Queerness in Rural Schools: A Literature Review Exploring the Intersection of Rurality and Queerness in K–12 Schools

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Given recent anti-Queer legislation across the United States and the 16-year gap since Gray's Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, this literature review describes the intersections of Queerness and rurality in K–12 educational spaces. Hallinger's process for review provides a framework to analyze the selected articles. Based on the search criteria, nine peer-reviewed, empirical journal articles published between 2012 and 2022 were selected. These articles were analyzed for rural Queer salience and how they discuss the intersection of Queerness and rural education. From the analysis, three themes emerged related to victimization and safety, teacher and administrator attitudes, and school-provided Queer resources. This review concludes with a discussion and implications for change section that educators and researchers may use to further investigate the intersections of rural education and Queer identities.*

In her 2021 discussion of a rural critical policy analysis, Brenner called for a critical, place-centric approach to policy analysis, specifically examining how rurality is defined in policy, if the policy includes any assumptions around all places being the same, and how rurality is addressed within the policy. As anti-Queer[1] policies pass from the state and local levels into schools (e.g., use of bathrooms and locker rooms, removal of Pride symbols, and book bans), Queer youth and educators continue to be at risk because of a system that does not support and accept them. Anti-Queer/trans rhetoric and policies continue to erase Queerness from rural contexts, contributing to harmful stereotypes and monolithic narratives of rural communities. This anti-Queer, placeless rhetoric and policymaking is exacerbated by (or, at least, coupled with) the dearth of research concerning Queer experiences in K–12 education.

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[1] I capitalize the term Queer to acknowledge the rich sense of identity, history, and community within in the term while also honoring the various different lived experiences within the Queer community.

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As of the date of this writing, I am not aware of any studies have explored rural Queer youth experiences in schools to the same extent as Gray's (2009) *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*. Since its publication, Queerness in rural contexts has remained a relatively underexplored area with relatively few exceptions. Gray's study was the first contemporary ethnographic study of Queer rural life in the United States (p. 9) and highlights the influences of visibility, emerging access to the internet, and the role of community in identity formation for Queer, rural youth. The narratives of rural Queer youth that Gray collected illustrated moments of joy and harm while examining the role of Queer visibility in rural America. For example, Gray described Shaun and his friends who, after posting photos of themselves performing in drag at the local Walmart, received verbal harassment both in person and online, prompting them to remove their online existence in fear that "strangers might happen to find photos and zero in on the HPA [Highland Pride Alliance] as an easy target" (p. 116).

Additionally, Gray (2009) found that community pushback was a prominent factor at the intersection of rurality and Queerness, as illustrated in Boyd County, Kentucky, when a group came together to form a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). This nonacademic club received negative feedback based on "the politics of LGBT visibility in rural communities" (p. 63). Opponents denied the establishment of a GSA, arguing that schools are not the

"time and place" for sexuality discussions, and other clubs, such as the Human Rights Club, already promoted respect for all. Gray also highlighted the struggle of exploring gender and sexuality while navigating other intersecting marginalized identities. She summarized the thoughts of two participants, Brandon and John W., stating, "Until recently, Brandon felt his bisexuality was incommensurate with his racial identity. John W. questions whether his identification with bondage [kink] fits with his understanding of 'gay'" (p. 138). Gray's study and its findings provide insights into experiences and feelings situated at the intersection of rurality and Queerness, while also illuminating how rural Queer youth find ways to be resilient in, and outside, rural schools.

The rural Queer youth experiences that Gray (2009) presented represent a sort of harm that exists as both macro and micro aggressions, which illustrate not only how rural Queer individuals personally express themselves but also how those Queer individuals see other community members respond to Queerness. The significance of marginalizing Queerness is painfully evident in United States history, with Queer individuals being neglected within health care systems (e.g., HIV and AIDS epidemic), targeted in mass hate crimes (e.g., Pulse nightclub, Club Q), and "overkilled" (Stanley, 2021). Stanley (2021) explained the term *overkill* as excessive violence toward a body following death. Two Queer young people, Brandon Teena and Matthew Shepard, both were brutally murdered in rural communities, and their stories are painful reminders that rurality is part of the narrative of overkill. They were targets of murderers who sought to end their "trans/queer life itself" (Stanley, 2021, p. 33), not just a life. After being raped, Brandon Teena (1972–1993), a transgender man in rural Nebraska, was overkilled by two men in the community. A few years later, Matthew Shepard (1976–1998), an openly gay man in Wyoming, was beaten and tied to a fence. Their stories were brought into conversation in Gray's (2009) study and in Abelson's (2019) *Men in Place: Trans Masculinity, Race, and Sexuality in America*. Gray and Abelson both explicitly studied the role of place in regard to Queerness, and the legacies of Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena were still very alive in their rural Queer conservations. While spaces exist that celebrate acceptance of Queer identities and lives in rural spaces, such as the *Country Queers* (Garringer, 2013–present) podcast, the largely public narratives of Shepard and Teena exhume fear around the histories of rural Queer bodies as targets of violence and harm.

Rurality is especially important when exploring Queer identity because rural spaces are more likely to have fewer and less visible Queer-affirming spaces and fewer lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) resources, including access to health care (Abelson, 2019;

Gray 2009).[2] Rural people often live on the geographical/sociocultural periphery and face societal stereotype threats (Peine et al., 2020; Wray, 2006), which influence policy and politics that often prove to be disadvantageous for rural people (Azano, 2019). Additionally, rural schools often face challenges such as budget cuts, teacher retention, and school consolidations, which leave rural communities without potentially life-affirming resources, leading to Queer individuals' fleeing to metrocentric, well-resourced, visibility-affirming communities.

The confluence of harmful educational policies around Queerness, Gray's (2009) study, and the histories of Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena (among countless others not mentioned here and/or undocumented), demonstrates the need to further examine rurality and Queerness in K–12 educational spaces. This literature review explores the ways in which peer-reviewed, empirical studies have described the intersections of Queerness and rurality in K–12 education spaces. It identifies important themes around rural education and Queerness so that researchers, policymakers, educators, caregivers, and community stakeholders can better understand the challenges, experiences, and opportunities related to how place influences gender and sexuality.

