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# QUEER REPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP EDUCATION: An Integrative Literature Review

## Abstract

Modern leadership educators have shown an increased interest in empowering queer student leaders and making campuses more equitable for queer people. These educators help shape the policies, programs, and curriculums that directly impact how queer people experience higher education. Yet there appears to be a dearth of abundant literature on queer people and their experiences as they relate to leadership education. This integrative literature review explores the existing literature on the relationship between leadership education and the queer community over a thirty-year period. The results suggest that queer people are being represented more equitably than they were thirty years ago, but that representation does not extend to all members of the queer community.

## Introduction

Modern leaders increasingly tackle complex societal issues like racism, sexism, and income inequality. To prepare future leaders, many universities have adopted leadership education opportunities for students (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). These opportunities come in the form of curricular education and co-curricular organizations or activities (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). The task of postsecondary leadership educators then is two-fold; to help shape the leadership identities of students with varying backgrounds and ideologies, while also preparing those same students to lead in an increasingly diverse world.

In serving students/learners, leadership educators must be cognizant of the unique needs of those students from marginalized populations. The queer community has been marginalized in ways that have kept them invisible on campuses. However, in the last thirty years, some members of the queer community have been given a spotlight in higher education. Many universities have anti-discrimination policies that specifically address sexual orientation, LGBTQ+ campus groups and resource centers, and diversity and equity



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programs. However, LGBTQ+ topics rank low on the list among other diversity topics (Jennings, 2011; O'Malley et al., 2015). Queer students and faculty still feel marginalized (Pitcher, 2020; Davis et al., 2020) and in many ways, still fight for equitable treatment within higher education (Hughes et al., 2020).

Leadership educators who take on queer topics in research help shape LGBTQ+ policies, programs, and curriculum in higher education (Renn, 2010). Yet there appears to be a dearth of abundant literature on queer people and their experiences as they relate to leadership education (Garvey & Rankin, 2015). The opportunity then arises for leadership educators to explore queer topics further to better understand the LGBTQ+ community and its needs.

In this integrative literature review we identify queer topics in leadership education research over a thirty-year span. We describe how queer people are being represented in the literature, what queer identities are being researched and how they connect to leadership identities, and how universities include queer people in their leadership programs. We also make recommendations for future areas of exploration.

## Conceptual Framework

The experiences of queer people have largely been excluded from a broader historical narrative through systemic repression. Historically, higher education played a significant role in the silencing of queer people. Some universities even went beyond silencing and enacted aggressive measures of public shaming by "flushing out" suspected gays and lesbians (Braukman, 2012). These acts of repression permeate the queer narrative, even leaching into terminology found in the community such as "closeted" or being "out" as expressions of sexual orientation or gender identity.

However, through the continued efforts of queer activists and their allies, the narrative has started to change, and higher education reflects this change (Rankin et al., 2019). Many universities now tout LGBTQ+ anti-discrimination policies, and offer clubs and activities centered on queer students. Research on queer topics is also rapidly growing. Queer theory emerged in the early 1990s and uses deconstruction as a method to critically analyze binaried heterosexual systems (Dilley, 1999; de Lauretis, 1991). As Dilley (1999) describes, queer theory explores identity by asking "how is queer?" as opposed to "who is queer?" Emerging from this renaissance is the opportunity for leadership education to establish a path towards the practical application of determining "how is queer?" in the broader context of higher education.

In this paper we primarily use the word "queer" to collectively describe all members of the LGBTQ+ community. We recognize that gender and sexuality labels are fluid and change over time. Therefore, at the time of writing we define "queer" as anyone who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, asexual, and pansexual folks. We acknowledge that there is a vast difference between sexual orientation and gender identity, and that using an umbrella term such as "queer" may not accurately capture that distinction (Renn, 2010). We also understand that "queer" was traditionally used as a slur, and in some circles may still be perceived as such. However, we feel that "queer" most accurately encapsulates a broad spectrum of identities and orientations that are non-heterosexual or cisgendered (Pryor, 2020; Renn, 2010).

There is an element of subjectivity that comes with synthesizing research for an integrative review. As such, it is important to acknowledge positionality and how it impacts the implementation of the methodology. Positionality theory emerged as an evolution of standpoint



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theory (Kezar & Lester, 2010). Like post-structuralism, positionality theorists propose that individuals have a subjective position from which they view the world, held in place by a complex system of multiple intersecting identities including race, gender, class, and sexuality (Collins 1993). Central to positionality theory is the concept that the ropes of our identities are constantly being unraveled and then re-tied in knots that hold together who we are at the time. To that end, the authors will declare their positions/social locations as part of the methodology.

