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A Textual Analysis of Prospective Teachers' Social Justice Identity Development and LGBTQ Advocacy

Mi Ok Kang

***Abstract*—**This study examined the influences of including LGBTQ-related content in a multicultural teacher education course on the development of prospective teachers' social justice identities. Appling a content analysis to 53 reflection texts written by participating prospective teachers in response to the relevant course content, this study deduced the stages of social justice identity development (naïve, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization) that participants reached during the course. The analysis demonstrated that the participants reached various stages in the social identity development model and none of the participants remained at the naïve stage during/after class. The majority (53%) of the participants reached the internalization stage during the coursework and became conscious about the heterosexual privileges they have had and aware of possible impacts of such privilege on their future LGBTQ students. Also the participants had begun to develop pedagogic action plans and devised applicable teaching strategies for their future students based on the new understanding of heteronormativity. We expect this study will benefit teacher educators and educational administrators who want to address LGBTQ-related issues in their multicultural education programs and/or revisit the goals, directions, and implications of their approach.

***Keywords*—**LGBTQ, heteronormativity, social justice identity, teacher education, multicultural education, content analysis

I. Introduction

OVER the last a few decades, an increasing number of multicultural teacher education programs have incorporated social justice themes into their curriculum including gender politics and sexual orientation [1]. These curricular additions were developed with the expectation that the prospective teachers in their programs would develop a social justice identity to disrupt dominant heterosexual ideologies both in their future classrooms as well as in society [2], [3]. These programs anticipate that prospective teachers will become cultural workers [4], [5] dedicated to pedagogic interventions with their students. To serve in this role, they will seek to provide their students with clearer understanding of gender and sexual identity as well as the issues facing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. In so doing, they will ultimately transform themselves, their schools, and their communities [6] in order to build a just, inclusive society. Therefore, incorporating social justice themes into the teacher education curriculum is a transformative step; it aims to enhance teacher candidates' understanding of the influence of certain group memberships on their perception of themselves and others, prompting them to acknowledge inherent patterns of power in society and improving their reactions to the unequal power structure. Moreover, fomenting a social justice identity among prospective teachers has been a core concept in many teacher education programs [7], [8]. In these programs, prospective teachers are expected to negotiate social justice identities as they develop a deeper understanding of their own group membership through course readings and class discussions. As teacher educators begin to introduce social justice themes into multicultural education classrooms, it might be easy to assume that all prospective teachers exposed to these materials would build an identity as social justice advocates; however, [9] explained in detail that the social identity development process unfolds differently for each individual and that prospective teachers will reach varying stages of development (from naïve to internalization) during the course work. According to [9], the goals of teacher education programs should encourage prospective teachers to build a social justice ally with socio-culturally marginalized groups. Because the outcomes of the social justice development process are so varied, this complicated process warrants further examination.

Existing studies [2], [10], [11] on LGBTQ advocacy in education have acknowledged that many prospective teachers, despite various multicultural education opportunities, lacked understanding of sexual minorities, held onto distorted images of LGBTQ people, and/or acted as a discriminatory agent because of their misunderstanding of gender identity and sexual orientation. The extremely negative views toward sexual minorities commonly found in conservative religious communities can hinder the development of social justice identities in teacher candidates in those communities. Misguided ideas regarding gender and sexual identity are often absorbed from the surrounding culture. In the case of this study, the religious conservatism of the surrounding community has a strong influence on the teacher candidates. However, not much research has examined the ways prospective teachers have developed an identity as an active social agent during multicultural education coursework, especially in courses taught in a deeply conservative religious community. The process through which prospective teachers learn about LGBTQ-related issues and how they develop a social justice identity has been neglected. In this context, this study examined the influences of including LGBTQ-related content in a multicultural teacher education course on the development of prospective teachers' social justice identities. Appling a content analysis [12], [13] to 53 reflection texts written by participating prospective teachers in response to the

Mi Ok Kang, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, is with the Elementary Education at Utah Valley University in USA (Phone: 1-801-863-5359; e-mail: momoinme@gmail.com).

relevant course content, this study deduced the stages of social justice identity development that participants reached during the course. The more we can understand the process of social identity development that prospective teachers undergo, the better prepared we will be to increase prospective teachers' multicultural competence when they work with LGBTQ students. We expect this study will benefit teacher educators and educational administrators who want to address LGBTQ-related issues in their multicultural education programs and/or revisit the goals, directions, and implications of their approach.