Contextual Foundation of K–12 Rural Schools, Queerness, and Identity Development

Schools, as a site of gender and sexual identity development (Pascoe, 2012; Thorne, 1993), may reproduce cis-heterosexual values which directly influence all students' gender identities and sexual orientations. Dominant discourses of white,[3] cis-heterosexual, able-bodiedness influence the ways in which minoritized groups see themselves and have the potential to shift the ways in which we construct our identities through literacy (R. S. Bishop, 1990). In rural communities where Queer visibility may be limited or conjoined with a fear of exposure, these dominant cis-heterosexual discourses may feel more normalized. Queer existence is coconstructed within educational systems that mirror society's power dynamics, oppressive histories, and values systems.

Queerness exists both as an identity and as a factor in politics. The Queer body exists at the same time as the Queer invisible existence of that body, and rurality acts as a social

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[2] While not mentioned in Abelson (2019) and Gray (2009), the acronym "2SLGBTQIA+" should be updated to include Two Spirit, intersex, and asexual people who also face issues with resources and health care.

[3] I choose not to capitalize "white" because of the historical systems of oppression and white supremacy related to the capitalization of the term.

identity and a physical geographic place. In other words, a person's Queer and rural identity is still a part of them regardless of their own visibility or society's Queer and rural visibilities. A Queer and rural person is always a Queer and rural person, regardless of another person's opinion of their outward projection. Outward visibility is not simple for rural Queer individuals, and often those visible signals may be negotiated for community acceptance, safety, and comfort. Nonetheless, the individual remains rural and Queer despite which identity is "visible," "seen," or "heard." For example, in college, I would hide my accent because I was nervous that classmates would think I was uneducated. Likewise, in my rural community, I try to keep my gay sassy dialect to a minimum to feel more comfortable. In communities of care and authenticity, the rural gay sassy dialect shines bright. I remain rural and Queer in all these examples, regardless of how others would hear or see me.

The manifestations of the threat of stereotyping heighten the invisibleness and visibleness of being rural and Queer. The ideas of visibility and invisibility around identity can be challenged or validated in schools, which act as a site of identity development and gender play (Thorne, 1993). In other words, schools are not only a space of gender and sexual development, but also a place that reproduces gender and sexual norms (Pascoe, 2012; Thorne, 1993). This literature review examines how research studies have explored Queerness in rural schools.

Methods

Subjectivity

My earliest memories of dealing with my own Queer rural identity were linked to shame. My Southern Baptist preacher announced to the church that if you were a homosexual, then you have sinned and will go to hell. Most days in middle school I heard, "That's so gay," or "You're so gay." My uncles would ask at every birthday luncheon which new girl I was dating. The only Queer representation I had was from TV shows; each Queer character (e.g., Kurt from Murphy and colleagues' [2008–2015] *Glee*, Tim Gunn on Holzman's [2004–2015] *Project Runway*) signaled urban to me. I did not feel Queer enough to fit in with the urban-Queer representation, and I did not know if Queer communities valued my rural self since I never saw rural Queer people growing up. For 23 years, I was more comfortable with the idea of unaliving myself than I was to admitting who I was. Despite this early "rural" education, which taught me homosexuality was a problem/sin, my soul was still rural through and through. I wanted to learn from my grandma how to bake pies, garden for fresh radishes, and sew plastic Christianity cross bookmarks. Whenever I would hop on my four-wheeler, I felt my body breathe

with Mother Nature. Friends and I laughed until curfew in the Walmart parking lot with our Sonic slushes. These moments juxtaposed love and acceptance against insults and rejection. I did not understand how a place I loved so much refused to let me love.

In addition to growing up gay in the country, another important subjectivity of mine in this work is my experience as a middle school teacher. As of 2019, when I was a second-year teacher, I was still in the closet. However, after a class discussion during which a seventh grader exclaimed, "I just don't understand why people can't love who they want to love," I finally knew it was time to come out. While coming out was very much a personal journey, my students' voices acted as a catalyst to my soul finally living its truth. From that moment, I gradually became a more confident, openly gay educator in a rural-serving middle school. During my tenure after coming out, I had many of the experiences that Gray (2009) described in her study. A colleague said to me, "I love working with you; I just don't support your lifestyle." A student walked out of my classroom because she found out I was gay. At the same time, I had students write their coming out letters in my classroom and tell me they appreciated my shirts that said, "Love wins."

As a public school teacher, an employee of the public, I needed to make all my students feel acknowledged. I taught students with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, including Queer students, which meant Queerness needed to be evident in my classroom climate. I did not provide opt-out forms for a documentary called *A Place at the Table* (Houston & Hudson, 2000), which featured a gay Jewish second-generation immigrant, because people working in public education cannot opt out of Queer youth and educators. Therefore, I came to this literature review through lived experiences as a rural farm kid walking barefoot on the rocky river bottom and then as an openly gay educator. My personal subjectivity has allowed me to see the fears inspired by the stories of Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena, while nodding in agreement to Gray's (2009) Walmart stories and the role of small-town politics. While it took me time, I finally chose love. This subjectivity illustrates how I arrived at my methods to develop my search criteria.

Search Criteria

This review of research includes peer-reviewed, empirical journal articles from 2012 to 2022. I chose this 10-year time span because of the lack of research prior to 2012. I also selected the 10-year timeline based on the release of Gray's book, the first ethnographic research centered on rural Queer youth, in 2009 and recent policies, described above. Given the nature of Gray's work, I anticipated a short lapse between publication of her book and research that

may have been influenced by it, which is what contributed to my decision to start at 2012.

Articles identified for inclusion examined how schools are a place where gender and sexuality identities are topics within the lived experience of being in rural U.S. schools, which could include policies, school climate, etc. I limited this review to research conducted in the United States because Queer politics and schooling in general are vastly different in international contexts.

Sample topics of these studies included: teacher/administrator attitudes, curriculum choices, and student safety. In keeping with guidance on rural salience (Biddle et al., 2019; Coladarci, 2007), I reviewed the articles to make sure they discussed rurality and Queerness as two intersecting identities that are shaped in schools. To make this determination, I read study abstracts and assessed the studies for both rural and Queer salience. For example, one article (Leonardi & Staley, 2021) that did not meet the search criteria focused on a Queering mindset from an educator perspective, but rurality was never a variable in the discussion. Another article that was eliminated was Evans and Chapman (2014). While their study took place in a rural district and addressed connections to LGB discrimination in bullying situations, participants' sexual orientation was not collected. Therefore, they could not make assertions as to a rural Queer salience and getting bullied.