Kezar and Lester (2010) identify three main components of positionality theory: intersecting identities, power relations, and context. Each of these must be addressed in turn to fully reveal positionality. I, Sarah, am a white, cisgendered, queer woman who works in agriculture. All these identities interact dynamically to create my unique multifaceted identity (Kezar and Lester, 2010). I must also acknowledge that there are identities that I do not hold, and which impact my ability to speak for others whose positionality differs from my own. I may see threads of my own experience woven in the narratives of other queer people, but I cannot fully comprehend the unique experience of a black transgender person. My unique positionality lends itself to a place of power. My female and queer identities limit my power in some social interactions; however, my white and cisgender identities offer me privileges that protect me from certain types of discrimination. In positionality theory, local context is particularly important (Kezar & Lester, 2010). I am reviewing these articles through my identity as a scholar who lives and works in a community that is equitable and accepting of many different types of people. The university I attend, and its faculty, generally support my identities. As such I feel safe and encouraged to pursue this work without fear of retaliation.

I, Jacklyn, am a white, cisgender, heterosexual, female identifying individual who works in higher education, all of which are privileged identities. My identities have a profound impact on the ways in which I see the world and the ways in which I interact in it. I am compelled to leverage those privileged identities in advocacy and activism for those students and colleagues who do not have the privilege that I do. I have supervised this research using the lenses afforded me by my identities and as such must hold myself to account for the assumptions that I might make consciously and unconsciously. I have done so using reflexive journaling as a means to reveal and bracket my conscious and unconscious biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Methods

This integrative literature review seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the representation of queer people in leadership education to help better understand what topics could be explored in future research.

Three research questions guided our study:

1. How does a queer identity interact with a leadership identity?
2. How are queerness and queer people being represented in leadership education?
3. How are universities including gender identity and sexual orientation in their leadership programs?

The guidelines for conducting the review came from the integrative literature review recommendations offered by Torraco (2005) who provides a checklist for writing an integrative review that helped structure the process of this review and informed inclusion/exclusion criteria. We were also guided by eleven questions listed by Torraco (2016) on conducting an integrative review; The eleven points and our approach to each of them is summated in table 1.



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**Table 1**
*Torraco's 11 Points for Conducting an Integrative Literature Review*

| Torraco's point | Our approach |
|---|---|
| Need and Purpose of the Review | Preliminary search for "LGBTQ+ leadership education integrative review'' yielded no results as likely none have been conducted before. The purpose of this integrative review is identified in the methods section. |
| Topic of the Review | Topic is identified and creates boundaries for the scope of the research questions and in the inclusion and exclusion criteria. |
| Author(s) Perspective | We identify our positionalities and address the potential for assumptions or bias that may arise due to our perspectives of the world. |
| Organization and Structure | Results are arranged chronologically. From each decade, themes were synthesized. |
| Discussion of Research Methods | We list our chosen keywords in a table, identify the databases searched, list our inclusion and exclusion criteria, and describe the process used to determine which articles fit the criteria in the methods. |
| Critical Analysis | Critically analyzed strengths, weaknesses, and differing perspectives. Conceptual relationships and common themes are identified. |
| Synthesis | Articles were synthesized within the results section and connected via theme to bridge gaps and explore potentially new concepts. |
| Further Research | Opportunities and questions prompting further research are described in the conclusion. |
| Logic and Conceptual Reasoning | A conceptual framework section was included to describe the logic and conceptual reasoning of the authors. |
| Future of the Topic | Emerging developments and the potential future of the topic are addressed in the conclusion. |
| Writing Quality | Multiple drafts of the literature review were completed. At each draft, the writing was reviewed by both authors, discussed, and then edited until satisfactory. |

Literature for the review was selected by its topical orientation to queer people and leadership education. First a keyword search in abstracts and/or titles was conducted. To be considered for in-depth reading, article abstracts and/or titles had to contain at least two relevant keywords. Keywords were selected based on descriptors of both leadership education and the LGBTQ+ community. Keywords are listed in table 2.



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**Table 2**
*Leadership Education and LGBTQ+ Keyword Terms*

| Keyword terms | |
|---|---|
| Asexual | Lesbian |
| Bisexual | LGBT |
| Education | LGBTQ |
| Gay | Nonbinary |
| Gender | Queer |
| Genderqueer | Sexual Identity |
| Heteronormativity | Sexual Minority |
| Higher Education | Sexual Orientation |
| Homosexuality | Sexuality |
| Leader | Training and Development |
| Leadership | Transgender |

All keywords were searched in four online academic search engines including: ProQuest, Web of Science, JSTOR, and the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Boolean search operators were used to increase accuracy and reduce search time. In searches that retrieved many results, the first 300 titles and/or abstracts retrieved in a search result were assessed for further review. According to findings from Haddaway et al. (2015) when conducting a title search, the first 200-300 articles adequately capture the most relevant literature.

The initial title and/or abstract search yielded 223 articles which were tracked by title, authors, and publishing date in a spreadsheet. Abstracts of all two hundred and twenty-three articles were read thoroughly. The abstracts were evaluated and assessed for topical relevance based on the research questions and the following exclusion and inclusion criteria:

Exclusion criteria:

- Articles from non-peer-reviewed journals, magazines, and books.
- Articles that related only to LGBTQ+ experience and did not pertain to leadership education, higher education, or training and development.
- Articles on the experiences of LGBTQ+ children and adolescents.
- Articles pertaining to leadership education outside of higher education such as in the field of human resource development.

