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LGBTQ Research in physical education: a rising tide?

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ABSTRACT

Background: LGBTQ scholarship in physical education has a history tracing back to 1982. Recently, however, there has been a ‘rising tide’ in LGBTQ studies in physical education. Despite this recent surge there has not been a genuine attempt to critically understand, track, and map the scope of this literature.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to identify, categorize, and analyze published scholarship and peer-reviewed research on LGBTQ issues in physical education.

Design and Analysis: An exhaustive search was conducted on nine databases which produced 230 abstracts that was reduced down to 76 manuscripts chosen for inclusion. Articles were coded independently for numerous aspects of the scholarship and research. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and then deductively conceptualized drawing on critical social theories.

Conclusions: Whilst there is a current surge in LGBTQ focused research in physical education, such work is met with a complex web of interconnected and staunch problems that limit researchers. As such, the authors end with suggestions that can make the field more amicable for LGBTQ inspired research and researchers.

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Sexuality; cruel optimism; systematic analysis; queer; critical

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. (Berlant 2011, 1)

Introduction

We were inspired to write this paper in order to emphasize the progress that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/ Questioning (LGBTQ) research has made in physical education (PE). Our optimism on this topic, however, was met with a complex and interconnected web of staunch problems that we, as a field, have yet to consider addressing. From the outset, we want to assert we are hopeful about the trends and progress that LGBTQ research has made over the past 30+ years (in PE). In the midst of our optimism, we wanted to add something greater to the field than a run of the mill literature review. Rather, we aimed to conduct a systematic analysis of LGBTQ scholarship.

We took the approach of a systematic analysis for a few reasons. First, a systematic analysis of literature is different from a literature review. A literature review synthesizes research on a particular area of study. A systematic analysis of literature, on the other hand, codes published scholarship in order to identify trends in the field (Silverman and Skonie 1997). Amidst our optimism, we hoped

this analysis would shed light on past and present scholarship to build towards the future. Some of the topics we coded included the theories used, methods employed, and countries of origin, amongst others. Second, a systematic analysis allowed us to broaden our examination of LGBTQ scholarship. As such, we use the term scholarship (instead of research) for a specific reason. Much work on LGBTQ issues in PE has been philosophical, literature reviews, or creative pieces (in addition to research). Given this, we did not want to exclude such important and varied work and felt it was crucial to recognize that LGBTQ scholarship needs these additional outlets because of the homophobic environments that ensconce LGBTQ researchers (and research) in PE. There is a complicated, entangled history related to issues around these topics. As such, we foreground our analysis of scholarship with a brief genealogy of LGBTQ research in PE.

LGBTQ research in PE: a brief genealogy

In 1970, Larry Locke collaborated with his graduate student, Mary Jensen, to research the 'heterosexuality' of women in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programs. Locke and Jensen (1970) conducted a quantitative survey exploring the percentage of women PE majors who displayed 'heterosexual' behaviors, observed 'heterosexual' behaviors, and stereotypes. Looking back on this, it may be considered strange (and perhaps impossible) to classify behaviors as 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' because sexuality is contextual. Yet, the fact there is such research from this time illustrates the interconnected and vexed historical relationship between PE and sexuality. In other words, sexuality has a history of being engrained in PE, explicitly (Cahn 1994; Griffin 1998) and implicitly (Pronger 1995). One of the significant findings of Locke and Jensen's research was that some women were described as 'not preferring to marry.' Locke and Jensen did not label these women as lesbians; that was, however, the implicit assumption. Notably, having this label (not preferring to marry) came with negative connotations.

Fast forward 12 years, Cobhan (1982) wrote the first publication (book chapter in a Lesbian Studies collection) under a pseudonym that explicitly addressed homosexuality (not heterosexuality) in PE. Cobhan was a secretary in a University PE Department where she noted many lesbian professors lingered in the closet and avoided LGBTQ topics. Cobhan (1982) reflected on this silence and claimed, 'To date, there has been no serious feminist analysis of the place of lesbianism – either actually or philosophically – in sport and physical education' (180). Cobhan chalked up this lack of investigation due to the homophobic and discriminatory nature of PE. The book chapter is integral because she noted the high number of lesbian physical educators; yet, very little research on these women in sport and PE.