Search Procedure

I performed a systematic search in November 2022 using EBSCOhost, specifically the Education and Health and Medicine (psychology/behavior) databases. My Boolean phrase was (LGBT+ OR lesbian OR gay OR homosexual OR bisexual OR transgender OR queer*) AND (Rural*) AND (K–12 OR elementary schools OR secondary schools OR K–5 OR 6–8 OR 9–12). This search yielded 30 articles, but only eight met the search criteria of specifically addressing rural and Queer intersections.

I then performed a search using the *Journal of LGBT Youth* because it specifically focuses on Queer youth. The search phrase was: (LGBT* OR lesbian OR gay OR homosexual OR bisexual OR transgender OR queer*) AND (rural*) AND (K–12 OR elementary schools OR secondary schools OR K–5 OR 6-8 Or 9-12). This search produced one article, but the study did not have rural as a variable.

I next explored two rurally focused journals. The search term I used for both journals was (LGBT) and (Queer). I found four articles in *The Rural Educator* and one in the *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, but none of the articles met the search criteria of 2012–2022 peer-reviewed research, and Queer and rural focused.

After exploring journals that center Queer and rural scholarship, I searched the Virginia Tech Libraries Database.

The search phrase was (LGBT* OR lesbian OR gay OR homosexual OR bisexual OR transgender or queer*) AND (rural*) AND (K–12 OR elementary schools OR secondary schools OR K–5, 6–8, 9–12) AND (eu:PeerReviewed) AND (x0:artchap) AND (yr:2012..2022). This search yielded one result, which did meet the search criteria.

In a final attempt to find research, I mined the references found within the articles that I identified for inclusion in the literature review to perform a guided ancestral search. By reviewing the literature review sections from research that met the search criteria, I discovered three final reports from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) climate survey that addressed the intersection of rurality and Queerness. Though they did not fully meet the search criteria, it is worth acknowledging the importance of these reports and the longitudinal data they provide, and I included them in my discussion to provide a well-rounded backdrop to this review of research.

Thus, in totality, nine articles met the inclusion criteria. Refer to the Appendix for a list of the included articles along with information about the research design (e.g., urban/rural and Queer/cis-hetero comparative, national survey, case study, etc.) and their connections to both rurality and Queerness.

Guiding Questions for Article Analysis

Following the search, I developed my analysis plan based on Hallinger's (2014) review of reviews of research to identify exemplary reviewing practices on educational leadership. Hallinger (2014) emphasized the importance of addressing methodology choices in reviews of research to better understand holistically how the findings may have been interpreted. Without providing clear methodological structures, scholars risk relying on "undefined" techniques to identify understandings and trends (Hallinger, 2014). Additionally, various research methods possess different ethical considerations. For example, quantitative questionnaires may grant greater anonymization, whereas qualitative interviews may garner more complex narratives. While this literature review does not analyze other reviews of research, Hallinger's guiding questions and methods for systematic analysis of each study, while considering how methodology choices inform a study's findings, provided a clear process to review each study that met the search criteria. I adapted Hallinger's conceptual framework to fit within the scope of this literature review, as illustrated in Table 1.

Following the analysis of each article in relation to the Hallinger-inspired (2014) guiding questions, I open coded each article with my original research questions in mind to identify themes across all studies. Example open codes included: *safe spaces and joy* (Whidden et al., 2020),

[comparative] access to continuing education (Ramos et al., 2014), and *rural school principals' dismissive attitudes* (H. N. Bishop & McClellan, 2016). From the codes, and after exploring the connections and discrepancies among the findings and how they reflect common ideas (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 172), I identified three overarching themes.

Findings

Three themes surrounding Queerness in rural schools emerged: victimization and safety (including safe spaces), educator attitudes toward Queer topics in rural contexts, and issues around school-provided Queer resources.

Table 1
Example of Adapted Hallinger Framework

Hallinger's (2014) questions to guide inquiry	Guiding question	Study example and its connection to question
What are the central topics of interest, guiding, questions, and goals?	In what ways were Queerness and rurality the central topics of interest, guiding questions, and/or the goals of the study?	H. N. Bishop & McClellan, 2016 • "This article explores how principals of rural high schools perceive and support LGBTQ students." (p. 125)
What conceptual perspective guides the review's selection, evaluation, and interpretation of the studies?	What Queer and/or rural conceptual perspective guides the studies?	Bailey et al., 2022 • Rural Conceptual Perspective: Analyzing the role of "religious" and "conservative" while defining rural in this study to evaluate the study's rural salience.
What are the sources and types of data employed in the review	How do the sources and types of data employed in the study signal Queer or place-based education methodologies?	McQuillan, 2021 • Signaled Queer methods by focusing on centering gender and sexuality diversity and attempting to disrupt top-down policy implementation
What is the nature of the data evaluation and analysis employed in the review?	What is the nature of the data evaluation and analysis employed in the study, and how does it signal rural Queer salience?	Kosciw et al., 2015 • By using national data to consider the role of place in relation to the concept of being out and qualities of resilience.
What are the major results of the review?	What are the major results of the study saying about the intersection of Queer and rural identity?	Page, 2017 • Rural ELA teachers felt less comfortable with Queer topics in classrooms, had fewer resources, felt afraid of community/parent backlash, and were less likely to have GSAs as compared to urban counterparts.

Evidence of Victimization and Safety Challenges for Queer Rural Youth

The first theme concerns levels of victimization and feelings of safety for rural Queer youth. Rural Queer students often face higher levels of victimization associated with outness as compared to their urban counterparts (Kosciw et al., 2015). Using data from the 2011 GLSEN school climate survey (Kosciw et al., 2012), Kosciw and colleagues (2015) proposed a model of risk and resilience for outness across an urban, suburban, and rural school divide. In their study, rural youth, while not less likely to be out in comparison to their urban peers, did seem to face greater risks associated with being out (e.g., victimization, hostile school cultures, and fewer supportive resources). Additionally, they noted the link "between depression and missed days of schools was larger for rural than urban students, and the path between depression and GPA revealed a similar, albeit only marginally significant, relationship" (Kosciw, 2015, p. 174).