Inclusion criteria:

- Articles on queer or LGBTQ+ students in leadership education.
- Articles on queer or LGBTQ+ faculty in leadership education.
- Articles on queer or LGBTQ+ policies and programs in higher education.

Fifty abstracts met the exclusion and inclusion criteria. All 50 articles were then read in their entirety and compared to the research questions and exclusion/inclusion criteria. Of the 50 articles, 25 were found to fit the criteria for this literature review. The 25 articles were read a second time in their entirety before writing the review. Articles were grouped by decade



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chronologically because historical context influences the perceptions of queer people over time. Torracco (2016) recommends grouping by theme or concept for an integrative literature review, therefore articles were grouped by theme within their respective decades.

## Results

Pre-1990: Visibility. One article prior to 1990 was retrieved that met the criteria for this literature review. This singular article provides a snapshot of the relationship between queerness and leadership education nearly thirty years ago. The image is sobering. Queerness was legally and morally taboo (D'Augelli, 1989) and institutes of higher education responded to any indicators of queer individual's existence with silent indifference (D'Augelli, 1989). As a result, the emerging theme from this era is visibility. If queer people were seen, then perhaps the world would see the injustices against them as well. Table 3 provides a summary of articles for this decade.

**Table 3**
*Articles Retrieved with a Publication Date Pre-1990*

| Year | Author | Summary |
|---|---|---|
| 1989 | D'Augelli | The role of student activists, the evolution of campus climate, and the relationship between administration and gay/lesbian students at Penn State University from 1971-1990. |

*Queer Representation in Leadership Education*. D'Augelli (1989) provides insight into how queer people are perceived by leaders in higher education at the time of the study. First, leaders saw queerness as an immoral or taboo affectation (D'Augelli, 1989). Contextually, it is important to point out that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) had removed homosexuality as a deviant pathology only fourteen years prior to the publishing of D'Augelli's article (Drescher, 2015). It is possible that many people still saw queerness as a mental health disorder at this time which could contribute to the description of queer people as being deviant or immoral. The second emerging description is that leadership believed queer people were simply non-existent (D'Augelli, 1989). In some ways this seems contradictory to the previous description. How can someone be a miscreant if they do not exist? Yet, the overarching description is somewhere in the middle of the two. Queer people are depraved individuals lurking in the shadows of society and the best way to handle that is by ignoring their existence (D'Augelli, 1989).

*Interaction of Queer and Leadership Identities.* If queer people are forced into a state of non-existence, then visibility is the fulcrum of both a queer identity and leadership identity during this decade (D'Augelli, 1989). Queer students who wanted to change the narrative, did so by pointing out the injustices happening to them at institutes of higher education and beyond (D'Augelli, 1989). To have a marginal amount of visibility, these students were forced to make so much noise that they could not be ignored. Thus, whether they wanted to or not,



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every queer student likely felt it necessary to adopt a role of activism and self-advocacy.

Following in the footsteps of racial minority groups, queer people sought to reduce oppression by boldly pointing it out to the point that it could no longer be ignored by the people in power (D'Augelli, 1989). At this juncture is an early example of how a queer identity may interact with a leadership identity. In acknowledging their oppression, queer students began to question the inequitable power systems and practices that maintained the status quo. This questioning phase is the first step to a desire to initiate change (Mckee & Bruce, 2021; Shields, 2010). In some queer individuals that desire for change translates into action which can manifest as either advocacy or activism (Mckee & Bruce, 2021). For some, the advocate or activist identity is a catalyst for developing a leadership identity (Renn, 2007; Shields, 2010). It is not necessarily by a desire for power or other ulterior motives, although that certainly could have been the case for some. Instead, it is a convergence born by necessity, because to do otherwise would mean remaining invisible.

*University Inclusion of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Leadership Programs*. During the early part of this era, any programs or policies regarding queer people was not meant to protect them but instead existed to police them (D'Augelli, 1989). If higher education institutes implemented protections for queer people or allowed student led activities, then by default they would be admitting that queer people existed. As social institutions, colleges and universities have a moral obligation to protect and nurture their students as part of their social contract (D'Augelli, 1989). Therefore, acknowledging the existence of queer people would acknowledge the failure of these institutions to uphold their contract. Later, when the cry for visibility became too loud, higher education institutions did relent and allow some student-led activities or programs (D'Augelli, 1989). However, researchers and faculty were still prevented from conducting research or teaching queer topics (D'Augelli, 1989). Perhaps because these individuals possess power that could be used to conduct meaningful change within these institutions. If given the opportunity to explore queer topics, then they could use that power to lift queer people instead of keeping them marginalized. In essence, the message from universities was a cold indifference to queer people and a genuine reluctance to support or even include them in programming or policies.