II. Theoretical Frameworks

A. Development of Social Justice Identity among Prospective Teachers

Departing from racial identity development theories, the social justice identity development theory has extended its boundaries to include various social group identities including class, gender, sexuality, etc. [14]-[17]. Specifically focusing on classed, gendered, and raced communities of struggle, the social justice identity development theories have been broadly applied in analyzing how an individual self-identifies or perceives her/himself while reflecting on her/his place within the dynamic relationships of her/his society and acknowledging a social self within the system. More specifically, the social identity development theory, developed by [9] in the context of social justice education, describes developmental patterns and organizes the characteristics of social identities into five stages: Naïve (exhibits no consciousness about differences between social identity groups), acceptance (acts as a dominant group member with consciousness of his/her privilege, but denies the existence of oppression in society), resistance (with greater awareness, searches for instances or examples of oppression while feeling frustrated and guilty), redefinition (develops positive definitions of social group identity without attributing superiority/inferiority), and internalization (has an in-depth understanding of difference and oppression, applies this new consciousness to his/her daily life). According to the theory, a social agent/agency progressively moves from one stage to the next before ultimately arriving at consciousness-in-action, an internalization of transformative social identity.

Applying the social justice identity development model to the evolution of the participants' views and treatment of sexual minorities, we can predict that prospective teachers at the naïve stage would have a very limited understanding of the diversity of gender identity and sexual orientation and very little awareness of LGBTQ-related issues. Those at the stage of acceptance would acknowledge their privileged position within the discriminatory social order, even though they are reluctant to acknowledge that the existence of discrimination and oppression against LGBTQ people. Prospective teachers at the rejection stage would search for opportunities to deepen their understanding of heteronormativity and to become more conscious about oppressive social structures. During this process, they would experience guilt, fear, or anger as they learned more about the issues. While many at the redefining stage would reexamine their identity in the discriminative and unjust social structure, we anticipated that prospective teachers at the internalization stage would seek to become allies to sexually marginalized groups as they integrated their new activist identity into their everyday life.

Individual prospective teachers acting as allies for social justice are expected to work with sexually marginalized groups and build partnerships to end the system of discrimination and oppression. We also anticipated that they would recognize the privilege granted to the members of sexually dominant groups and acknowledge that they are likely beneficiaries of the system. In so doing, they are expected to take responsibility for working with privileged groups to try to dismantle the oppressive system [18].

It is worth mentioning that we as researchers used the social justice identity development model as a tool to evaluate the prospective teachers' self-reflection as they expressed it in their papers for the course. Because the social identity development process is neither linear nor chronological [19], more sophisticated approaches are needed to examine the complexity of the changes, and teacher candidates' critical reflections are crucial in analyzing this complicated process. Reflection assignments on sexual orientation and queer theories asked prospective teachers not only to carefully examine policies that discriminate against the sexually marginalized but also to interpolate a new form of political organization to limit the power of these hegemonic social forces [20], [21].

B. Ally for Social Justice Challenging Heteronormativity in Education

The emergence of critical consciousness has destabilized heteronormative sexual politics by dismantling gender categories [22]-[26]. Activist teachers have developed a number of discursive practices to destabilize sex and gender categories and dispel their juridical and repressive power in education [24]-[30]. For instance, the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) has been one of the most influential participatory agents in U.S. education since the late 1990s and early 2000s [24]-[32]. By practicing critical pedagogy, many educators have provided tremendous support for the Gay-Straight Alliances, supporting positive growth in students regardless of their sexual orientation, and providing many teachers who were once antagonistic toward people with LGBTQ identities with an in-depth understanding of diverse sexual identities and the unequal social structures which marginalize sexually different others [26].