Seven years later, Griffin (1989) published a practitioner suggestions article that provided advice on addressing homophobia in PE. In the article, in the *CAHPER Journal* of Canada, Griffin (U.S. based scholar) called for an open dialogue about homosexuality in PE and gave five recommendations to make PE more inclusive: (a) reading resources on homophobia; (b) attending professional development; (c) reflecting on our own homophobic actions; (d) consider the ways silence promotes homophobia; and (e) monitor school curricula and policies for homophobic bias. Thirty years later, many of these recommendations are still not addressed in the field of PE.

The first empirical manuscripts on LGBTQ issues in PE were published in 1992 by Sherry Woods and Karen Harbeck (Woods 1992; Woods and Harbeck 1992). In exploring the lives of lesbian physical educators, Woods and Harbeck found teachers had to split their personal and professional lives while managing and concealing their identities in school settings. Much of Woods and Harbeck's work was reinforced and built on by Sparkes (1994); especially illustrating the ways lesbian teachers had to divide their personal and private lives because of their status as physical educators during Section 28 United Kingdom (U.K.). In line with these initial empirical studies, much of the research published from the 1990s outlined the homophobic and heteronormative environments that lesbian physical educators faced in schools (Clarke 1996, 1998). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Sykes (1998a, 2001) proffered an alternative narrative claiming that, whilst teachers were constricted in

their identity formation, they were also active in the construction of such identities. The work by Clarke and Sykes would prove to be foundational for the field of LGBTQ research in PE because it documented the lives of lesbian teachers.

Moving into the twenty-first century, greater interest was placed on the environments in which LGBTQ persons were ensconced. Researchers across the world documented heterosexist, homophobic, heteronormative, and derogatory remarks and behaviours in PE settings (Morrow and Gill 2003; Sykes 2004; Gill et al. 2010; Piedra et al. 2014, 2016). Given this, it is no surprise that the latest international climate report has indicated LGBTQ persons found PE to be exclusionary (Denison and Kitchen 2015). As we read the LGBTQ scholarship, we hoped to be optimistic. Empirical, theoretical, and practitioner scholarship had begun to offer a foundation and some promise to discuss pertinent issues. Then lisahunter (2019) reasserted Cobhan's initial revelation, noting the amount of LGBTQ identified persons within PE juxtaposed with a lack of LGBTQ scholarship. This led lisahunter to stating: 'What a queer space HPE is, or is it yet?' Her reassertion caught our attention. Was this the cruel optimism (Berlant 2010) of it all? The promise of LGBTQ scholarship hovered 'in its potentialities' (93); a foundation had been established for PE and researchers to explore these (heated) issues. In this systematic review, we hoped to uncover and imagine where this foundation might go and what it might do.

Theoretical framework: cruel optimism

We began the paper with a quote from Lauren Berlant, acknowledging the concept of cruel optimism. As we looked through the past and think towards the future, we can't help but wonder if cruel optimism will haunt and vex 'us' (the PE field), especially as we *try* to work through and bring greater visibility to LGBTQ issues to transform the field to be more inclusive. We argue that PE is comprised of many LGBTQ teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Yet, much silence remains around LGBTQ research in PE, especially with current youth. This registered with us as cruel optimism (Berlant 2010). On the one hand, there is a pressing need to address LGBTQ issues in the current educational context. According to cruel optimism, LGBTQ research in PE has much potential because of the promising foundation we discussed. As researchers (driven by a sociocritical perspective), we have high hopes to create PE environments that are less hetero- and cis- normative, but rather more inclusive. Yet, we recognize this optimism may also be cruel, or 'discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic' (94). According to Berlant (2011), the things we desire are not singular objects or events, but rather are clusters of promises that come concomitantly with said objects/events. For Berlant then, when we talk about an object of desire or something that we want, we are really talking about a cluster of promises that come along with said desire.