2000-2010: Existence. No articles retrieved between 1990-2000 met inclusion/exclusion search criteria for the final review. The next decade in which articles surfaced was 2000-2010 which produced ten articles for this review. In the leap from the late 1980s to the early 2000s there is a sense that researchers had moved on from the topic of queer visibility as described by D'Augelli (1989), to a broader exploration of how openly queer people fit into the world around them. No longer it seems, was the question "do queer people exist? Instead, the question became "how do they exist?" (Anderson et al., 2009; Dugan et al., 2008; Fox, 2007; Horne et al., 2004; McAllister et al., 2009;



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Renn, 2007; Renn, 2010; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005b; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Table 4 provides a summary of articles for this decade.

**Table 4**
*Articles Retrieved with a Publication Date of 2000-2010*

| Year | Author | Summary |
|---|---|---|
| 2004 | Horne et al. | Heterosexual student leader and resident assistants (RA) report negative attitudes towards queer students. |
| 2005a | Renn & Bilodeau | Queer students progressed through the six stages of the Leadership Identity Development LID model and in a stronger development of their sexual orientation identity. |
| 2005b | Renn & Bilodeau | Queer leadership experiences contribute to development of a queer identity. |
| 2007 | Fox | Explores "safe spaces" for queer people in higher education. |
| 2007 | Renn | There is an involvement-identity cycle that occurs for LGBTQ+ student leaders. When identities intersect, three leader types emerge: LGBT Leader, LGBT Activist, and Queer Activist. |
| 2008 | Dugan et al. | There is no meaningful difference between queer students' capacities for socially responsible leadership and heterosexual students' capacities. |
| 2009 | Anderson et al. | Only 13.3% of student leaders at a dental school felt adequately prepared to work with LGBTQ+ patients. Queer participants perceived more unequal treatment than their heterosexual counterparts. |
| 2009 | McAllister et al. | In a mentorship program connecting LGBTQ+ PhD candidates and established faculty, mentors reported a positive experience with the program. Proteges were generally unsatisfied with the experience. |
| 2010 | Renn | Colleges and universities are a wellspring of research on queer theory and critical evaluation of queer topics, yet institutes of higher education often do not adhere to these theories within their own systems. |
| 2010 | Renn & Ozaki | Student leaders take two paths when it comes to psychosocial identity development. Either they merge their identities, or they run parallel to one another. LGBTQ students tend to merge their paths more than other minority groups. |

*Queer Representation in Leadership Education*. By the early 2000s two personas of how queer people exist emerged in leadership education. The first is that of a helpless victim and is identified by descriptions of queer



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people who are not out or who are newly out (Anderson et al., 2009; Fox, 2007; Horne et al., 2004; Renn, 2010; Renn & Bilodeau 2005b). There is a sense that this group needs to be protected, and that with the right amount of protection or support then they will feel comfortable enough to come out and embrace their identity or sexual orientation. In a university setting, this manifests in the form of safe spaces (Fox, 2007) or mentorship programs (McAllister et al., 2009) and an attitude among allies that, could be argued, verges on

saviorism (Fox, 2007). The message, it seems, is that queer students struggle with internal turmoil over their own identity or orientation and need a soft place to land to process it. However, it is likely that queer students struggle with coming out not because of an internalized uncertainty about their identity or orientation, but because of a legitimate fear of how they will be received in the world if they exist as their true selves (Anderson et al., 2009; Horne et al., 2004). If that is the case, then queer people are not perpetrators of their own victimization. Instead, they are victims of a constructed labyrinth of acceptable queerness and bear the burden of constantly trying to navigate the boundaries of their confines.

Here, then, is where the second description of a queer identity emerges within the literature at the time. That of an activist (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau 2005a; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). If a queer student chose to exceed the level of acceptable queerness, then they were perceived as radical. Perhaps, this is because when queer people freely own their existence it makes some people uncomfortable and any challenge to the comfort of the status quo could be perceived as an act of rebellion (D'Augelli, 1989; Horne et al., 2004). From this perspective then, it is possible to see how a queer identity begins to intertwine with a leadership identity during this decade. Queer people who pushed the boundaries in even the smallest ways likely became representatives for other people in their community who were not yet ready to do the same. Thrust upon this pedestal then, leadership would be a natural segue for students who chose to continue down a path of existing as their true selves.

*Interaction of Queer and Leadership Identities.* In leadership education during this decade, researchers explored how a queer identity interacts with a leadership identity through the lens of a developmental process (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005b; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). The general message is that a queer identity develops over time and in stages (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005b) and that for some people, both a leadership and queer identity run parallel to one another or even intersect and then merge (Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). The premise is rooted in an observed continued cycle of increased leadership leading to increased outness (Renn, 2007). The



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emphasis of outness during this decade is logical. As society considered how queer people exist, the act of coming out was a fundamental element of queer people answering that question in different spaces. By coming out, they inadvertently adopted the activist role and took on the burden of representation within the space they occupied, thus launching the cycle of increased leadership and increased outness. It was part of navigating the new world where queer people could be out, but few still were.

