

## Integrating Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgender Topics and Their Intersections With Other Areas of Difference Into the Leadership Preparation Curriculum: Practical Ideas and Strategies

By: Colleen A. Capper, Judy Alston, [C. P. Gause](#), James W. Koschorek, Gergardo Lopez, Catherine A. Lugg, and Kathryn Bell McKenzie

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### **Abstract:**

A theory and practice of social justice is fraudulent when it does not fully address lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) individuals and their intersections with other identities. Faculty who claim to be concerned with social justice cannot focus on one or perhaps two areas of difference while ignoring or giving short shrift to the others. After all, public school leaders oriented toward social justice cannot pick and choose among areas of difference with their students, staff, and community members. These leaders must lead for social justice across areas of difference; faculty should expect no less of themselves. Many LGBT students or students perceived to be LGBT face daily harassment at schools, and LGBT staff, families, and school leaders themselves generally find schools unwelcoming. This article offers practical teaching strategies and teaching resources that can raise consciousness, increase knowledge, and develop leadership skills to prepare leaders to confidently meet the needs of LGBT individuals in their schools.

### **Article:**

One primary assumption underlying this article is that faculty in leadership preparation who claim to be concerned about equity or social justice must address in their courses the spectrum of societal injustices related to race, ethnicity, religion, language, (dis)ability, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and their intersections. Faculty who claim to be concerned with social justice cannot focus on one or perhaps two areas of difference, such as race, ethnicity, or gender, and then ignore or give short shrift to the others. Mentioning sexual orientation in the list of *isms* or perhaps discussing one article in a course is not enough. It is possible that a faculty person may have expertise or personal experience in a particular area of difference, such as race or gender, but this faculty person must also take responsibility for directly addressing and including examples related to other areas of difference in his or her courses. After all, public school leaders oriented toward social justice cannot pick and choose among areas of difference with their students, staff, and community members. These leaders must purposefully and adeptly lead for social justice across areas of difference; faculty should expect no less of themselves and should model this expertise to students in their courses.

We argue that two of three areas of difference that faculty who are concerned with social justice routinely leave out of their courses are those of sexual orientation and gender identity (disabilities is the third area; see Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, in press). To illustrate, Capper and colleagues conducted, an extensive review of the literature on educational leadership for social justice, analyzing in particular the specific recommendations for administrator preparation. In this literature, suggestions for leadership preparation focused primarily race and ethnicity, with a few suggestions related to social class (Solomon, 2002; Young & Laible, 2000). Other suggestions for preparation were generic across areas of difference, that is, understanding oppression and stereotyping (Parker & Shapiro, 1992). Although some of this literature included the area of sexual orientation in the list of differences (Parker & Shapiro, 1992), none offered specific recommendations for leadership preparation related to sexual orientation and gender identity. An entirely separate search on sexual orientation and leadership located only five articles that directly addressed school leadership and sexual orientation

(Blount, 2003; Capper, 2000; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b), and none of these articles offered recommendations for administrator preparation.

To address this gap in the literature, this article offers ideas and strategies for integrating lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) topics into educational leadership courses. Modeling these ideas and strategies in courses can help build the capacity of future school leaders to provide similar professional development opportunities for their teaching staff

## **LGBT TOPICS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

As alluded, a theory and practice of social justice is fraudulent when it does not fully address LGBT individuals and their intersections with, other identities. The level of injustices perpetuated against LGBT individuals and individuals considered to be LGBT (though they are not) pervades the history of the human race. In the German concentration camps, males considered to be homosexual were required to wear a pink triangle. When the Allies came to open the gates to freedom, these individuals remained imprisoned. These injustices continue to this day when school leaders and educators who consider themselves to be concerned about equity and social justice do not intervene when students as young as those in the first grade with ambiguous gender identity are harassed and when these same social justice—minded educators allow phrases such as *queer* and *That's so gay* to ring out through school hallways. Alarming, 83% of students have reported that "faculty never or rarely intervene [in such harassment] when present" (Kosciw, 2004b, p. 3), whereas more than 18% of students have reported that teachers and staff themselves are making homophobic remarks to students at least some of the time (Kosciw, 2004a).