Many teacher-led initiatives in the U.S. have also opened dialogic spaces to combat homophobia. This form of teacher activism is best exemplified by the Pink TIGers (Teacher Inquiry Group). The Pink TIGers developed various curricular materials for use in public schools, revealed the complexity of challenging homophobia and heterosexism in classrooms, became active participants in gay-straight alliances, and examined the responses of the dominant heterosexual communities to LGBTQ people [33]. The Pink TIGers are credited with equipping teacher activists with a more profound

understanding of the social and political discrimination facing sexual minorities and enabling them to challenge the unequal social structure which leads people to believe that sexual minorities threaten heterosexual social order and that masculinity is superior to femininity [34], [35]. Despite these exemplary efforts, many teachers are reluctant to address homosexuality in the classroom, and many states enact education policies that silence the voices of LGBTQ people in public schools. The unique practices of the Pink TIGers (Teacher Inquiry Groupers) came out of a strong connection between K-12 schools and teacher education programs in the state. In this regard, one of the important roles of multicultural teacher educators is to help teachers build a positive social identity as a supporter of LGBTQ students. Teacher educators need to guide prospective teachers to an awareness of the importance of allying themselves with sexually diverse students in their classroom and resisting prevailing discrimination and oppression against sexual minorities in schools [36], [37].

In this study, we explored prospective teachers' perceptions of their current status in society by analyzing their critical reflections on LGBTQ themed course readings and class discussions. We anticipated that the prospective teachers would reach various stages of the social identity development model [9] —naïve, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization—as they completed the coursework. Using these five stages as coding schemes for a deductive qualitative analysis, this study took up these two research questions:

(1) What stages did participating teacher candidates reach in the social identity development process during/after the course work?
(2) Did prospective teachers plan to address gender and sexual identity issues in their future classrooms? And, if so, what were they planning to do?

III. Data Sources and Analytical Methods

A. Contexts of the Study

The participating teacher education program is located at a public university in the Intermountain Region in the US. The state is known to be strongly religious and conservative, and more than 90% of the students in the school are white women who self-identify as members of a Christian community. The participants were recruited from three multicultural understanding classes during the 2013-2014 school year. Among the 87 pre-service teachers on the class rosters, 55 prospective teachers (86%) submitted the consent form. Two students withdrew their consent in the middle of semester, so the final number of participants was 53.

B. Data Sources

As part of the required coursework, participants in this study were asked to write reflections during the class periods regarding their understanding of LGBTQ people. Based on Rolfe's reflective model [38], the assignment asked prospective teachers to write two-page essays divided into three parts: what, so what, and what's next. Participants were asked to describe the foundation and construction of their personal beliefs regarding LGBTQ people before/after course work (what); thoughts, feelings, and insights they had in response to the required reading materials (so what); and their plans for pedagogic actions with their future students (what's next). Structuring the assignment around Rolfe's model allowed the researchers to track the challenges participants experienced and the changes in participants' views as they completed the coursework.

C. The Structure of the Course

The reading resources were organized around three key themes. Reading 1, *On Being Gay*, by McNaught [39] focused on the struggles homosexual youths face because of their sexual identities and the weight of societal prejudices. Reading 2, *What Do We Say When We Hear Faggot?,* by Gordon [40] outlined scenarios in which teens were contemplating suicide and offered suggestions for teacher interventions to help those students. Reading 3, *Who Gets Called Queer in School?* by O'Connor [41] consisted of analyses of the prevalent heterosexual ideologies in the school and suggestions for dismantling them. It was selected to help participants to understand the issue from the perspective(s) of LGBTQ people. If prospective teachers are able to use this reading to develop a deeper understanding of diverse gender and sexual identities, then they may be more willing and better able to stop the (re)production of distorted images of LGBTQ people in schools.