The message reads as empowering, as queer people embrace their queer identity, they also embrace their leadership identity and grow into both. Indeed, this theme of stage development laid the foundation for exploring the complexity of queer leadership identity in later years. Renn & Bilodeau (2005b) find that the experience of identity development differs among people in the queer community who are transgender or a racial minority. Renn (2007) suggests that within the broader queer leader persona, individuals typically fall into an identity that considers leadership a position or one that views leadership as non-positional and more a facet of their identity. Dugan et al. (2008) finds that there is little difference in capacity for leadership between queer individuals and heterosexual individuals.

Beyond empowerment, there are additional considerations to note on the topic of queer identity and leadership identity from this era. First, is the emphasis on coming out. Within the literature, coming out is reduced to a homogenized process that can be defined by steps that explain the experience for nearly all queer people. Yet it is arguable that coming out is not the same for all members of the queer community, nor is it a linear process. Queer individuals may be out in some spheres but not others and they may police their levels of outness to match the comfort levels of who they are around. There is also a dearth of discussion surrounding the privilege of outness. Participants in the studies from this era are all students at universities and have likely had some level of class and race that landed them there. Coming out may not hinder their ability to survive, as is evident by their participation in student leadership programs or LGBTQ+ campus groups. It is unlikely that queer students who faced homelessness or other economic challenges would have the time to invest in such extra-curricular activities.

Another topic that received little attention but is worth further exploration is the impact of a queer identity becoming an individual's sole identity and how that relates to leadership. When a queer person comes out, their gender identity or sexual orientation becomes their identity to everyone else around them regardless of how important it is the queer person themselves (Means et al., 2017). Some queer people likely embrace this identity emphasis, while others fight against it. This premise also leads into further consideration of the topic of "passing" and its relationship to leadership. Queer people whose physical appearance



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matches the norms of their gender or sexual orientation can pass in certain scenarios and in turn, are not forced to adopt the queer identity unless they choose to come out or are outed by someone else (Means et al., 2017). Those who "look" queer are immediately suspect and in turn are labeled with a queer identity by default. The impact of passing and not passing could affect how much a leadership identity is tied to a queer one and how capable an individual is of dividing or merging the two.

*University Inclusion of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Leadership Programs*. It appears that universities began to show up for the queer community during this era through a variety of programs, policies, and research studies that centered queer people (Anderson et al., 2009; Dugan et al., 2008; Fox, 2007; Horne et al., 2004; McAllister et al., 2009; Renn, 2007; Renn, 2010; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005b; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). In one light, the narrative reads as a story of progressive universities that welcomed queer people with open arms. Campuses offered LGBTQ+ clubs and support services for their students (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005b; Renn, 2007). Queer faculty members offered mentorship to queer students (McAllister et al., 2007) and allies turned their offices into safe spaces (Fox, 2007). Yet the untold narrative is that queer students were still experiencing blatant discrimination, bullying, and even physical threats from their peers (Horne et al., 2004; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005b) at the same universities that purportedly embraced them. If there were policies, educational programs, mentorships, and safe spaces in place to protect queer students and promote awareness of queer issues, then why were these students still experiencing discrimination?

Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the approach. Identifying as queer alludes to an alternative expression of gender or sexuality, which can make people uncomfortable. University leadership controlled what was being taught in diversity programs and controlled the parameters of student-led organizations, to avoid heterosexual discomfort, they may have watered down how queer people could show up in policies and programs. As a result, actual queer people did not feel that these programs met their needs (Anderson et al., 2009; Fox, 2007; McAllister et al., 2009). This suggests that the underlying message from universities is that they acknowledged the existence of queer people but wanted to control how they existed within the confines of higher education.

Navigating the integration of queer people into identity-based campus groups and diversity programs was new territory for universities (Renn, 2010). It is logical that there would be some trial and error in the process. Universities were operating on a set of assumptions that perhaps minimized the queer community to a homogenized group. There appears to be an



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assumption that all queer people and their experiences are the same which allowed universities to carve out segregated spaces to put queer people in. Rather than putting forth a concerted effort make all spaces safe, they instead made safe spaces where they could send queer students to deal with their concerns separately from everyone else. Yet for this gap in the needs of queer people and the services being provided, there were some positive outcomes as well. LGBTQ+ groups provided a platform for queer leadership development (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a; Renn & Bilodeau 2005b; Renn, 2007; Dugan et al., 2008) and space for queer communities to develop.

2011-2021: Hierarchies. The final fourteen articles were published in a decade that saw great legal and cultural advancement for queer people. In 2010 "Don't Ask Don't Tell" was repealed (Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111–321, 124 Stat. 3515, 2010). In 2014 the Defense of Marriage Act was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015) effectively legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide. From there, a trickle-down effect occurred as corporations and institutes of higher education created anti-discrimination policies to protect queer people. Without the law on their side, those opposed to queer people had to retreat to ideological battle grounds. The resulting effect then is a segregated world where those with power use apathy and microaggressions to control the queer narrative and ultimately who gets to be queer and in what spaces (Boyland et al., 2016; Brubaker et al., 2011; Case et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2020; González, 2020; Hughes et al., 2020; Jennings, 2011; Kanagala & Oliver, 2019; Means et al., 2017; Olive, 2015; O'Malley et al., 2015; Pitcher, 2020; Pitcher et al., 2020; Pryor, 2020). Table 5 provides a summary of articles for this decade.



