions of sexuality and 4-H (e.g. Soule, 2017; Swires, 2018; Austin, 2018; Poliseno, 2019). Like the unpublished studies, the work published outside the field is often not reaching the authors and practitioners interested in inclusion.

Advancing Inclusion: Queer Methods of Situating in the Discipline. Without a clear body of literature to draw upon within the field, authors of these LGBTQ focused papers engaged in unique strategies to tie their work to the discipline. In many academic papers, the literature review contextualizes a study by situating the author and research question in a relevant disciplinary and scholarly community (Goodman et al., 2014). In these papers, however, authors situated themselves in the discipline by going to great lengths to describe their *unsuccessful* searches for relevant literature in agricultural education. For example, Poliseno (2019) and Soder (2009) both explicitly named agricultural education journals and more than half a dozen databases (including 4-H practitioner databases) that have not published or indexed research on LGBTQ youth. This rhetorical move is important. Both authors have literature reviews that primarily draw from other fields (e.g. education, psychology, public health). By naming agricultural education journals and databases that do not have LGBTQ research, the authors frame the papers as relevant to the discipline. This method allows the authors to situate inclusion work as relevant to the discipline when appears to be no relevant prior literature.

Advancing Inclusion: Queer Citational Practices. For some authors, the lack of published, peer-reviewed research in the field led them to engage in queer citational practices by bringing in non-traditional sources. Alongside peer-reviewed, published studies, the authors cited senate committee meeting notes (Soder, 2009), non-academic presentations (Swires, 2018) organizational non-discrimination policies (Soule, 2007), popular press articles (Swires, 2018), governmental websites (Soder, 2009) mission statements (Swires, 2018), unpublished studies (Soule, 2007), and practitioner newsletters (Soder, 2009), among other atypical sources. Some authors went as far as teasing out – like we have in this philosophical paper – studies that use survey instruments where even just *one* question might be tangentially related to sexuality, or identifying a newsletter that references an unpublished curriculum which cannot be accessed, but might relate to LGBTQ youth (Soder, 2009).

For example, Soder (2009) identified a 2004 special issue of the University of Maine Extension’s *Family Issues* magazine that focused on creating safe spaces for LGBTQ youth and referenced an unpublished curriculum to support LGBTQ youth. Viewed through the analytical lens of queer theory, Soder (2009) queers these binaries of knowledge, rendering non-academic newsletters and websites as legitimate sources of knowledge through their inclusion in his literature review. Yet even as Soder (2009) blurs these binaries between official and unofficial knowledge, his work is similarly situated outside of what might be considered traditional academic venues. Yet in networks of queer academics and academics who queer what counts as official knowledge, it is circulated and cited (e.g., Soule, 2017), just as Soder circulated and cited other queer and non-traditional sources. Soder’s (2009) queer citational strategy of referencing a newsletter that mentions an unpublished curriculum is critical for two reasons. First, Soder (2009) demonstrates educator interest in supporting LGBTQ youth in 4-H extends to the early 2000s – over a decade before gay marriage would be nationally legalized – and aligns his work in the discipline. Second, in some small way, this queer citational practice grants authority to texts at the margins and establishes a precedent for published works like Soule (2007) to engage in similar citational practices. As Mott and Cockayne (2017) have suggested “citational

practices can be a tool for either the reification of, or resistance to, unethical hierarchies of knowledge production” (p. 956). By queering citational practices, the authors extend the discipline’s knowledge of LGBTQ issues and confer status on LGBTQ publications and authors through citation.

Advancing Inclusion: Queer Rhetorical Strategies. Authors who brought LGBTQ topics into published works in canonical extension education journals employed unique framing to overcome anticipated resistance and advance the conversation around inclusion. Among the authors who published commentaries and literature reviews (McKee & Bruce, 2019; Meyer, 2008; Soule, 2017), all four used rhetorical strategies that identified and addressed anticipated reader discomfort. McKee and Bruce (2019) identified potential resistance from educators in implementing best practices for LGBTQ youth: “*Although doing this can feel awkward*, [emphasis added] Extension professionals can...” (para. 6). This discomfort was first articulated 11 years earlier by Meyer: “While it is *a very uncomfortable subject* [emphasis added] for many...” (2008, para. 1). Soule (2017) went so far as to devote a full page of justification in a section titled “Why Should Extension Personnel Read This Article?” (p. 104). While justifying the importance is a critical part of academic writing, the creation of a standalone section framed in terms of resistance is atypical in the *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*. Soule’s (2017) extensive argument about the relevance of sexuality might point to the author’s, editors’, and/or reviewers’ experiences of and assumptions about the typical audience of agricultural education journals. The rhetorical moves employed by all four authors suggest they anticipated a potentially hostile audience, alluding to barriers to publishing research on sexuality in extension journals – underscoring Sedgwick’s (1990) analysis of how queer voices and issues are often excluded from the literature. Yet, by naming and addressing potential sources of audience discomfort, the authors were able to put forward published works on LGBTQ subjects in canonical Extension journals and spur disciplinary conversation on inclusion.