Participants spent about two weeks (six hours in total) on the theme of gender and sexual orientation in the Multicultural Education course and all participants submitted reflections [42], [43]. More than a technical writing assignment, the reflection paper required students to demonstrate their insights about what has happened in schools and in society and what those critical events meant; and how, as educators, they could intervene in similar circumstances.

D. Analytical Methods

For this study, we applied a content analysis method [12]-[13]. First, we examined the texts by systemically calculating the frequencies of the most-used thematic phrases and sentences. Then, we categorized those themes so that we could analyze the way they were represented in each instance. Specifically, we used deductive content analysis [44]-[46] to determine if the Social Identity Development Model could be applied to a teacher education program as well as to examine the possibilities and limitations of educating prospective teachers to develop a social justice identity as cultural workers willing to work with LGBTQ students.

For initial coding, the researchers used QCAmap software to independently read through the texts and highlighted the phrases and sentences that fit into our predetermined five stages. Then, we created tables organizing the relevant excerpts by category. We compared tables, triangulated perspectives, and arrived at a final categorization for each excerpt/participant.

E. Positioning as Researchers in this Study

The researchers had taught the multicultural education course and they were aware that inclusion of sexual orientation theme in the curriculum mutually benefits prospective teachers as well as the heterosexual researcher-instructors. Because we were both raised in fundamentalist Christian communities, we understood how the religious contexts would hinder teacher educators from influencing prospective teachers' perceptions on LGBTQ people. Even though one of us taught Multicultural Education courses in the participating institution, we did not collect data in the classes she taught for two reasons: (a) We wanted to avoid creating a coercive situation for our current students, and (b) we sought to detach our data from our perspectives and biases. We knew that some students would attempt to tailor their reflection papers to the expectations and biases of their instructors, and we were aware of the possibility that we would recognize our students' writing in the data pool [47], so we decided to distance ourselves from the participants.

We as researchers found that the participating instructors sought mutual understanding of the theme, built rapport with his/her students, and opened a safe space for everyone to be at ease while participating in controversial discussions. In studying the effect of LGBTQ themed material taught in this way, we also extended our understanding of possibilities and limitations of teaching sexual orientation to prospective teachers in a conservative religious community.

IV. Findings

A. Frame of Judgment Regarding LGBTQ People before Class

After the initial coding of the "What" section, we found three saturated themes that led participating prospective teachers to different levels of understanding of LGBTQ people: Types of discriminative practices, relationships with members of the target group, and their frame of judgment regarding LGBTQ people. As shown in Table I, many participants viewed gender and sexual discrimination as a serious issue because they were personally acquainted with at least one LGBTQ person; for some, that person was a friend and for others a relative or former spouse. The majority of participants had observed bullying, stereotyping, and labeling at least once, and three participants revealed that their friends or relatives had committed suicide because of their different sexual identity. As the majority of the participants were raised in a Christian community, many participants (n=15) attributed their frame of judgment to their religion. For instance, a female participant explained, "Arguably the biggest oppressors of, that is, those against providing certain rights to, individuals who are not considered to be heterosexual are religious groups."

Four participants described conflicted feelings regarding their faith and their views on LGBTQ orientation: They accepted their family members' or friends' sexual "choice," but rejected the concept of sexual "orientation" because they did not believe that God would create homosexual desire in people. Some participants with these views seemed to acknowledge same-sex attraction as something other than a choice, but stressed that one should not choose to act on that attraction. They agreed with the idea that "being homosexual is a choice, and furthermore, a sin against God." The views held by participants prior to the course were generally slightly negative owing to the prospective teachers' personal beliefs and/or the prevalent heterosexism in the surrounding culture.