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**Table 5**

*Articles Retrieved with a Publication Date of 2011-2021*

| Year | Author | Summary |
|---|---|---|
| 2011 | Brubaker et al. | Evaluation of a program for multicultural social justice leaders in counseling who advocate for LGBTQ+ individuals. |
| 2012 | Case et al. | Examines the process of a university adopting a transgender anti-discrimination policy. |
| 2012 | Jennings | Sexual orientation ranked low or was not included at all in higher education leadership programs. |
| 2015 | Olive | Friendship significantly impacts leadership identity development among queer students. |
| 2015 | O'Malley et al. | LGBTQ+ issues are only marginally included in the broader social justice curriculum for aspiring principals. |
| 2016 | Boyland et al. | Participants in a leadership curriculum that includes LGBTQ+ topics became more aware of LGBTQ+ issues but not interested in enacting meaningful change for handling queer issues. |
| 2017 | Means et al. | Black gay male doctoral students or recent graduates of higher education, student affairs, and leadership education programs describe their experience in higher education. |
| 2019 | Kanagala & Oliver | Queer student affair leaders working in higher education describe their experience. Participants also make recommendations for making higher education more equitable. |
| 2020 | Davis et al. | Academic faculty is diversifying and starting to include more queer people, yet they remain largely underrepresented. |
| 2020 | González | There is a lack of intersectional support for students who are both queer and Hispanic at community colleges. |
| 2020 | Hughes et al. | Students, faculty, and institutional leaders address queer issues at a Jesuit, Catholic university. |
| 2020 | Pitcher | A reimagining of gender equity in higher education to include transgender people. |
| 2020 | Pitcher et al. | Higher education should mirror the structure found within queer and transgender communities to retain queer and transgender college student. |
| 2020 | Pryor | A framework for queer advocacy leadership in higher education. |



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*Queer Representation in Leadership Education*. Queerness and queer people from this era are represented in a hierarchical fashion. The legal and cultural shift likely encouraged more queer people to come out and be out in the various facets of their lives. Yet, the descriptions of queer people suggest that not every person is received equally. White, gay people find less difficulty being out (Pitcher, 2020) than transgender people of color (Davis et al., 2020). Transgender people who identify as either male or female can navigate spaces more smoothly than those who identify as nonbinary or genderqueer (Pitcher, 2020). What this suggests is that there is an acceptable image of queerness that deserves the privilege of outness. Those who do not fit that image are ignored, rejected, or face outright discrimination (Davis et al., 2020; Means et al., 2017; Pitcher, 2020).

In this decade queer people are depicted as complex individuals with multiple intersecting identities (Brubaker et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2020; González, 2020; Kanagala & Oliver, 2020; Means et al., 2017). As queer people explore occupying spaces as "out", they are met with varied levels of reception (Davis et al., 2020; Kanagala & Oliver, 2020; Pitcher, 2020). The emerging description is that individuals who possess more than one marginalized identity such as someone who is both black and queer (Davis et al., 2020; Kanagala & Oliver, 2020) effectively faces pushback akin to that from previous decades. Additionally, someone who identifies as any orientation other than gay or lesbian, or those who are transgender are also faced with greater resistance (Pitcher, 2020). In a society that purports equality for queer people, the recognition of other intersecting identities is necessary for explaining continued inequality within the community. Otherwise, if not for an individual's blackness for example, it is likely they would receive the same privileges as their queer counterparts.

Another description of queer people highlights the way that those who are in power can reinforce a hierarchy within the community. Opposite to descriptions of unique and complex beings, is the flattened image of the token queer (Means et al., 2017; Pryor, 2020). Here, queerness is compounded to a palatable dose and then held up as a representation of social progress. Tokenizing does provide queer people a space for representation of their community (Davis et al., 2020). However, it could also reinforce the image of the "acceptable" queer and perhaps be used as a scapegoat for those in power to avoid doing more than check off a diversity box.

*Interaction of Queer and Leadership Identities.* Within this decade it appears that the hierarchy of queer identities interacts with the manifestation of a leadership identity. Again, there is complexity likely driven by the segregation of spaces ideologically accepting of queer folks. Researchers appear to navigate this complexity and



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explore the relationship between a queer identity and a leadership identity in several ways.

The first is like the previous decade that directly ascribes a leadership identity to a queer one (Davis et al., 2020; Kanagala & Oliver, 2020; Means et al., 2017; O'Malley et al., 2014; Pryor, 2020). Much like the activist theme from the early 2000s (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005b; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010), researchers appear to attribute a positive relationship between the development of a leadership identity and the development of a queer one. However rather than broadly including all queer folks, researchers in this decade describe this phenomena specifically in populations with intersecting identities such as queer racial minorities (Davis et al, 2020; Kanagala & Oliver, 2020) or in queer identities still on the fringes of acceptability (Pitcher, 2020). The general message then, it appears, is that folks who fit this narrative are inherently thrust into a leadership or representative role by choosing to come out. Furthermore, these individuals must engage in more policing of their identities and navigation of when and how much to come out than some of their peers (Kanagala & Oliver, 2020; Means et al., 2017).