When considering integrating LGBT topics, into the curriculum, some faculty and students may question why LGBT topics should be addressed, particularly in states and regions that have clear laws and cultural biases against homosexuality. Consequently, instructors should clearly describe why addressing LGBT issues is important, in leadership preparation and in the work of school leaders. We draw our reasons in part from the *2003 National School Climate Survey: The School-Related Experiences of Our Nation's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth* (Kosciw, 2004a).

LGBT students and students who do not follow traditional gender identity roles are harassed at far greater rates than most other students, with 84% of LGBT students reporting being verbally harassed (Kosciw, 2004a) and 39% of LGBT students reporting being physically harassed (e.g., shoved, pushed, hit) because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw, 2004b). Transgendered students are most at risk among LGBT students, with 55% reporting being physically harassed "because of their gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation . . . meaning that transgender students are 30% more likely to suffer physical harassment than LGBT students" (Kosciw, 2004b, p. 3). Kosciw also reported that 45% of LGBT students of color are verbally harassed because of both their sexual orientation and race/ ethnicity and that a high percentage of these youth (35% compared to 29% of White students) reported missing school because they felt unsafe; in fact, more than 64% of all LGBT students reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation.

Not surprisingly, this harassment negatively affects student attendance, student achievement, and college aspirations. LGBT students who did not have (or did not know about) school policies that protected them from harassment were more than 40% likely to skip school simply because they were too afraid to go (Kosciw, 2004b). LGBT youth who experience severe verbal harassment are twice as likely to report they do not intend to go to college, and their grade point averages are lower than those of other students (2.9 versus 3.3). In addition, teacher support is linked to LGBT student career aspirations. For LGBT students who cannot identify any supportive teachers in their education career, 24% have no intention of going to college. By contrast, for those students who can identify a supportive teacher, only 10% have no intentions of going to college.

Every semester, a few students in our classes report that they do not know of any LGBT individuals in their school or community and that the conservative climate of their communities prevents them from addressing LGBT issues as a school leader. However, regardless of school location or size, LGBT topics must be

addressed, given that same-gender couples live in 99% of all counties in the United States (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.) and, of these households, one-third of lesbian couples and one-fifth of gay couples have children (Women's Media, n.d.). In addition, between 6 million and 10 million children of lesbian/gay/bisexual parents currently live in the United States. In short, no matter how rural a school or district, given the prevalence of LGBT individuals (most estimate that at least 10% of any population is LGBT), all schools have students and staff who are LGBT, have same-gender parents; know someone who is LGBT; or have immediate or extended family members, neighbors, or friends who are LGBT—all of whom are affected by harassment of LGBT students.

The unrelenting violence of LGBT harassment in U.S. schools suggests that leadership faculty do not take seriously the importance of demanding that school principals learn how to stop this harassment at all costs (for specific suggestions, see Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2000). At the same time, Lugg (2003b) argues that "nonoppression is not quite the same thing as social justice" (p. 117). In addition to demanding and teaching prospective school leaders to stop student harassment, professors must; also prepare school leaders to create schools that are welcoming and affirming for all students and families, regardless of the school leaders' personal beliefs about sexual-minority individuals or regardless of the community's values and beliefs about homosexuality. In this article, we offer strategies to do so. First, we explain the methods that we used to identify these strategies.

## METHOD

To develop this article, eight scholars with expertise in teaching LGBT topics in their leadership classes were contacted and asked to submit syllabi and related reading lists that included LGBT topics used in their courses. They were also asked to submit a list of activities or strategies used in integrating these topics into their courses. We then analyzed these syllabi and strategies using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), based on the six domains of a framework for preparing leaders for social justice (see Capper et al., in press; see Figure 1).