Themes of victimization were also highlighted in Bailey and colleagues' (2022) ethnographic case study, which explored the use of homophobic language in a rural high school. While analyzing the purpose of homophobic language, the authors found that students related their usage of homophobic slurs to marginalizing others, mimicking adults' language, acting out in rebellion, and generating masculinity (Bailey et al., 2022). For example, students reported that they felt that homophobic language was used to make peers feel "less than" (Bailey et al., 2022, p. 225), which the authors related to the theme of "the language of marginalization." While considering the importance of these findings for rural contexts, the authors noted the tensions of conservative rural communities, where religious influences may "collide" with national and urban-centric policies. Bailey and colleagues (2022) cited a study that explored sex education policies and practices by Blinn-Pike (2008), which found that rural educators felt like urban policies often were more liberal leaning and not as influenced by religiosity.

Whidden and colleagues' (2020) found that when schools provide inclusive spaces (such as GSAs) and teachers are trained on creating safe zones, students may feel more connected to their school. In a rural Texas high school, Whidden et al. (2020) found that students enjoyed school when they perceived an inclusive learning environment, when they had fewer social stressors (e.g., difficulty making friends, comfortability chatting with teachers and taking risks in classrooms) while forming relationships with teachers and peers, and when family support allowed them to feel more connected in the school climate. Whidden et al. (2020) argued that when rural students are given the opportunity to experience inclusive spaces and are supported by the development of a GSA, resiliency trainings, and creation of safe zones, they feel less social stress and more classroom confidence and simply enjoyed being at school. De Pedro et al. (2018) used a dataset of the 2013–2015 California Healthy Kids Survey to explore the relationship between school climate, safety and victimization, and Queer identities. Their study highlighted the importance of having "LGBTQ support, peer intervention, and teacher intervention" for LGBTQ youth to feel a sense of safety (De Pedro et al., 2018, p. 275). Therefore, Queer-affirming educators were also correlated to students' sense of safety in schools (De Pedro et al., 2018).

While these studies show a theme of victimization and safety, they also present deficit narratives and reify social constructions of rural contexts as homophobic and unaccepting spaces for Queer rural youth. Moreover, these research studies describe the intersection of rurality and Queerness for youth to be a space of challenges and risks. The articles that contributed to this theme also rely primarily on quantitative data. The quantitative research, deriving from surveys and questionnaires, emphasizes a data narrative around wellness and victimization. However, it also illustrates the importance of potential possibilities for qualitative research to expand and capture a more holistic understanding the narrative found within the data.

Attitudes of Educators

This review of research also showed that educators' attitudes are a central topic in research focused on the intersection of Queerness and K–12 rural schools. While the first theme relied mostly on quantitative data, this theme was developed across studies using a variety of research methods. H. N. Bishop and McClellan (2016) used qualitative semi-structured interviews, Page (2017) implemented mixed methods (QUANT-qual), and Hall and Grayson (2019) relied on quantitative data from the 2006–2014 General Social Survey. These methods are important because the qualitative studies offer the *why* and not just the *what* is happening with Queerness in rural schools.

In a study that examined teachers' comfort levels with including Queer themes in their classrooms, Page (2017) found that most rural teachers simply did not address Queer issues and indicated that they felt uncomfortable talking about Queerness. In terms of rural Queer salience, Page's study used a statewide online survey, followed by optional interviews, to compare rural to urban-centric spaces. For example, Page reported, "Teachers in rural schools, proportionally, felt less comfortable using LGBT literature in their curricula than did their suburban and urban counterparts" (p. 7). Comfort level could also be a result of not having access to educational resources or support from administrators and/or local stakeholders.

This theme also addressed teachers' fears that if they discussed LGBTQ+ issues or literature, they would face consequences such as losing their job, community and parental backlash, and pressure from administrators (Page, 2017). Page (2017) described "teachers in smaller schools and in smaller communities showing higher levels of agreement with the statement that they would be 'in trouble' with their communities if they utilized LGBT literature in the classroom" (p. 9). Affirming student diversity while negotiating community tensions was also a factor in a study of principals' perceptions of LGBTQ students (H. N. Bishop & McClellan, 2016). H. N. Bishop and McClellan (2016) described their participants as "[principals] serving in areas where community may be resistant to supporting LGBTQ students" and their setting as "schools in rural areas with high poverty, high numbers of people with evangelistic conservative religious ideologies, and few college-education residents" (p. 130). In this description, the term "rural" was connected to monolithic ideas of rurality such as conservative, high poverty, not college educated, and evangelical. While those variables are additional factors to explore in the context of Queer identity development, they may not signal rurality for everyone. In contrast to Page (2017), H. N. Bishop and McClellan's (2016) study of principals found that "none of the principals could recall instances of community resistance to their leadership in support of LGBTQ students, and all were in agreement that the community expected them to support all students" (p. 140). Page (2017) and H. N. Bishop and McClellan's (2016) studies highlighted a power dynamic around educators in rural contexts, focused on fear of community ostracism or backlash.

Like H. N. Bishop and McClellan's (2016) description of their research setting, the authors of other articles in this literature review did not always identify "rural" as the central variable when describing why educators had negative attitudes toward Queerness in rural schools. Studies that focused on educators' attitudes consistently mentioned that religious beliefs, age, and conservative values influenced their attitudes toward Queer issues (H. N. Bishop & McClellan, 2016; Hall & Rodgers, 2019; Page, 2017). For example, Hall and Rodgers (2019) analyzed data from the General Social Survey, "a repeated cross-sectional survey with nationally representative sample of adults in the United States" (p. 28), to explore teachers' attitudes around Queerness. They found that factors such as "age, race/ethnicity, geographic region, political orientation, and religiosity" (p. 32) were associated with teacher attitudes. Page's (2017) study, which surveyed teachers attitudes and comfort levels about including LGBTQ+ topics in their classrooms found that "the older the teacher, the lesser the comfort level," and those teachers who identified with strong "religious beliefs were more likely to disagree or strongly

disagree [to include LGBT literature in their curricula]" (pp. 4–5). While the description of comfort level around Queer topics may not be explicitly harmful, avoiding curriculum content generates harmful microaggressions based on deficit ideals and oppressive biases, which could lead to rural Queer identity erasure (Eppley, 2011). Rural in this context is being used with other social identifiers such as older, strong religious values (evangelical), conservative politics, and high poverty rates to describe attitudes toward Queerness in schools. This approach affirms the importance of identifying and defining various descriptors that often are linked to rurality and rural identities within research designs and methods.