Unlike the previous decade, this phenomenon is not the case for all queer people. Individuals who fit the image of acceptable levels of queerness as defined by the status quo are free to be out in most spaces without having to take on a leadership role (Brubaker et al., 2011; Pitcher, 2020). With this freedom comes a reduction in the emotional burden of continuous self-advocacy and self-policing for culturally acceptable behavior or appearance. Furthermore, individuals who fit the societal definitions of acceptable queerness may be invited into leadership roles not privy to their less desirable counterparts. Thus, the token queer who is often the spokesperson for the community at-large is often selected not because they are truly representative leader, but because they reinforce the image of who a queer person is among the status quo. Naturally, these queer people still cannot access all spaces and it is likely that many of them still face exclusions, discrimination, and microaggressions on a regular basis. However, these instances are likely less impactful or even frequent than their peers with intersecting marginalized identities.

In the space between the two descriptions of queer leaders, is privilege and the emergence of a third interaction between queer identities and leadership identities. The role of advocacy (Case et al., 2012). Community has always been important to queer people (Olive, 2015; Pitcher et al., 2020). The stigma that can attach itself to coming out, has historically led to many queer people being abused or rejected by family members and ostracized or even kicked out of social groups. As a result, queer people have traditionally sought acceptance among themselves. Sometimes to the point of recreating family structures (Pitcher et al., 2020). There is a sense of safety and



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belonging in these communities that comes when the pressure of constant explanation is peeled away (Olive, 2015). With a sense of camaraderie, it is possible that queer people who possess more privilege will advocate for others who have less within their community. Indeed, examples of this emerge in the literature of queer faculty advocating for their students in institutes of higher education (Davis et al., 2020; Kanagala & Oliver, 2019).

The role of advocacy and its relationship to leadership education is just one of the topics worth further exploration from this era. Within the same realm, a deeper look at the power of privilege and its relationship to both queer and leadership identities could provide some fascinating insight. Further areas of interest require an inquiry into the broader system. If the potential connection between leadership and queerness during this decade is understanding who an acceptable type of queer is, then it could be beneficial to learn more about who is creating that narrative. Although there is still identity-based segregation within the queer community (Kanagala & Oliver, 2020), it is unlikely that queer people wish to occupy any space as anything other than their authentic self. If that is the case, then there must be other people controlling the narrative, and further investigation could help define who and why that is.

*University Inclusion of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Leadership Programs*. During this decade, researchers take a more critical approach to studying how universities are including gender identity and sexual orientation in their leadership programs. Rather than holding these programs up as an example of progress, researchers hold them up as evidence that something is missing (Boyland et al., 2016; Brubaker et al., 2011; Case et al., 2012; González, 2020; Hughes et al., 2020; Jennings, 2012; O'Malley et al., 2014). One emerging theme is that on a broad scale, queer topics are largely excluded from diversity and equity programs (Jennings, 2012; O'Malley et al., 2014). In a sense it is not that queer topics and issues are excluded for nefarious reasons but are instead reduced to a topic of lesser importance than others. It is possible that facilitators of these programs see queer topics as less pressing because so much equality has been achieved in the past decade. There is also the possibility that these facilitators harbor some sort of ideological opposition towards queer people. After all, it is the one marginalized population whose actual existence has always been called into question. Whatever the reasoning, minimizing queer issues in far-reaching educational programs potentially reinforces attitudes that there is no need to expand queer rights or evaluate who is an acceptable queer and why. Furthermore, the responsibility of educating students on queer issues falls on individuals who are invested in the topic (Boyland et al., 2016; O'Malley et al., 2016). As a result, institutes of higher education are vulnerable to pockets of segregation as educators within different departments either take



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it upon themselves to teach about queer issues or choose to remain apathetic towards the topic (O'Malley et al., 2016).

Among the individuals taking up queer issues, are people who they themselves are openly queer (Brubaker et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2020; Kanagala & Oliver, 2020; Pitcher, 2020; Pitcher et al., 2020). This is significant because for the first time in history, queer people in academia are researching and recounting their experiences with minimized fear of repercussion. The narrative from these researchers provides valuable insight into the broader desires of queer people in higher education. They desire an environment that allows for true representation of queer people as their authentic selves in university positions of power (Brubaker et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2020; Kanagala & Oliver, 2020; Pitcher, 2020; Pitcher et al., 2020).