For us, we may be trying to raise LGBTQ awareness, but we are also trying to create safe and equitable spaces, better pedagogy in PE, and a better reputation for the field. We have personal aspirations that are part of this cluster as well. For example, as we write more on this topic, one of prevalence in today's political, social and educational climate, we can gain academic and professional success that comes in the form of awards, tenure, and promotion. But, Lauren Berlant argues this optimism is cruel. Berlant (2011) claimed that we stray from the path of reaching the ultimate goal in order to get seemingly closer to such clusters of goals. She referred to these path-straying tendencies as 'striking affective bargains' (94). In other words, the optimism is cruel because, as we make strides towards achieving that goal, or the cluster of promises, we enter into bargains that make the end goal impossible to reach. So, we continue to settle for 'less' but use that same optimism to keep going. We argue this is an important point to remember as we continue through this paper.

As researchers (with different career stages and subjectivities) entering the field to work with youth and critical issues, we find promise, hope, and/or potential in working with LGBTQ issues in PE. We may enter this work as optimistic, that we can help youth, future teachers, and 'make a difference.' Yet, Berlant (2010) raises awareness to not ignore how optimism is also cruel, tied to a sense of precarity. Indeed, PE is also a precarious space (Kirk 2019, 2020). As such, in this

systematic review and later, in analyzing the scholarship, we remain cognizant of ‘affective bargains’ (Berlant 2010, 94) with emotional costs which cannot allow us to fantasize the bumpy road of sensitive issues.

Methods: systematic analysis of literature

Silverman and Skonie (1997) claimed ‘One avenue for looking at the growth of research in an area is to analyze its research. Published research becomes a record of an area’s scholarship and provides a foundation to understand research trends’ (300). Thus, the purpose of this paper was to (a) identify scholarship addressing LGBTQ topics in PE, (b) navigate emerging trends, and (c) reflect on ways to progress this scholarship in the future. To address this, we took a systematic approach with our methods by identifying, categorizing, and analyzing scholarship addressing LGBTQ issues in PE through 2018. This process is detailed in the following sections.

Identifying scholarship

As previously mentioned, we used the term scholarship because much of the literature included book chapters, reports, theoretical, and creative manuscripts that are foundational to LGBTQ issues in PE. Such an inclusive approach expands the previous work in the sport/ physical activity that examines empirical literature exclusively (Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2019). To be clear in our process, we want to iterate that LGBTQ scholarship was operationally defined as manuscripts that explicitly explored the experiences of LGBTQ persons, the teaching of queer/ LGBTQ topics, homophobia, heterosexism, homoeroticism, heteronormativity, or LGBTQ identities in PE. While we readily concede other topics are interrelated with LGBTQ issues (e.g. masculinities, gender), such manuscripts were not included if they did not explicitly address LGBTQ issues as defined. In addition, the scholarship analyzed focused specifically on PE. Thus, articles in broader fields of sport and human movement were omitted unless they explicitly addressed PE.

An exhaustive search was conducted to identify research published in journals, books, and reports through 2018. To ensure papers were not missed, two persons undertook a literature search in the following databases: Google Scholar, SPORTDiscus, ERIC, Education Research Complete, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, Scopus, Health and Wellness Resource Center, and Web of Science. As is search protocol in systematic analyses (Silverman and Skonie 1997), we first used inclusive keywords (e.g. physical education, LGBTQ, sexuality, etc.) so that any possible studies would be identified. Second, paper titles and abstracts were reviewed to meet inclusion criteria as operationally defined. Over 230 abstracts were reviewed, 97 papers were analyzed in-depth, and 59 manuscripts were chosen for inclusion. To assess the reliability of the papers included, 20% of all abstracts ($n = 46$) were reviewed independently for inclusion. The percentage of agreement for the two sets of decisions was 100%. After included manuscripts were read in-depth, the authors located additional scholarship that did not arise in the search indices by reading bibliographies of manuscripts. In so doing, the authors used a snowball method to review and included an additional 17 manuscripts. This increased the total number of manuscripts in the systematic analysis to 76. A limitation of this paper is that it did not include papers in languages other than English.