TABLE I
Participants' Contact with LGBTQ People and Their Frame of Judgment

Observation	Relationship	Frame of judgment
Bullying	friends	religion
suicide	son	(Christianity)
stereotyping	ex-husband	personal belief
	sister	societal input
	father-in-law	heterosexism
	people in the media	cultural reinforcement

TABLE II
Stages of Social Identity Development

Stage	Frequency	Qualities	Exemplar
Naïve	0% (0/53)	Very limited understanding of LGBTQ People No understanding of same-sex attraction and love.	n/a
Acceptance	30% (16/53)	Identify themselves with the dominant groups' views as they recognize heterosexual privileges	"I have a very dominant stereotype in my mind when it comes to people who have a different sexual orientation than I have."
Resistance	11% (6/53)	Experience anger, shame, rage, and rejection because of contradiction between their heterosexual belief and the course readings	"I don't believe as a human being that homosexual behavior should be included in my way of life, and I don't want to teach my students that this behavior is acceptable. I held myself to a higher standard. … This course makes me feel very guilty and nervous to be a heterosexual."
Redefinition	9% (5/53)	Re-examine their own identity in their social, cultural, and religious contexts and begin to understand heterosexism as types of oppression	"Considering what my life would have been like had I been born with homosexual tendencies or even attributes that would lead others to label me as gay and the complete and utter isolation and fear I would have felt, I cannot stand by silently and allow other children, teenagers or adults to be treated with such complete disregard."

B. Stages of Social Identity Development as LGBTQ Allies

Because this study aimed to observe any developments in the participants' social identities that would prepare them to work with LGBTQ students, we specifically traced the ways participants explained what the course readings meant to them (so what). Based on their descriptions of the changes in their understanding during class, we found that participating teacher candidates reached very different stages in their development as allies for LGBTQ people (see Table II). Many participants (42%; 22/53) expressed their acceptance or rejection of the target group, while several participants (11%; 6/53) went through the painful process of redefining their identity in the

matrix of sexual privilege. More than half of the participants (53%; 28/53) explicitly expressed a proactive attitude toward eliminating discrimination against LGBTQ people.

Naïve. Before encountering the course readings, some students held views consistent with the naïve stage of identity development; however, it is worth noting that after they engaged with issues of gender and sexual identity in class, all participants in the study advanced beyond this stage in the identity model. The following excerpts are examples of some of the naïve-stage views participants held before the class:

- I have been scared of homosexuals in the past.
- I have been more accepting to those who are gay but if there was a lesbian or bisexual I just thought they were disgusting and didn't want to associate with them at all.
- I shamefully must admit that … I used to think that gay and lesbian individuals were just trying to get attention, faking their sexual opinions, and just trying to be different from everyone around them. I now feel very differently. What changed? I became informed. I was so naïve to the actual issues that encompassed homosexuality.

After they read the course materials and participated in intense discussions in class, their understanding of the issues and LGBTQ people was drastically improved.

Acceptance. The first step for participating prospective teachers was to confront their own previously unacknowledged biases and prejudicial beliefs:

> I have also had a very dominate stereotype in my mind when it comes to people who have a different sexual orientation than I. I realized that I have been more accepting to those who are gay but if there was a lesbian, or bisexual I just thought they were disgusting and didn't want to associate with them at all.

The prospective teachers participating in the study realized that they lacked knowledge about LGBTQ people, that they had seldom discussed sexual orientation and LGBTQ people, and that they had been exposed to a hostile environment toward sexually different others. For instance, one prospective teacher narrated, "I grew up surrounded by hate-filled comments regarding homosexuality, and grew into an adult who spewed similarly ignorant and discriminatory comments."

The "hate-filled" environment was not unique to this participant's experience; many prospective teachers wrote that they had been exposed to prejudicial environments where heterosexual norms prevailed and homosexual people were frequently discriminated against in schools and the outside community. Participants who reached this stage did not experience any drastic changes in attitude, even though many began to be aware of the biases and prejudices they had (un)consciously developed and to think about the oppressive social structure that inculcated their heterosexist and heteronormative views.

Resistance. Even though there were many meaningful, positive changes in prospective teachers' minds, there were a few prospective teachers who strengthened their views against LGBTQ people after the class sessions. A few prospective teachers, especially those who espoused conservative Christian values, voiced anti-LGBTQ views after reading the assigned materials:

> Why would we want to recognize or encourage behavior that is abhorrent before God? It is important to be clear moral leaders for our students, to set unambiguous standards that are consistent with good Christian values.