When educators indirectly or directly display levels of discomfort toward a particular social group, their biases can influence a student's opportunity to thrive in certain school climates. These biases were a factor in H. N. Bishop and McClellan's (2016) study of rural principals. They argued,

> We heard from participants that they advocated through (a) love and professional support. They set out to "love each student as their own," even though they clearly conveyed to students that they themselves did not believe in "the student's lifestyle" or "choice." Further troubling, participants enforced acceptance and inclusivity through (b) policy and procedures, changing dress codes, and "encouraging" students not to "stand out," what sounded a lot like "don't come out" to us. (p. 144)

Queer rural students experience higher rates of victimization, both physical and verbal (Kosciw et al., 2014, 2016), and exist in a space where adults may be uncomfortable or lack resources to fully embrace Queer students and educators. While this discomfort may reflect a general unwillingness among educators to discuss and accept any type of sexuality, heteronormative culture has rooted itself in curricula even when not explicitly discussed. For example, an English teacher may teach Romeo and Juliet in ninth grade and, while the teacher may not discuss the heterosexuality found within the text, students still see and read about a heterosexual relationship, normalizing it. Without portrayals of LGBTQ relationships, they are not similarly normalized. Furthermore, heteronormativity is ubiquitous within schools. For instance, students often asked me how my wife was at home. I had never mentioned anyone in my home life, yet without any verbal cues, students made heteronormative assumptions. If Queer identities are constantly overlooked or labeled as deviant and undeserving of dignity in a cis-heteronormative landscape, educators and youth may continue to reproduce those fears and frustrations.

Rural School Resources and Queer Identity

The final theme identified in the literature concerned issues around Queer resources, including curricula, GSAs, health care, and policies. Rural teachers' discomfort around Queer topics may be correlated not only to personal belief biases, community backlash, and cis-heteronormativity but also perhaps to a lack of Queer educational resources. As in the previous theme, Page (2017), for example, found through interviews with teachers that most rural teachers felt they would get "in trouble" with their community if they included Queer topics in an English language arts classroom (p. 9), while Page's quantitative data showed "rural teachers' lower comfort levels and lower awareness of resources coincide with a lower rate of curricular diversification" (p. 7). Lack of educational resources can certainly constrain educators who are seeking the language to support all their students.

Ramos et al. (2014) examined data gathered from a 2009 New Mexico Department of Health survey of school nurses to explore the disparities between urban and rural school nurses. They found that rural school nurses "were less likely to have had CE [continuing education] within the previous 5 years on 2 behavioral health topics: suicide risk identification and prevention, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) health" (p. 267). The lack of school-provided resources may not have been the choice of teachers, caregivers, administrators, or nurses, but rather a shortage in policies that specifically allowed rural school nurses to access CE opportunities to shrink the rural-urban youth health disparity gap.

While, for example, GSAs have been vital for some schools as a place to collect and disseminate Queer resources, Page (2017) explored the lack of GSAs in rural communities. Whidden et al. (2020) cited the joy of a GSA as part of a student's rural school experience. In contrast, De Pedro et al. (2018) found that "GSAs were associated with lower levels of safety" (p. 275). De Pedro et al. explored this finding by examining the barriers of establishing a GSA and who gets to find safety in a GSA. As Queer safe spaces are often targets of violence and harassment, some students may protect their personal safety by *not* joining a GSA because of a larger climate of homophobic attitudes and fears of being targeted as visibly Queer.

Lack of resources, higher levels of victimization, and conflicting attitudes from school personnel can be influenced by policy. Through interviews with rural school principals, H. N. Bishop and McClellan (2016) found that these school leaders often deferred to their county's policy when addressing issues around gender and sexuality. Educators constantly used state and local "policy" to navigate out of Queer topics in education, as a convenient way to shut down any discussion or texts around Queerness in schools. They stated, "To keep behaviors and identities under control, participants indicated that they would use school policy to maintain order" (H. N. Bishop & McClellan, 2016, p. 145). McQuillian (2021) conducted a policy document analysis in Illinois to examine how local districts adopted state legislation regarding gender and sexual diversity (GSD) reforms and concluded, "The regression analysis revealed rural and less financially-resourced districts might need additional supports to implement inclusive policies through administrative guidance" (pp. 31–32). Lack of supportive policy for Queer rural students highlights the importance of addressing how institutions use policy to oppress and assimilate youth in the educational system. Additionally, a lack of resources and policies could illustrate a need for regional-specific support such as training for administrators, educators, and community stakeholders.

Without policies that support Queerness, rural schools become spaces that lack access to Queer resources, which diminishes Queer-affirming visibility. Without Queer-affirming resources, educators and youth risk erasure of Queer livelihood, which recycles a dominate cis-heterosexual society. Rural schools often act as the heartbeat to rural communities because of the economic, social, cultural, and political opportunities that rural schools provide (Tieken, 2014). School personnel are constantly bound to county, state, federal, and/or tribal policies, which historically have not functioned to protect and affirm marginalized populations. When policies create barriers or are not explicitly validating life-affirming educational resources, it becomes an entire school personnel issue, which directly influences the larger attempt to generate a Queer-affirming space to learn as a community.

Discussion

This literature review examined how nine empirical, peer-reviewed research studies explored the intersections of K–12 rural education and Queerness. These studies show that rural Queer students are at risk of physical and verbal abuse (Bailey et al., 2022; De Pedro, 2018), feeling unsafe in schools with threat of community backlash (Hall & Rodgers, 2019; Kosciw et al., 2015), being less academically engaged (Whidden et al., 2020), and having fewer school affirming resources (H. N. Bishop & McClellan, 2016; McQuillan, 2023; Page, 2017; Ramos et al., 2014) as compared to their urban peers, mirroring results from recent GLSEN National School Climate Survey reports (Kosciw et al, 2012, 2014, 2016; Palmer et al., 2012), the Movement Advancement Project (2019) report on LGBT people in rural U.S. communities, and the Trevor Project's (2021) brief on LGBTQ youth in rural areas. These themes generate a negative school climate, diminishing Queer rural students' overall potential to thrive in schools that do not

have policies (McQuillan, 2023), practices (Page, 2017), and people to support Queer identity (Whidden et al., 2020) in school contexts.