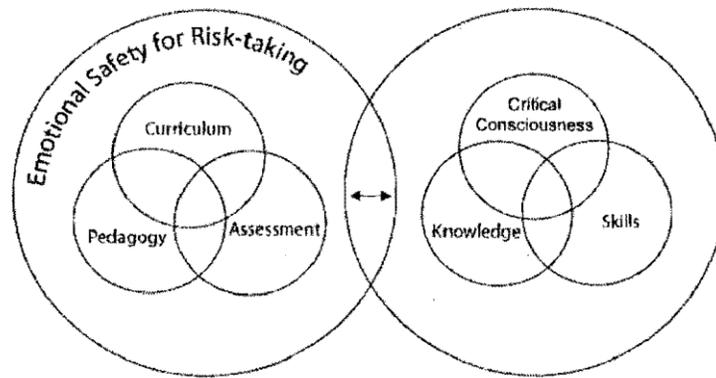


Figure 1. A framework for preparing educational leaders for social justice.

The first circle of the framework identifies three dimensions that delineate components of a preparation program: curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. These components must be enacted in a classroom climate of emotional safety for risk taking. The second circle depicts what school leaders must believe, know, and do to lead socially just schools. Thus, we analyzed each of the activities and strategies to determine (1) if its primary goal is to raise consciousness about homophobia and heterosexism, increase knowledge about LGBT topics, or develop specific leadership skills related to LGBT issues that leaders can actually carry out in schools or (2) if it addresses a combination of these three domains. Further, we determined if the activity, strategy, or reading was primarily curriculum related, demonstrated a particular pedagogical skill, or was an example of an assessment practice to measure student learning and growth. Considering the framework domains ensures that when teaching about LGBT topics (or any social justice—related topic), professors not only attend to the critical importance of consciousness raising about homophobia and heterosexism in schools and gaining knowledge about, for example, gender identity but also offer opportunities for students to learn specific skills related to providing safe and welcoming schools for all students.

## **CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES**

We now outline pedagogical strategies and specific curriculum associated with these strategies, loosely in the order that they might occur in a course. We also identify to what extent these strategies raise student consciousness, develop student knowledge, and build student capacity to carry out related leadership skills.

### ***COCREATING EMOTIONAL SAFETY FOR RISK TAKING***

The pedagogical strategies we outline later in this article presume that guidelines or group agreements for class discussion about controversial topics have been established during the first class meeting. One way to establish grounds for classroom emotional safety that can encourage student risk taking is for the instructor, on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of class, to pose the question, verbally and in writing, "What do you need from this class, from the instructor, or from each other to do your best work, to feel comfortable speaking your truth about a topic, to help you push to your growing edge around topics?" Students can take a few minutes to write their responses on index cards and then take turns going around the room saying their responses while the professor writes them on newsprint. It is important for the instructor to add to the list, if students have not mentioned it, that denigrating side comments about any individual or group are not allowed, including, for example, negative comments about "conservative Christians" or "the Christian right" or any other particular group, explaining that, in public schools, principals need to work well with the entire community and staff, which include individuals along the entire continuum of beliefs. This establishes a tone for the class from the beginning. Furthermore, if there are students who subscribe to a conservative point of view, then they know that their views will also be respected. The instructor should also ensure that confidentiality is listed among the agreements, to ensure that students can know that if they voice an unpopular opinion, they will not be denigrated outside of class. In addition, the instructor should ensure that the agreements include a stipulation that if anyone is made to feel uncomfortable during class, this discomfort will be immediately addressed by the professor or class members. The list of student-generated group agreements is distributed as a handout during the next class, where students review them, add any additional ones, and clarify any that are unclear. Students are reminded that the professor is not the "group-agreement police" and that all students are responsible for ensuring the agreements are followed. We stress that these group agreements help provide the conditions for students to engage in difficult conversations with others about power and differences, enhancing the quality of their leadership preparation.

### ***LGBT CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY***

After establishing the group agreements, many of us then present information regarding why it is important to address LGBT topics in the educational leadership curriculum. We use the statistics cited in the LGBT and Social Justice section of this article to make our case. We then move on to additional curriculum topics and pedagogical strategies.