For them, sexual minorities must reconsider their sexual orientation and practice to please God and/or to follow the natural order. They were reluctant to discuss LGBTQ related issues in their classrooms and resisted the possibility that they would encounter either LGBTQ students or parents once they began teaching. It was noticeable that participants at this stage felt guilty and anxious when they realized that heterosexual groups discriminate against and oppress others and that, as members of those groups, they are part of the unjust system. Instead of immediate acceptance, this group explicitly expressed their emotions, concerns, and hostility toward LGBTQ people. Shared by six participants, these views seemed to stem from their common religious and cultural community and for this reason warrant further discussion.

Redefinition. Because the majority of prospective teachers had very limited personal experiences with LGBTQ people, facing their prejudices and negative attitudes against LGBTQ people was similar to navigating a heretofore invisible reality. Many participants realized that the society reinforces hegemonic heterosexual norms by silencing the voices of sexual minorities, discouraging critical consciousness about the heterosexist, heteronormative social structure, and adhering to Christian beliefs that teach people to believe heterosexuality is the only "right" way to live. However, society's approach to these issues is changing, and one of the participants recognized that destabilizing efforts exist and are beginning to bring change:

> Homosexuality wasn't something openly talked about, and was an issue "swept under the rug." One thing is certain. Society isn't sweeping much under the rug anymore. More and more issues are in the faces of all people including children.

The author of this excerpt agreed that until recently homosexuality was not openly discussed in the U.S., so the identities of sexual minorities, whose existence had been symbolically ignored, have recently become more visible. In this regard, a participant commented:

> I feel that even though my religion doesn't fully support homosexuality, it also doesn't teach condemnation, ridicule, or unjust treatment of people. Just because someone isn't heterosexual it doesn't mean they are a bad person or that they shouldn't be treated like any other human being.

The participant redefined her frame of judgment towards LGBTQ people after she carefully examined the oppressive structure of heterosexual normative society. Despite her Christian beliefs, she became more inclusive and respectful of LGBTQ people. After prospective teachers read the required articles and participated in-depth class discussions, some reached the redefinition stage and began to reexamine their

new identity as a teacher as they built more positive attitudes and feelings toward LGBTQ people. They demonstrated this progression by contrasting their current identity with their past ones:

> I cannot imagine the type of teacher that I would have been, had I chosen this profession earlier in my adult life. I cringe to recognize that I would likely have been a teacher who did not stand up for gay students being openly discriminated against in my school and classroom, and might have even been part of the problem.

Prospective teachers at this stage are still developing their new identity by questioning the privileges and oppressions they have experienced and seeking to understand the possible influences of the unequal structures on their future students.

Internalization. One of the meaningful changes in prospective teachers' attitudes toward LGBTQ people was that they began to separate their beliefs as individuals from their obligations as teachers. Based on their understanding of the politics of heterosexual hegemony in society and the politics of silencing the voices of LGBTQ people, prospective teachers began to critically examine their own views. From their writing, it was clear that many prospective teachers understood their role in the classroom and decided to open a space to discuss the problem of oppressive activities in school such as bullying against sexual minorities. This is a very meaningful change in their mindset because the prospective teachers may face adversity if they attempt to act on their new beliefs. Many prospective teachers were able to see this problem as a part of their culture instead of an individual issue and began to understand that as educators they could break from the oppressive culture to support their students.

Finally, the most advanced social justice identity emerged in one of the participants whose ex-husband was gay. In response to the readings, Katy insightfully narrates her transformation into a cultural worker:

> In my book of life, there are not only two versions of people one may love, but multiple versions and by following and listening to my heart my world has expanded. … It is never wrong to love and find the hidden treasure that resides in all people, if we open our hearts to acceptance instead of rejection. … My family has become very sensitive to protect the people who are ostracized, made fun of, and find it difficult to fit in. My home became a haven for some of the outcasts and misfits that society labeled on these children because they were different from the accepted norm.