Rural schools also were more likely not to offer Queer resources or Queer-affirming education, which influenced the choices and practices of teachers (Page, 2017), nurses (Ramos et al., 2014), and administrators (Bishop and McClellan, 2016). Many teachers did not engage in Queer topics due to personal beliefs or fear of community and/or district backlash (Page, 2017). Principals in H. N. Bishop and McClellan's (2016) study relied on policy to address Queer issues and explained how they treat all their students with love and respect while also enforcing a "don't come out" environment. This type of communication echoed "Don't ask, don't tell" mentalities that have forced Queer people to hide parts of their existence to be successful in their careers. These examples provide insight into how language is used to recreate social hierarchies and harm Queer students in specific contexts, such as how a rural school with conservative values may use homophobic language to maintain a cis-hetero dominant narrative (Bailey et al., 2022). However, if students are encouraged to be fully themselves, gain confidence, and be in inclusive environments, they are more likely to feel connected in those schools (Whidden et al., 2020). Indeed, schools may be the only space where Queer youth find acceptance in their rural communities, so when those schools create a culture of discomfort, they risk marginalizing and demoralizing students. This push-out narrative has the potential to lead rural Queer youth to a school-to-prison pipeline (Snapp et al., 2015) and higher rates of substance abuse (Fallin-Bennett & Goodin, 2019). If Queerness is socially constructed in schools as an "othered" identity, all students, especially Queer-identifying students, may face levels of victimization rooted in misinformation and hatred.

Therefore, based on the results of this inquiry, I ask: How can both Queer and rural communities come together to cultivate a sense of safety? Whidden et al.'s (2020) support strategies (e.g., inclusive environments, lessons on resilience and confidence, forming positive connections with teachers) can be a starting point to create spaces for rural Queer youth to (re)gain confidence in themselves. What conversations must take place for both Queerness and rurality to co-generate love and acceptance? Page's (2017) study called for literature and narratives to (re)center love and acceptance in classrooms while also addressing fears of community backlash. Moreover, when there is discomfort and fear, how can we fearlessly disrupt monolithic narratives that harm? Darder (2017) observed, "In many ways, teachers replicate the same fears, frustrations and insecurities as their students when they hit unfamiliar territory and receive no substantive support in developing their teaching abilities within the context of their everyday practice" (p. 57). While

this cycle of replication seems insurmountable, educators, scholars, and community stakeholders must critically question how they can disrupt those replications of fears and insecurities for the sake of young learners. Addressing these critical questions will facilitate the creation of communities of care in which rural Queer youth can authentically belong in their learning experiences.

More research focused on Queerness in rural schools is needed to inform the creation of spaces that truly love and support all students and educators. Further research also must hold space for the ways in which rural schools may be bright spaces for Queer youth to thrive in their communities, allowing rural schools to be the model for Queer inclusion. The intersectional possibilities are vast with rural Queerness, and future research should consider rural Queer students[4] of Color, variously abled rural Queer youth, Indigenous Queer youth (Two-Spirit), and low-income rural Queer youth. A specific research focus on trans and nonbinary youth in rural spaces also is needed; trans and nonbinary youth may need very different resources and care to feel validated and affirmed than sexual minorities (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, polysexual) need, especially when the sociopolitical climate targets trans and nonbinary youth.

As researchers navigate this space, they must consider ethical considerations when attempting to reach Queer rural youth. For example, youth under 18 usually are required to have the permission of a parent or guardian to participate in a study—which highlights the intentionally of care behind the ethics of research with vulnerable youth populations in communities that are small, as such with the research at the intersection of rural and Queer educational studies. Following Hallinger's (2014) advice on holistic analysis of a study's methods, the majority of the studies included in this literature review used quantitative survey data; surveys may feel more anonymous and allow respondents to feel more unidentifiable. Regarding the qualitative studies included in this review, the majority relied on participants who were adults; qualitative scholarship is needed to provide more nuanced narratives into issues that Queer rural youth face in public school systems. Creative narratives, such as *Country Queers* (Garringer, 2013–present) and nonfiction auto/biographies, and contemporary methodologies (e.g., photovoice, autoethnography, Queer scavenging) could be spaces that complicate rural Queer discourse not only by presenting valid issues but also by sharing celebrations, histories, and stories that provide rich descriptions of the spectrum of rural Queer livelihood.

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[4] I refer to "students/youth," but it can be interchanged with "educators," "community members," "school personnel," and "parents" and should welcome allies.

Implications for Change

This literature review's findings present several implications for future research and practice in support of Queerness in rural schools.

Accessing Queer-Affirming Resources

If rural schools and communities provide fewer visible affirming spaces and resources, online resources may offer opportunities for impact (i.e., The Trevor Project [2021], Learning for Justice [n.d.], Movement Advancement Project [n.d.], GLSEN [n.d.], PFLAG [n.d.]). Regarding affirming literature, the Whippoorwill book awards (Bass et al., 2024; Parton et al., 2023) focus on rural young adult literature and highlight marginalized identities in rural spaces—an award that sings to the authentic experiences of rural people and places. Researchers also need to explore more ways to spread Queer-affirming resources from urban-centric spots to rural, isolated locations, while also developing new locale-based resources.

Community, Family, and Educator Attitudes

Undefined and assumptive anti-Queer policies in rural communities have the power to negatively influence the attitudes of the community, families, and educators. That is, policies that do not explore the nuances of place and/or explicitly protect Queer individuals lead to unique complex challenges in rural settings. Queer youth and educators want to be accepted, loved, and respected in their rural communities. Policies that directly target Queerness in schools, specifically trans and nonbinary identities, get politicized. Policymakers and stakeholders with agency need to explicitly mandate protections to allow educators and youth to celebrate Queerness because public schools should aspire to be spaces that honor and celebrate all humans.

Victimization and Safety

Anti-Queer violence persists in rural spaces, but bright spots can (re)define Queer joy. For example, in my local community, we have a camp for Queer youth. Throughout the week, students engage in teambuilding activities, learn about Queer histories, and talk about their own lived experiences. While these campers may face victimization and feel unsafe at school, they find comfort and peace during this weeklong camp. If policies and adults fail to support rural Queer youth and educators, alternative spaces (e.g., a camp for Queer youth, a club, a caring group of adults) may be needed to challenge these spaces of discomfort. Moreover, place-based tolerance and anti-bullying workshops, specifically regarding Queerness, must be considered to make sure all students, community members, educators, and parents (re)center their love for community. Hatred comes from the fear of the unknown, and if Queer joy is not visible and celebrated in rural communities, Queer people risk continuing being victimized in their communities.