Most leadership preparation students are unfamiliar with or dangerously naïve about state and local laws that address LGBT individuals, with language and terms associated with sexual orientation (e.g., *transgender*, *gender identity*, *bisexual* and *queer*, among others) and with ideas associated with LGBT topics, including recent research on why individuals are LGBT. Thus, a minilecture and article discussion (we suggest Lugg, 2003a) can be one way to share this information that increases a student's consciousness and knowledge. For example, appropriate terms to use when discussing LGBT topics include *LGBT individuals* or *sexual minorities*. Phrases and language that are inappropriate when discussing LGBT topics include *homosexuals*, because this term has historically referred primarily to gay men, and *sexual preference*, because most LGBT individuals do not consider their sexuality a "preference" or choice but rather their sexuality identity a result of biological makeup. In addition, most LGBT individuals find the phrase *gay/lesbian lifestyle* offensive because it assumes that the day-to-day lives of LGBT individuals are exotic and remarkably different from those of individuals without this identity.

Additional pedagogical strategies include videos, panel discussions, and case presentation and analysis. One powerful strategy is showing the video *It's Elementary* (see Resource List), which features racially diverse elementary and middle schools across the country and how they have integrated LGBT topics into their curriculum and have provided a supportive culture for LGBT staff in their schools. The video features the

principals of each of the schools discussing why they directly address LGBT topics in the curriculum and culture. This strategy raises student consciousness about the appropriateness of integrating LGBT topics into the elementary and middle school curricula and provides knowledge about ways it can be done, as well as possible barriers that leaders might experience in addressing these topics.

A second powerful pedagogical strategy includes inviting a panel of LGBT individuals or educators, including LGBT persons of color, to speak to the class, sharing their educational experiences and offering suggestions for school leaders. This strategy raises student consciousness about LGBT individuals and the heterosexism and homophobia they confront, and it provides students' with knowledge about leader actions that can make a difference (see Resource List for speaker sources). When the panel shares its stories, it is important that the speakers are seated among the students in the room and not in front of the room "on display." This seating arrangement encourages students to interact with the guests on an individual basis before and after the panel, furthering the opportunity to break down stereotypes and correct misinformation.

For a third pedagogical strategy, students can conduct an LGBT equity audit in their school (Capper et al., 2000; Skrla., Scheurich., Garcia, & Nay; 2004). Audit questions, taken from Capper and colleagues, include the following:

Does your district have any policies that address sexual orientation and gender identity?

Does your school or district antiharassment policy include sexual orientation and gender identity?

How and to what extent does your district's curriculum provide instruction related to sexual orientation and gender identity?

If a group of students approached your building principal and requested to begin a Gay-Straight Alliance (see [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)), how would your principal and district respond, given that opposing such a request is illegal?

Assess your school's library and media holdings related to sexual orientation and gender identity. To what extent do students in your school have access to information about sexual orientation and gender identity, and what is the nature of this information?

If you are at the elementary level, to what extent are same-gender families addressed in the family units that occur in the early elementary grades, and what books and other resources are available to do so?

To what extent do school enrollment forms and other school forms recognize same-gender parents (i.e., do the forms only include reference to "mother" and "father")?

How are same-gender families respected and appreciated at parent-teacher functions and in the life of the school?

How are staff with same-gender partners or romantic relationships included on staff social invitations—that is, is reference made to significant others?"

What school data are collected on harassment associated with sexual identity?

What do these sexual orientation data mean?

The students then write a one-page analysis incorporating related required readings; assessing their schools' strengths and areas for improvement in serving LGBT parents, students, and staff within their schools' curriculum, instruction, and culture; and detailing concrete strategies for remedying the weaknesses. The sexual orientation equity audit is a powerful strategy for raising consciousness about LGBT inequities in their Own

schools. Students also gain knowledge about their schools' policies and practices, and they learn skills for data gathering and analysis and how to make concrete recommendations for policy and practice from these data.

Fourth, students can discuss legal issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity using the question-and-answer format. from the publication *Dealing With Legal Matters Surrounding Students' Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* (National School Boards Association, 2004). Question topics include the following: students wanting to form a Gay—Straight Alliance; student dress codes and how these affect transgendered students; parents' Concerns about "prohomosexual" class content and demands that their children be removed from a class; same-gender couples attending the school prom; students with religious or moral objections to homosexuality who want to have a public forum to air their views; creating antiharassment policies on the basis of sexual orientation despite claims by some students that such policies 'violate their rights Of free speech; and others. We offer two activities for utilizing this publication.