Katy's sensitivity toward LGBTQ individuals, and many other marginalized people, enabled her to fight discrimination in her community. Even though her insights should be mostly attributed to her personal experiences with her ex-husband, it is clear that her participation in the coursework reinforced her beliefs. By offering her home as a safe place for marginalized students to gather and to share their talents and concerns, Katy created a symbolic community filled with love and care, respect and acceptance.

C. Plans for Pedagogic Practices for Future Students

For an understanding of the pedagogic plans participants developed in response to the course readings, we turned to the "now what" section of the reflection papers, specifically the papers written by participants who reached the internalization stage. In this group of papers, we found detailed plans for responding to LGBTQ issues in the classroom and society in general:

- My class will be safe for EVERYONE. I will actively seek continuing opportunities to identify and attack my own biases to ensure that I do not get caught in the trap of allowing myself to be a passive observer while injustices take place.
- I will be addressing exactly how we can make a life changing impact on those students of different sexual orientations than the norm, and why this is so important.
- My ultimate goal is to inform my students of the issues surrounding homosexuality as to not let my students be as judgmental as I once was.
- We need to care about our students as people, not as blacks, whites, gay, lesbians, boys, girls, rich, or poor, they are all just people. I definitely think it is important for teachers to stand up for what is right, and it is right for all students to be treated equally. No person deserves to be bullied or discriminated against no matter what. It is of deep importance that teachers address this issue and put an end to any discriminating against others due to sexual orientation.

In their reflections, many prospective teachers developed pedagogic plans to help their future students to better understand difference and diversity, including methods for teaching students not to unfairly label, name-call, or harass sexually marginalized others. It was clear that the majority of the participating prospective teachers in this study were willing to join critical dialogues about conflicts facing individuals with different sexual identities in society.

They realized that their new identity as a future educator meant they must stand up for oppressed others and expressed their commitment to breaking the culture of silence and overturning the culture of oppression. One prospective teacher wrote:

> As an educator, you must stand up for the rights of your students, even if it means setting your personal beliefs aside. The issue of sexual orientation should be discussed, not ignored. It is vital to educate your students about the issues surrounding sexual orientation, to stop bullying and discrimination in your classroom. Students must know not only that it is not okay, but why it is not okay.

Like this participant, many prospective teachers decided to build positive and safe relationships with LGBTQ students and plan for ways to teach their future students not to perpetuate prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination towards LGBTQ people.

V. Discussions and Concluding Thoughts

A. Various Stages of Developing a Social Identity as an Ally

For the first research question, what stages did participating teacher candidates reach in their social identity development process during/after the course work?, this study found that participating prospective teachers reached various stages in the social identity development model and none of the participants remained at the naïve stage during/after class. Because the participants came to the class with different levels of understanding of the issue and had very different types of contact with LGBTQ people, their reactions to the topic varied. There were some participants who would not accept that society unfairly discriminates against LGBTQ people because they were unable or unwilling to overcome the heterosexist discourse they had internalized through their religious practices. However, the majority of the participants reached the internalization stage during the coursework and became conscious about the heterosexual privileges they have had and aware of possible impacts of such privilege on their future LGBTQ students. As Page and Liston [48] also found (see also [49], [50]), exposure to new knowledge about gender and sexual identity and the lives of LGBTQ people helped the participants to exhibit more accepting attitudes. The participants came to recognize the fact that they are living in a heteronormative society [51] and learned to see that failure to disrupt the narrative of heteronormativity results in the perpetuation of this oppressive paradigm [52]. Many prospective teachers wrote that the assigned readings and class discussions opened their eyes about a group of people that they once thought unacceptable. It is worth mentioning that many participants changed their minds during the coursework and began to develop a new social identity that would help them better defend their future students regardless of their gender or sexual identity.