Conclusion

A rural Queer experience exists at the center of two communities—rural and Queer—coming together. Queer youth and educators may seek out rural spaces for sundry reasons (e.g., job opportunities, family ties, escape from broader societal pressures, to live in a self-sustaining environment; see Schwamberger, 2023). Queer identity work is part of cultivating a sense of security in place and community. Place and Queer personhood are (un)rooted in the subjectivities that students and educators bring into the classroom. Resisting urban-normative cis-heteronormativity is vital for acknowledging who will get to exist fully, and who already has existed fully, in a rural space.

This literature review explored the ways in which the intersections of Queer identity and K–12 rural education are described in current research. Lack of structural supports, resources, and affirming policies and adults' discomfort with Queer topics (H. N. Bishop & McClellan, 2016; Page, 2017)—perhaps more based on age, religion, and conservative ideals than actual rurality (Hall & Rodgers, 2019)—leads Queer rural students to experience even more challenges and difficulty finding support in rural spaces. As communities and schools navigate anti-Queer legislation, advocating for, listening to, and celebrating Queer rural students and educators are vital actions. When addressing Queer policy, stakeholders and policymakers must seek to define and address how that policy functions in a rural context (Brenner, 2022).

Rural Queer educators and students exist together and should be celebrated in all schools. Students must have access to books that allow themselves to be seen and to Queer-affirming resources that validate their existence. Moving forward, communities, schools, and caregivers in rural contexts need to be intentional about methods and strategies to support and celebrate Queer youth and educators. As rural schools seek to love all their students, rural Queer narratives provide insight into the importance of love and care coming from a community that cares for one another.

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Appendix A: Breakdown of Research Articles Design and Findings

Article	Database	Method	Relation to rurality	Relation to queerness	Queer and rural intersections
Bailey et al., 2022	EBSCOhost	Qualitative • Observations and interviews • Non-urban/rural comparative • Random sample (n = 20 male high school students)	• Site: rural Intermountain West • Reason: Context (place) influence of a school space • Terms Associated: religious and conservative rural	• Exploring homophobic language • "More accepting of LGBTQIA individuals than other communities in the surrounding area" (p. 224).	• Homophobic language used to marginalize others • Maintain social hierarchy • Connected to adult power and authority while also mimicking adults' language • As an act of rebellion • Exploring sexual ideals • Generating more masculinity within social groups
H. N. Bishop and McClellan, 2016	EBSCOhost	Qualitative • Semi-structured interviews • Non-urban/rural comparative • Sample (n = 5 rural principals)	• "Investigate how the context of the schools, specifically rural communities, may affect the principals' perceptions and implementation of a positive climate for all students" (p. 127). • "We looked for schools in rural areas with high poverty rates, high numbers of people with evangelistic conservative religious ideologies, and few college-educated residents. According to the literature, this setting may be less safe for LGBTQ students" (p. 130).	• "This article explores how principals of rural high schools perceive and support LGBTQ students" (p. 125).	• Principals wanted to know each student for rapport and to treat all students with respect. • Strong value of stability and longevity, having staff that remains at the school. • "We heard from participants that they advocated through (a) love and professional support. They set out to 'love each student as their own,' even though they clearly conveyed to students that they themselves did not believe in 'the student's lifestyle' or 'choice.' They commented that support services for LGBTQ students might come in the form of identity disorder counseling and special education services. Further troubling, participants enforced acceptance and inclusivity through (b) policy and procedures, changing dress codes, and 'encouraging' students not to 'stand out,' what sounded a lot like 'don't come out' to us. And finally, although most admitted that their rural communities were extremely conservative and community members had problems with 'tolerating' student diversity (their language, not ours) and despite our leaders' close affiliations and long associations with them, participants claimed they had the ability to conscientiously resist these ties through (c) a sharpened 'reflective consciousness' (Theoharis, 2007, p. 250)" (p. 144).
De Pedro et al., 2018	EBSCOhost	Quantitative • 2013–2015 California Healthy Kids Survey • Sample (N = 611 students; n = 151 LGBTQ students and n = 460 non-LGBTQ students)	• Rural California district	• "Explores the relationships between multiple dimensions of LGBTQ affirming school climates, safety, and victimization among LGBTQ students and non-LGBTQ peers" (p. 266).	• "Overall, findings from this study show that LGBTQ affirming school climates in rural school communities are with more positive perceptions of safety for LGBTQ youth, consistent with prior research (Kosciw et al., 2013; Wimberly, 2015). This study found that within a rural district context LGBTQ support, peer intervention, and teacher intervention were associated with higher levels of safety among LGBTQ youth. Contrary to past research, the presence of GSA's was associated with lower levels of safety" (pp. 274–275).

Article	Database	Method	Relation to rurality	Relation to queerness	Queer and rural intersections
Hall and Rodgers, 2019	Virginia Tech Libraries	Quantitative • General Social Survey Data • Rural *vs.* urban comparative • Sample (*N* = 305 teachers; 84.3% female, 15.7% male, 96.1% hetero,3.9% LGBQ)	• "This study sought to expand the literature by investigating how an array of demographic, geographic, and social variables relate to teachers' LGBQ-related attitudes" (p. 28). • "In terms of geographic location, 38.4% of teachers were from the South, 22.3% were from the Midwest, 20.7% were from the Northeast, 11.1% were from the Pacific region, and 7.5% were from the Mountain region" (p. 29). • "The level of urbanicity to rurality of the area participants lived in was measured using a 10-point scale that ranged from 0 (*large city*) to 9 (*open country*); thus, higher values indicate a more rural area" (p. 30).	• Educator attitudes regarding LGBTQ issues in school systems • Asked to rate: - Morality of sexual relations between adults of the same sex - Level of agreement/ disagreement about the right to same-sex marriage - If a gay man should be allowed to make a speech in their community - If a gay man should be allowed to teach at a college or university - If a book written by a gay man supporting homosexuality should be removed from the public library	• "The urbanicity/rurality of the area teachers were in was unrelated to attitudes" (p. 34). • "Descriptive results … showed that teachers' attitudes varied somewhat depending on whether the attitude item assessed the morality of homosexuality versus civil liberties and civil rights of LGBQ people" (p. 32). • "In terms of demographics, teacher age was positively associated with attitudes, thus, older teachers tended to have more negative LGBQ attitudes than younger teachers" (p. 32). • "In terms of religiosity, religious identification was unrelated to attitudes; however, more frequent attendance of religious services was associated with more negative attitudes. Further, carrying one's religious beliefs into other areas of life was also associated with more negative attitudes" (p. 34). • "Political orientation was strongly related to attitudes with higher levels of conservatism associated with more negative LGBQ attitudes" (p. 34).
Kosciw et al., 2015	EBSCOhost	Quantitative • GLSEN Survey Data • Rural *vs.* urban comparative • Sample (*N* =7,816 LGBTQ+ students; 29.5% rural)	• "Respondents were fairly evenly split across urban (28.3 %), suburban (42.1 %), and rural (29.5 %) locales, and were 16.0 years old on average" (p. 171). • "This paper examines a model of outness as both risk and resilience, accounting for LGBT youth's interpersonal experiences in school and the community context (i.e., locale and geo-graphic settings) in which they occur" (p. 168).	• Level of outness in relation to resilience in psychological and academic outcomes • Queerness in relation to: outness, victimization, well-being, academic outcomes, community context	• "Comparisons of the models across community contexts indicate that the increases in victimization associated with outness were substantially larger for rural youth than for urban and suburban youth" (p. 174). • "The path between depression and missed days of schools was larger for rural than urban students…, and the path between depression and GPA revealed a similar, albeit only marginally significant, relationship" (p. 174). • "Although outness was associated with enhanced well-being for rural youth as well as other youth, the indirect path from outness to GPA via victimization and depression may contribute to more negative outcomes among rural LGBT youth than for other LGBT youth" (p. 174). • "Rural students may see more of the negative effects of being out, and this heightened negative contribution may not necessarily be offset by the positive effects of being out, in that the paths between outness and the two well-being indicators did not vary in strength by community context" (p. 174).