Intersectional Representation of LGBTQ Topics and Individuals

There are complex tensions about the representation – or lack thereof – of LGBTQ people among these studies on sexuality in agricultural education. While sexuality is one important lens to understand a person’s experience, individuals occupy unique vantage points through a combination of intersecting identities, including race, age, gender, and sexual orientation, among others (Crenshaw, 1989). The studies overwhelmingly focus on adults to understand youth issues, fail to ask or report sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data, and fail to recruit diverse participants to the studies. These challenges point to issues around research design, recruitment methods, and reporting data that fail to account for the complex issues that researchers and LGBTQ participants navigate in conducting research. However, the authors of these texts queer these methods by utilizing scavenging methodologies and strategically engaging in acts of visibility and invisibility to produce initial research that, while not ideal, begins to address these issues of inclusion.

Challenges to Inclusion: Omission of LGBTQ Youth. While the majority of the six empirical studies were framed around the LGBTQ youth experience, none of the 4-H studies involve youth, and nothing about the direct experience of youth was explored. Only Swinehart’s (2013) and Austin’s (2018) studies involved youth participants. In both, however, youth participants were never asked (or data were never reported) about their sexual orientation. These methodological choices make it impossible to disaggregate data and identify unique LGBTQ agriculture students’ experiences or know if LGBTQ students were even in the studies. Both surveys collected extensive demographic data. Yet data on sexuality, a primary variable of interest, were not collected. As a result, the findings have little explanatory power regarding the actual lives and experiences of LGBTQ people (Beaulieu-Prévost, & Fortin, 2015).

Challenges to Inclusion: Omission of LGBTQ Adults. The omission of demographic data about sexuality extended to the studies of adults. Participants were not asked about their sexual orientation in three of the four surveys. In the one study that did, “the only sexual identity [...] that met the five subject requirement for reporting was heterosexual,” (Soder, 2009, p. 61) suggesting that all or nearly all of the 47 participants were straight. While most instruments asked about gender, the diversity of the LGBTQ community was not reflected in survey options. For example, Swires’s (2018) demographic question about respondent’s gender forced a response between four options: “Male” “Female” “Gender Questioning” or “Other”, but most instruments only included the binary “Male” and “Female.” It is unclear then if a single member of the LGBTQ community was represented in these studies about LGBTQ people. This omission raises important red flags about how data are interpreted and used. For example, Swinehart’s (2013) instrument specifically included one question for students to indicate agreement with the statement “Agricultural Education welcomes all students to participate in activities regardless of their sexual orientation” (p. 49). The author interpreted the generally high level of agreement with this and other statements about the environment to conclude that “Agricultural Education welcomes all students to have an equal chance to participate in activities.” (p. 69). This point is presented uncritically, without examining perspectives of students outside of agricultural education, and without collecting sexual orientation and gender identity demographic data to identify LGBTQ students who may have differing perspectives. Without collecting or reporting SOGI data, LGBTQ youth are made invisible in the studies that are theoretically about them.

Challenges to Inclusion: Overrepresentation of White Participants. Just as the majority – if not all – study participants were straight, the majority were also white. Participant’s race and ethnicity were also not always reported. This failure to recruit, report, and disaggregate data by race reflects an assumption that the results “pertain to people regardless of race” (Helms, 1993, p. 243) despite evidence otherwise. This is particularly problematic given that intersections of race and sexual orientation influence individuals’ experiences of agricultural education (Poliseno, 2019; Martin 2020). There are complex issues around who is and who is not represented in the emerging scholarship on sexuality in agricultural education.