The message of authentic representation is woven into articles critically analyzing existing university programs. Within the overarching theme there is call for programs that recognize and support individuals with intersecting identities (González, 2020) and for policies that explicitly offer protections for all queer people (Hughes et al., 2020). The threads of this analysis suggest a shift in the role that sexual orientation and gender identity fit into leadership education. In the attempt to integrate openly queer people into society, there is only so much expansion that can occur when trying to fit identities into a system built on the premise of their nonexistence. It is possible then that this phase of critical analysis will give way to a call for a reckoning of current systems and the eventual possibility of building new more equitable ones.

## Conclusion

In reviewing the literature on queer topics in leadership education there is both evidence of great advancement and a repeating narrative of the same issues. Broadly, it would be easy to believe that the work is finished. Yet the literature reviewed here also suggests that systemically, things may not have changed all that much. It appears that the underlying narrative of queerness is still being controlled by those in power who are either apathetic to queer issues or uncomfortable with challenging heterosexual norms. Almost thirty years out and higher education is still mulling over whether queer people exist and if they do then how are they allowed to exist. Now, rather than gays and lesbians (D'Augelli, 1989) the contention is with transgender folks or other people who identify outside of sexual or gender binaries (Davis et al., 2020; Pitcher et al., 2020). Many higher education institutes have policies in place that protect queer people, but how far and to whom those protections extend is still questioned (Davis et al., 2020; Pitcher, 2020). Leadership education programs are now in place that address queer topics, yet the burden of the work is still left to educators who specialize in the topic (O'Malley et al., 2015).

In a little over thirty years, queer people have seen vast advancements in how they are received in society. Leadership education literature reflects those advancements but also presents areas of further work to be done as



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well. A pattern emerges that has been repeated over the decades. Queer people desire to live as their authentic selves, yet they are prevented from doing so. In turn, they must become advocates for themselves and rely on activism to obtain progress. Once they reach a volume that is heard by leaders in higher education, then policies and programs are created to reflect the desired change. The cycle is then repeated every time queer people seek to obtain further control of their narrative. The implication then, is that queer allies must do more. Queer people must have accomplices in the proverbial trenches, who will leverage their privileges (e.g., their heterosexual privilege) to break the cycles that we continue to see.

Of interest then is a further investigation into why this cycle exists in the first place, the mechanisms that allow for its perpetuation, and finally how the cycle can be broken. Modern queer people exist in a societal framework built on the premise that they did not exist (D'Augelli, 1989). Therefore systems, such as those at colleges and universities have been developed over a long span of time without space for queerness or queer people. Now, those same colleges and universities are inviting queer people into those systems and expecting that they will fit a mold without considering what happens when a person's identity or orientation is a different shape. Exploring how queer people fit or do not fit into these systems would provide interesting insight, as well as researching the deconstruction and rebuilding of systems into something more equitable. Interest must be paid to queer allies in positions of power, especially educators, and their essential role in eradicating the oppression that persists on campuses particularly.

There is also the influence of attitudes and ideologies of people in power that is worth exploring. Historically speaking, thirty years is not so far removed from our realities and consciousness and there are people in power who were likely around when the common belief was that queer people are an abomination. It is essential to uncover how these biases manifest. Perhaps, the indifference from leadership towards queer issues or a reluctance to expand on who is queer, stems from a deeper negative ideology about queer people (Boyland et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2020; O'Malley et al., 2014). It is possible that the discomfort of these individuals leads to the indifference or reluctance to expand queer policies and programs or give queer people more control over controlling their own narrative.

Furthermore, some of these individuals may hold other discriminatory beliefs which could contribute to the hierarchy of acceptability in the queer community and the emergence of "token" queer people. Perhaps on a broader level then, a topic worth exploring is power and who has it and why. On the topic of power, manifested privilege within the queer community is a topic worth potential exploration. The final decade reviewed provided the most examples of differing levels of privilege among queer people (Kanagala & Oliver, 2020; Means et al., 2017). Yet it is probable that privilege differentials within the community run deep and far back historically. Since the literature in leadership education is sparse, there is room to explore this further. Finally, the role of advocacy within the queer community and whether queer people with more privilege advocate for those with less.

As educators, we must acknowledge, validate, and address the unique needs of the students for whom we are charged with serving. It is our responsibility to not only educate ourselves about the needs of our constituent communities, but to then to position ourselves



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as allies and advocates for these students, in our classrooms and in our curriculums. Becoming involved with campus advocacy for queer students, attending and learning from workshops centering queer identities, and being vocal allies in all spaces are just some of the ways that it is essential that allies show up on campuses. Further, in our curriculums, we must find ways to center queer voices and queer experiences-- even when that means moving away from the hollowed tomes that have been familiar to us. It is not enough to have a case study here or there; we must intentionally engage in queering our curriculums to inculcate the queer experience in leadership as equal to that of the white heteronormative experience.

Progress has been made towards addressing queer issues, yet there is still room for improvement. Leadership Education is one of those areas as is evident by the dearth of literature on the topic. While the lack of research is concerning, it also provides a vast array of areas for researchers to explore. The task may seem daunting, but it is important to find the gaps so that leadership educators can help enact meaningful positive change in the lives of queer people.



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