Article	Database	Method	Relation to rurality	Relation to queerness	Queer and rural intersections
McQuillan, 2021	EBSCOhost	Multi-modal • Qualitative: case study of Illinois (samples, coding/content analysis) • Quantitative: analysis (descriptive, longitudinal, regression) • Rural *vs.* urban comparative	• Used geography as a variable when exploring LGBTQ+ policies	• District policies in connection to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression	• "Contrary to these findings, I did not find an association between greater policy protections and locale, higher per student spending, or lower socioeconomic status in Illinois. Only higher enrollment predicted greater policy protections in this study, a relationship driven by Chicago Public Schools (CPS) that did not withstand robustness checks, such as omitting CPS from the analysis" (p. 31). • "Districts with greater financial resources (proxied by per-pupil-spending) were more likely, and rural districts were less likely to have administrative guidance and have formal guidance when controlling for the other local characteristics in either model" (p. 31). • "The regression analysis revealed rural and less financially-resourced districts might need additional supports to implement inclusive policies through administrative guidance, a result that aligned with the types of districts that lacked policy protections in previous document analysis concerning LGBTQ+ students (Demissie et al., 2018; GLSEN, 2015)" (pp. 31–32). • "Taking these evaluations into consideration along with the current study, the limited evidence suggests urban districts with more financial resources have the greater capacity to institutionalize gender and sexuality-based reforms through policy documents, while rural districts lack this capacity" (p. 32).
Page, 2017	EBSCOhost	Mixed method • Primarily quantitative (Likert-scale survey) with volunteered interviews • Rural *vs.* urban comparative • Sample size (*N* = 577 teachers; 46.7% rural)	• "Rural teachers were more highly represented among the respondents (46.7%), followed by suburban (38.8%), and then urban (14.5%)" (p. 3).	• "The survey inquired about ELA teachers' experiences with their media center, their views on curriculum, their instructional purposes, their comfort levels related to LGBT young adult literature in the classroom, their awareness of LGBT resources, their priorities regarding literature selection, and other topics such as school policies (67 items total)" (p. 3).	• "Teachers in rural schools, proportionally, felt less comfortable using LGBT literature in their curricula than did their suburban and urban counterparts" (p. 7). • "Likewise, rural teachers' comfort levels with discussion on LGBT issues were also lower" (p. 7). • "Rural teachers also believed themselves to be less aware of LGBT young adult literature" (p. 7). • "Teachers in smaller schools were less likely to agree that they were aware of available resources and teachers in smaller communities also were less likely to agree that they were aware of resources" (p. 7). • "When asked why LGBT literature is not used, the most common response (31%) was that teachers were afraid of challenges or confrontations with parents or other community members. Other common reasons included a lack of awareness or education about such texts (21%) and lack of budget or resources to purchase texts (18%)" (p. 7). • "The data show that rural teachers were much more likely to feel that they would be 'in trouble' with their communities if they used LGBT literature in their classrooms" (p. 8). • "Rural schools were far less likely to have a GSA or similar club than were urban schools" (p. 10). • GSAs did correlate to more awareness of library holdings, more comprehensive bullying policies, more comfortable including LGBT literature in their curriculum.

Article	Database	Method	Relation to rurality	Relation to queerness	Queer and rural intersections
Ramos et al., 2014	EBSCOhost	Quantitative • Survey tested for knowledge) • Rural vs. urban comparative • Sample ($N = 311$ school nurses; 35% nurses working in rural schools)	• Rural school nurses • "Among respondents, 200 (64.3%) worked in metropolitan counties and 111 (35.7%) worked in rural counties" (p. 267).	• School health (including gender and sexuality)	• "Rural school nurses, compared with metropolitan school nurses, were less likely to have had CE within the previous 5 years on 2 behavioral health topics: suicide risk identification and prevention, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) health (Table 2)" (p. 267). • "Our findings suggest that education and training on LGBT health disparities may be lacking and needed for school nurses, regardless of rural or metropolitan setting" (p.270).
Whidden et al., 2020	EBSCOhost	Quantitative • Preexperimental • Pre/post test groups • Intervention • Non-urban/rural comparative • Sample size ($N = \sim360$ students)	• Rural Texas public high school	• Exploring inclusive environments (GSA/ Safe Zones) relation to social connectedness in schools • "The ultimate goal was to create a safe, inclusive, tolerant learning space for all students, emphasizing the SMY population" (p. 13).	• High relationship between enjoying school and creation of an inclusive learning environment" (p. 8). • "Social stress was reduced with inclusive learning environments" (p. 9). • "Family support was strongly significant" (p. 10). • "Classroom confidence was a significant" (p. 11). • "In this study, students enjoyed coming to school when a GSA was part of their collective experience. Another contributing factor for students enjoying school was providing teacher training related to safe zones and ways to establish havens on campus. Incorporating diverse clubs and organizations creates an environment that fosters student-connections" (p. 12).