Advancing Inclusion: Scavenging Methodologies. Studies that largely focused on straight white adults to understand LGBTQ youth are worthy of critique, but simultaneously are important examples of scavenging methodologies that enable inclusion research in a difficult context. Murphy and Lugg (2016) identified the challenges of collecting data on LGBTQ students. Researchers are routinely denied access to schools. Recruitment is stymied by a systematic inability to identify LGBTQ participants. Possible participants intentionally hide their sexuality in educational contexts. Schools hesitate to allow the direct inquiry into sexuality. Even processes of informed consent typically required by institutional review boards render studies of LGBTQ youth dangerous or impossible (Gamarel et al., 2014). Educational researchers are then left to scavenge (Murphy & Lugg, 2016) for participants, data, and methods that can combine analytic strategies across disciplines to approximate an understanding of LGBTQ experiences in educational programs. This is particularly appropriate as “scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies” (Halberstam, 1998, as cited in O’Mally et al., 2015, p. 575). While studying straight, white, adults is no substitute for recruiting a diverse pool of LGBTQ youth, these choices can be interpreted as scavenging (Murphy & Lugg, 2016): innovative strategies to do inclusive research on a population that has been excluded from traditional studies. By scavenging and piecing together data, the authors advanced early inclusion research and demonstrated the need for more robust analyses with LGBTQ youth.

Advancing Inclusion: Strategic Employment of Visibility and Invisibility. Authors advanced inclusion research by engaging in practices that may have avoided outing participants. Tensions around visibility and invisibility arise repeatedly in LGBTQ studies of agricultural education.

In all but one study reviewed in this paper, participants were either not asked about sexual orientation, or sexual orientation was not reported by the authors. This oversight – the invisibilization of LGBTQ people in agricultural education studies of LGBTQ people – raises significant concerns about how these studies may result in research, policies, and pedagogies that further problematic assumptions about LGBTQ people. Invisibility oppresses and dehumanizes LGBTQ people in multiple ways: (a) enforced invisibility through explicit repression, (b) concealing one’s sexuality (being in the closet), (c) normalization of schooling spaces to invisibilize LGBTQ people, and (d) implicit abjection when there are no words to describe anything outside of ‘normal’ (Rosiek, 2016). To invisibilize, then, is to marginalize LGBTQ people and their contributions. In the studies reviewed here, all authors invisibilized LGBTQ participants, either by not asking about sexuality or failing to recruit enough LGBTQ people to report data on (e.g., Soders, 2009).

While there is no evidence to confirm the rationale behind these decisions to not gather or report SOGI data, queer theory makes space to understand this as potentially intentional. By not gathering or reporting SOGI data, the authors avoided potentially outing LGBTQ participants who may be one of few out LGBTQ people in their sample. As explained by Dwyer and Ball (2020), navigating visibility is a safety issue:

Decisions around whether to be visible as queer, in what contexts, and how to do so, must be understood as negotiations of safety for LGBTI [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Intersex] people. [...] This means that depending on the context, LGBTI people are constantly navigating the tensions between being visible enough to avoid social and legal invisibility, and avoiding becoming hypervisible, which would draw unwarranted and unsafe attention to themselves as LGBTI people. (p.275).

Perhaps by not gathering or reporting SOGI data the authors avoided exposing LGBTQ participants to harassment or unwarranted attention. These concerns are amplified exponentially for LGBTQ youth of color, whose responses or participation might be implied or assumed if demographic data were reported without care. Austin (2018) hints at this: “due to the questions [sic] personal nature and out of respect for student confidentiality, no geographic identifiers were requested. However, due to the sensitive nature of the questions the results are at risk of misreporting due to embarrassment of uncomfortability” (p. 9). Taken together, Austin (2018) suggested enforced invisibility, by not asking certain demographic questions, strategically avoids making youth hypervisible, and also recognizes youth may engage in their own invisibilizing practices by misreporting their own demographic data to avoid hypervisibility. While these strategies dehumanize and invisibilize LGBTQ youth, they also protect LGBTQ participants who may be hypervisible in small counties and states. Therefore, by managing issues of visibility and hypervisibility the authors put forward inclusion research in a way that protects the most vulnerable participants.

Conceptual Framing of Sexuality Studies in Agricultural Education

Deficit frameworks are commonly employed in writing about LGBTQ youth in agricultural education, but these frameworks are inappropriate to understand the multidimensional realities and assets of LGBTQ youth. The use of these models points to issues related to not having a disciplinary basis for LGBTQ research. The authors of these texts overcame this challenge by situating their work in common transdisciplinary narratives to advance inclusion.