B. Plans for Pedagogic Practices

Furthermore, for the second research question, we found that the participating prospective teachers had begun to develop pedagogic action plans. A new understanding of heteronormativity equipped them to disrupt the unjust and cruel hegemonic norms that marginalize LGBTQ people and to devise applicable teaching strategies for their future students [53]. Even though only about six hours of the Multicultural Education course were dedicated to gender and sexual identity, the course had a positive influence on the way the majority of the participants approached sexual discrimination.

Many prospective teachers sought out additional resources beyond the course readings and obtained new knowledge that improved the way they addressed LGBTQ-related issues. As they became aware of the complexity of gender identity and sexual orientation and questioned the narrow logic of heterosexism and heteronormativity, many of them determined that they needed to dismantle the oppressive social structure by actively standing up for LGBTIG students in their classrooms. As they learned how to teach for social justice, most prospective teachers decided to implement a social justice curriculum and pedagogy in their future classroom [54]. Like the participants of Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, and McQuillan [55]'s study, the prospective teachers in this study also planned to develop new pedagogy for social justice in their future educational settings.

C. Implications for Teacher Education

This study found that incorporating LGBTQ issues into the multicultural education curriculum had a positive influence on teachers' attitudes. Many participants were willing to take responsibility as educators to care about their students and to stand up against discrimination and marginalization. Based on the opinions expressed in their reflections, it is apparent that many of the candidates did not see LGBTQ orientation as an affliction worthy of pity. In fact, many of them clarified that heterosexism and heteronormativity were societal problems that must be addressed through changes in the system. Although the course readings appear to have influenced many prospective teachers' attitudes, a few hours of class time did not guarantee automatic changes in prospective teachers' perspectives and interpretations, and often the same experiences lead participants in different directions and toward varying resolutions. Whether the coursework will influence participants' pedagogical practice will vary as well. However, the coursework regarding LGBTQ-related issues prompted participating prospective teachers to expand their knowledge and experiences to socio-structural issues and experiences beyond the sheltered views they previously held. Teacher educators who address LGBTQ issues in their classes face a number of challenges due to the limited time allowed for this specific topic in a course packed with important content, the hardships that come from opposing the neighboring community's position on controversial issues, and the risk of receiving unexpectedly low teaching evaluations from students with dissenting views. Despite these challenges, LGBTQ-related issues are worth discussing in teacher education because the majority of prospective teachers are willing to cross the ambiguous sexual boundaries between man and woman, normal and abnormal in order to help future students who struggle because of their different sexual identities as well as those who would otherwise (un)consciously discriminate against sexually different others. If education is to be a space for equity and social justice, many teacher education programs need to consider various ways to include sexual minorities.

D. Limitation of the Study

One limitation of the study is sample size. Because only 53 students agreed to join the study, the results may not be generalizable to other contexts. Moreover, the demographics of the participants were mostly homogenous; thus, the findings do not represent the reactions of prospective teachers from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds or other types of diversity in relation to sexual diversity. In addition, the data paves the way for a more detailed study through triangulation: interviews with the instructors and students, notes from class

observations, and follow-up studies examining the actual application of their pedagogic plans upon hire. In so doing, prospective teachers' voices can be heard in more specific ways, whether their views are supportive or critical, and researchers can redirect and reconsider the foundation, direction, and meanings of educating prospective teachers about the complexity and multiplicity of LGBTQ-related issues.

Lastly, our study was limited by the textual analysis approach we applied. As researchers, we examined the reflective texts that participating prospective teachers produced during the coursework and applied a qualitative content analysis with deductive category assignments to analyze the content. We used QCAmap software for coding and analysis to objectify the data, but, as Josselson [56] explained, we were aware that our findings and discussions may have been at least in part a product of our interpretation rather than an objective representation of the participants' points of view [56].

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Dr. Mi Ok Kang is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education at Utah Valley University in the US. She teaches *Multicultural Education* and *ESL Teaching Methods*, and her current research agenda are critical analyses of classism and poverty in education and cultural politics of (hetero)sexism.