First, before having students read *Dealing With Legal Matters* (National School Boards .Association, 2004), the professor writes each question posed in the publication on an index card, and small groups of students draw the cards at random and work to address the questions. The groups present their questions and responses to the entire class. Then the class reads the answers from the publication, or the professor presents them.

A second way to use the publication *Dealing With Legal Matters* (National School Boards Association, 2004) is to have students read the publication, draw questions from the publication at random, and then read those questions to other randomly selected students in the class. The other students must then respond to that question on the spot. Students and the instructor then provide additional ideas and feedback on the students' responses. These two activities raise student consciousness about issues related to LGBT individuals, increase their knowledge about the LGBT legalities, and provide student practice in responding to similar questions and issues in their schools.

For a fifth, pedagogical strategy, students can work individually and then in small groups for a think-pair-share activity, Students first think of a problem in their schools or districts that relates to institutional heterosexism and homophobia. Students determine if the issue is one of invisibility and imbalance, stereotyping, or fragmentation and isolation (see Capper, 1993). Students then think of what they can do to address the problem—that is, what they can stop, start, or continue doing. Students then share the problem and action with a partner. Finally, all students share with the large group the actions they would take. They list them under columns of *Stop*, *Start*, and *Continue* on a one-page handout with places for students to write their responses. This activity raises student consciousness about heterosexism in their schools, increases. their knowledge about what is contributing to this problem, and provides a list of student-generated actions that they could take in their schools.

A sixth pedagogical strategy uses case scenarios and debates to address homophobia and heterosexism, though we offer these strategies with caution. Given the paucity of published cases that address LGBT individuals - by our count, just 1 out of 90 has addressed LGBT topics since the inception of the *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* in the summer of 1998--we suggest. limiting case scenarios to ones similar to the legally defensible Cases described in the *Dealing With, Legal, Matters* (National School Boards Association, 2004). Otherwise, instructors risk using cases that merely perpetuate stereotypes and misinformation. For example, the case "Taboo Dating" (McCray, Pauken, Beachum, 2004) focuses on a same-gender. couple who wish to attend the prom. In short, although the case points out interesting situations (of which space limitations prevent a thorough critique), it. also reproduces misinformation and stereotyping. If instructors were to use this case without critiquing it—would they actually ask students to debate the merits and problems of an interracial or interreligions heterosexual couple's attending the school prom?—and if they were to do so without a thorough understanding of the legal assumptions involved (of which most leadership faculty do not have legal expertise), they would perpetuate homophobia and heterosexism educational leadership.

Relatedly, we consider it's inappropriate to propose a case scenario where a principal is approached to form a Gay—Straight Alliance and students are asked to weigh the merits and demerits of doing so. Legally, principals must allow such an organization to form (as addressed in *Dealing With Legal Matters*; National School Boards Association, 2004). For both of these cases, students might be asked to identify the possible kinds of resistance they would face in supporting these situations, how exactly they would address this resistance, and additional reasons for not interfering with same-gender couples or the forming of a Gay—Straight Alliance. We prefer using real cases in students schools as sources of classroom instruction; however, if instructors use store-bought case scenarios that do not perpetuate stereotypes and misinformation and if these cases are used appropriately, then they can raise student consciousness about heterosexism and homophobia, increase student knowledge about public school student rights, and provide skill development in dealing with staff and community resistance.

Many other teaching strategies can address building leadership skills to address LGBT issues. For example, students can learn how to increase the selections of media materials and books in their school libraries (see Resource List) or how to create antiharassment policies in their schools that include sexual orientation and gender identity.

To bring closure to the class, during the last 10 minutes students are asked to complete an anonymous index card: on one side writing what they appreciated about, the class session and on the other side writing any questions, concerns, or suggestions for change. These cards are then read at the next class, and any concerns or needed changes are addressed immediately. This postclass evaluation helps the instructor stay informed about any lingering concerns or questions that can be addressed in subsequent classes.