Challenges to Inclusion: Deficit Models. Embedded throughout the framing of these sexuality studies in agricultural education are assumptions about the populations being studied. LGBTQ and other marginalized youth are frequently viewed through deficit frameworks, which assume they are deficient compared to their straight or majority peers (Ladson-Billings, 2006). For example, Swires (2018) employed a deficit model to construct the argument that LGBTQ youth are ‘at risk’ throughout her research and accompanying curriculum. For example, the worksheet ‘Ag Kids are LGBTQ+,’ listed

“The Facts:” ten bullet points outlining the negative outcomes of being LGBTQ, including suicide, isolation, death, bullying, and homelessness. Deficit models are pervasive in these early studies of LGBTQ youth in agricultural education.

While there is a clear case for studies that identify the injustices LGBTQ people face in agricultural education, there is a compelling need for studies of LGBTQ students of agriculture that move beyond “stockpiles of examples of injustice” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 223) that only seek to “elicit stories of pain from communities that are not White, not wealthy, and not straight” (p. 226). Instead of focusing solely on what is lacking in these communities, another more affirmative approach that could be used is asset-based research. There is ample opportunity then to center more multidimensional accounts of LGBTQ life and critically envision a future of LGBTQ youth research in agricultural education that moves beyond deficit frameworks.

Advancing Inclusion: Aligning with Transdisciplinary Trends and Narratives. Deficit frameworks are pervasive in educational research and, while not ideal, their use allows agricultural education researchers to align themselves with a longstanding disciplinary narrative in the broader field. Deficit models emerged in the 1960’s in response to desegregation and dominated the educational research and pedagogical landscape for decades (Kirk & Goon, 1975; Paris, 2012). While these models have been critiqued and new models have been developed, deficit frameworks have had lasting impacts on the educational research landscape (Paris, 2012). Payne and Smith (2016) argued “mainstream educational conversations around queer identities and education are dominated by risk- and deficit-based interpretations of how [LGBTQ] students experience school. That is, LGBTQ youth are understood as easy targets, victims, and different in ways that demand their peers and teachers express tolerance and empathy” (p. 127). Most studies agricultural education researchers cited from outside the profession were informed by deficit models. To use a deficit framework, then, is to align the study with common transdisciplinary narratives in the broader fields of education and science communication, among others. Authors were able to draw upon theories, methods, and framings with a 60-year history. Without releasing the critique of the models specifically, the strategy lent legitimacy to the authors who had less relevant literature to draw from within agricultural education. By drawing upon a common transdisciplinary narrative, authors demonstrated their ties to a longstanding history in other fields. This strategy is mirrored in this philosophical paper – invoking the disciplinary narrative around inclusion to frame this paper rather than engaging with broader conversations around justice or transformation (e.g. Davis, 2020 Dunne, 2009; Harris, Barone, & Patton Davis, 2015). Drawing upon transdisciplinary narratives, managing issues of visibility, scavenging methodologies, queer rhetorical strategies, and citational practices together advance what it means to be inclusive – not just for LGBTQ youth – but for the profession writ large.

Conclusion

A culture of discrimination has existed throughout the history of agricultural education, as seen through gendered and racialized policies around membership and participation. To address these inequities, the agricultural education profession has spent more than 30 years grappling with how to provide agricultural education for all. Yet in all that time, only one single empirical study was published in the primary journals of the field that even bares passing acknowledgement to the LGBTQ community. In this philosophical paper, we leveraged queer theory to queer what counts as ‘the literature’ and make visible a nascent collection of texts on sexuality in agricultural education. When taken together as a body of literature, there are commonalities in how the authors engaged in complex maneuvering to put forward these studies. These strategies have made it possible for scholars to do work on sexuality in agricultural education and push the profession to be more inclusive. While there is an argument to be made that these strategies can be leveraged to advance studies of inclusion in agricultural education, it is no substitute for addressing root issues: LGBTQ authors and subjects are at

the margins of the field; transdisciplinary research on sexuality is not referenced in agricultural education; organizational barriers and individual risk constrain the direct study of LGBTQ youth; and agricultural education lacks a disciplinary basis for methods and frameworks for studying LGBTQ youth. By leveraging queer theory in this philosophical paper, we have explored some conditions that *create and uphold* this transdisciplinary silence (Rosenberg, 2016a) on sexuality and agricultural education. Just as researchers rose 30 years ago to address the climate of discrimination, there is a present need to design research, policies, and programs that are inclusive of the hundreds of thousands of LGBTQ youth in agricultural education.

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