

Queering in the Education DEEP SOUTH



Edited by
KAMDEN K. STRUNK

A VOLUME IN: RESEARCH IN QUEER STUDIES

Queering Education in the Deep South

A Volume in:
Research in Queer Studies

Series Editors

Paul Chamness Miller
Hidehiro Endo

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Akita International University

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INTRODUCTION

Queering Education in the Deep South

Kamden K. Strunk

Educational institutions have long served as centers of cultural development, cultural reproduction, and cultural conflict. They have the potential of being spaces of liberation through contact with new knowledge, unfamiliar ways of knowing, diverse ideas and cultures, and experiences of difference. For some students, educational institutions are spaces of refuge, freedom, and safety. However, those same spaces are sites of oppression and domination. Schools are one of the primary sites for creating and reproducing binary notions of gender and sexuality. Educators and their students are often invested in careful surveillance and policing of boundaries around gendered performances and sexual identities. Schools implement a hidden curriculum steeped in white supremacist heteropatriarchy that marginalizes and others people from marginalized groups, including LGBTQ people.

Education has been, and continues to be, a site of constant, contentious, and sometimes violent cultural conflict. Some of those moments are high-profile. In the South, schools were the front lines for the battle for racial integration, and conversely the ongoing battle to maintain white supremacy and segregation. In some Southern states, schools were even closed down for a period of time in

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defiance of mandates for school desegregation. In other locations, states invested heavily in private schools and church schools as an alternative to public education, intended to preserve segregated education in the South. The racist violence inflicted on, within, and by schools has been well documented, and historically has been especially virulent in the U.S. South. The battle for quality, integrated education for all students continues throughout the U.S., with many schools, including those in the South, still being essentially segregated. Those systems of dual schooling, in large part, persist to the present day.

More recently, schools have become a high-profile battleground in the fight for (or against) full LGBTQ inclusion and equal treatment under the law. This has been particularly salient in the past several years in the battle over trans students' rights in schools. States, especially in the South, have legislated against trans students using the bathroom, participating in team sports, and generally having access to educational facilities and services. All of that has been couched in language about safety and wellbeing of students (especially girls), with the specter of a pedophilic man posing as a woman to gain access to young girls being raised by conservative legislators to paint trans inclusion as a frightening prospect. Of course, that language is not new, and was used with regularity as states fought against racial integration. People questioned if integrated schools would be safe for White students, and if integrated schools would be of adequate quality. The same specter of the sexual safety of White girls was raised then, as legislators suggested Black boys might prey upon vulnerable White girls.

Then, as now, those ideas were aimed at preserving a system of oppression and domination by stoking irrational and unfounded fears about safety, quality, and access. Then, as now, states worked to preserve white supremacist heteropatriarchy, in which White straight cisgender men dominated economic and cultural systems at the expense of all others. What is happening now in Southern education is an old pattern—a cycle stuck on repeat. Those in positions of power and privilege exploit systems, including educational systems, to preserve their privileged positions and ensure the continued oppression of others.

It is precisely this contradictory, liberatory-and-oppressive, dominating-and-empowering system the authors of this text take up. They question how that system can be shaped for the benefit of diverse subjects, including queer students. They investigate how queer subjects interact with these Southern educational institutions. They imagine possibilities for infusing queer issues in classrooms and beyond.

The first section of this book focuses on efforts to teach queer studies and LGBTQ issues. Stephanie Anne Shelton examines how pre-service teachers make sense of religious and cultural factors in their attempts to address queer issues during field placements. Carey Andrzejewski, Hannah Baggett, and Rashida Askia explore the tensions pre-service teachers experience between personal ideological positions and their professional responsibilities to LGBTQ students. Finally, Heather Palmer describes efforts to teach queer theory in a Southern university.

The second section includes scholarship on educational policy and practice related to queer issues. Brittny Beck, Jennifer Jones, Wolfgang Sigmund, and Peter Westmoreland narrate the work of LGBTQ inclusion and equity at a public Southern university from 1950 to the present. Sarah Young, Nghi Phan, Evan Lowe, and Ian Fields Steward investigate the formation and operation of Safe Schools Coalitions, which focus on LGBTQ students in K–12 education. Georgianna Martin and Christopher Broadhurst document the experiences of student affairs administrators in Southern higher education institutions advocating for LGBTQ students and issues. Andrea Beall and Kamden Strunk document educational experiences of LGBTQ people through retrospective interviews. Finally, Dexter Backen, L. J. Winters, and Emalee Quickell explore the perceptions of LGBTQ students about higher education campus climate.

The final section of this book deals with libraries, literature, and archives, and attempts to create or include LGBTQ topics. Joshua Burford writes about the creation of a queer archive in North Carolina. Frank Perez writes about a similar effort to create a queer archive in Louisiana. Susan Jans-Thomas explores the challenges raised against queer literature in libraries. Finally, Khirsten Doolan and Allison Rittmayer investigate the teaching of and challenges to queer literature in Southern schools.

This text is part of a set on queer issues in the Deep South. Other volumes in this set explore *Queering Public Health and Public Policy in the Deep South*, and *Queering Spirituality and Community in the Deep South*, in addition to this volume on education. The authors in this volume all investigate, narrate, and explore various aspects of queer knowledges, queer people, and queer-affirming policies throughout Southern education. They offer crushing documentation of the oppression of queer people and queer knowledges. They document continuing challenges in the South that impede progress for LGBTQ justice and equity. But, they also offer glimmers of hope, of promise, and of possibility. Collectively, their work serves to queer education in the Deep South.