## **DEALING WITH STUDENT RESISTANCE**

We have experienced two causes for resistance when teaching about LGBT topics in our leadership preparation courses. Some individuals with particular religious beliefs argue that discussion of LGBT topics has no place in public education and if any information about LGBT individuals is presented, then that means the instructor (or principal of a school in a staff development context) is promoting homosexuality. A second source of student resistance involves students of color whose cultural values include the belief that homosexuality is wrong or a sin and, again, should not be discussed or addressed in public education.

We address both these concerns in the same way, by returning to the statistics presented for the reasons why LGBT topics need to be addressed. We point out, for example, that regardless of a leader's cultural or religious beliefs concerning sexual-minority individuals, all students who attend a public school should be able to do so safely, without being harassed, and it is the leader's responsibility to ensure that this happens. Protecting a child from harassment or decreasing harassment in schools cannot be construed as promoting homosexuality. Just as Christian students in the school should be protected from student and educator harassment, so should LGBT individuals. In addition, because students who are harassed or who feel unwelcome in school will have lower attendance rates and lower achievement scores, it is in the leader's best interest to provide as positive a culture as possible for all students in the school.

## **ASSESSMENT: A MISSING PIECE**

Assessment of student learning regarding LGBT topics beyond standard course evaluation (and the index card closure activity) remains limited. One exception, Pettus and Allain (1999; cited in Brown, 2004) includes two LGBT-related questions among 63 questions in their social justice assessment, and both questions pertain to consciousness or knowledge about LGBT topics, although neither address specific skills. Brown (2004, 2005) has reviewed the measurement literature related to developing a social justice orientation and, within a leadership course, has conducted pre- and posttests to measure gains in social justice orientation. However, this work focused primarily on student beliefs and dispositions, whereas measurement of student knowledge or specific skill acquisition has remained unexplored. The field of education could greatly benefit from the development of instruments that measure student dispositions, knowledge, and skills regarding LGBT topics and leadership, not only those measured before and after taking a course that includes such content, but, also

those regarding to what extent school leaders are engaging in proactive LGBT practices after program completion.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article provides a ready-to-use document to help professors easily integrate LGBT topics into their leadership courses. Space limitations prevent, sharing many additional excellent, teaching strategies. Professors should not let their lack of knowledge about LGBT topics or their fear of stifling up controversy or offending some students prevent them from seriously addressing these topics in their courses. LGBT students, staff, and families and individuals who are perceived to be LGBT, as well as all of their loved ones, are counting on us to do so.

## **NOTE**

The seven authors of this article bring an array of diverse perspectives to the LGBT topic: Three are men and four are women; three are of color; three are out lesbians and two are out gay men; and two consider themselves straight allies with LGBT individuals. In addition, they represent a range of leadership preparation programs, in states that provide varying degrees of support and barriers when teaching LGBT topics; Four reside in Midwestern states two work in universities located in liberal cities but conservative states whereas two work in conservative communities located in conservative states; one works at an East Coast university in a progressive state; one is from a Southern university; and one works at a university in the Southwest. The authors also have a range of tenure in integrating LGHT topics into the leadership curriculum, spanning 2 to 16 years.

## **APPENDIX: RESOURCE LIST**

### ***SPEAKER RESOURCES***

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays ([www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)). This national nonprofit organization—with over 200,000 members and supporters, as well as chapters in every state—promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, their families, and friends through support, education, and advocacy.

Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network ([www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)) with chapters in every state

College or university diversity groups

Faith communities who are welcoming and affirming of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals (see [www.christianlesbians.com](http://www.christianlesbians.com) for a complete list by state)

Community support groups for gay youth or teens

### ***WEBSITE***

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

### ***VIDEOS***

Information available at [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org).

*It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School*

*Brother Outsider: the Life of Bayard Rustin* (advisor to Martin Luther King and organized march on Washington)

*Before Stonewall* (good lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender history and schools discussed throughout)

*De Colores—Lesbian and Gay Latinos: Stories of Strength, Family, and Love*

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