Categorizing the codes and creating the tool

After manuscripts were identified for inclusion, they were coded based on numerous factors. Initial categories were developed through thematic analysis of the papers. Two of the authors read papers to develop categories based on information provided in the manuscripts to develop a coding instrument. After initial coding, ten papers were randomly selected and re-coded by three authors to determine reliability. The overall percentage of inter-rater reliability for all categories was 94.7%. Three authors then coded 25 manuscripts and an additional ten to do another test of inter-rater reliability.

This resulted in an inter-observer agreement above 95%. It is important to note that, in some instances, papers did not provide sufficient detail to cover all of the categories. Thus, at the end of the coding/categorizing, the coder had the opportunity to provide notes detailing any issues with the manuscript (e.g. lack of detail, no trustworthiness, etc.) (Table 1).

Data analysis

Data analysis was adapted from Silverman and Skonie's (1997) approach. Prior to data analysis, some categories were collapsed into more meaningful categories. For example, if papers used queer, post-structural, or postmodern theories, these were collapsed into one category called critical theories. One and two-way frequencies were tabulated for categorical values. Descriptive statistics were calculated for continuous values. Notes taken about manuscripts were thematically analyzed and compared to quantitative data to augment or provide further insights. After data were analyzed for themes, all authors discussed these themes in-depth as a form of peer debriefing. We also conducted a negative case check to consider those events that contradicted the themes developed. Given the iterative and rigorous process from identifying scholarship, to categorizing and analyzing, we

Table 1. Categories for coding.

Categories for Coding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year of Manuscript • Number of Authors • Country of Origin • Type of Output <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Article in Practitioner Journal ○ Article in Research Journal ○ Book Chapter ○ Report • Journal Name • Type of Manuscript <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Research Manuscript (Methods/ Data) ○ Literature Review ○ Practitioner Suggestions ○ Philosophical/ Theory Paper ○ Creative Piece ○ Other • Who were participants? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adults (general) ○ In-service teachers ○ MS students ○ HS students ○ LGBTQ adults ○ PETE students ○ University Students (non-PETE) • Theoretical Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Critical Theories ○ Interactionist Theory ○ Psychoanalytical Theory ○ None Listed ○ Type of Research ○ Qualitative ○ Quantitative ○ Mixed Methods • Focus of Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Environment ○ Pedagogy ○ Student Attitude ○ Student Perception/ Experiences ○ Teacher Attitude ○ Teacher Perception/ Experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative Variables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Authority Self Survey ○ Identity Construct ○ Prejudice Measure ○ Student Attitude ○ Student Perception ○ Teacher Perception • Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Correlation Statistics ○ Descriptive Statistics ○ Prediction Statistics ○ Testing of Means • Qualitative Data Collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Autoethnography ○ Digital methods (audio/visual) ○ Fictional narrative ○ Group interview ○ Individual interview ○ Artifact collection ○ Narratives ○ Observations ○ Oral life histories ○ Questionnaires • Data Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Analytical memos ○ Constant comparative analysis ○ Theoretical/ deductive analysis ○ Discourse analysis ○ Qualitative coding ○ Thematic analysis ○ Not Stated • Did the research have LGBTQ participants? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes ○ No • What LGBTQ subjectivities identified? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bisexual ○ Gay man ○ Lesbian woman ○ Queer more broadly ○ Transgender

believe the results below are a ‘trustworthy’ account of the findings. We then examined these trends in relation to some concepts used in Berlant’s (2011) *Cruel Optimism*. As such, the way data were interpreted and (re-)presented arose inductively through the data and then linked to overarching theory in order to make sense of these trends using theoretical depth.

Results

We provide results in two distinct sections. In the first section, we offer a brief overview of all scholarship reviewed to be inclusive of non-empirical literature as well as research. The second section is an in-depth analysis of the empirical research published.

Analysis of scholarship more broadly

Overall, we reviewed 76 manuscripts from 1982 through 2018. In this section, we draw on descriptive statistics to examine three trends. First, we analyzed the amount of scholarship published by year bands. As seen in Figure 1, since the 1990s there has been a steady flow of LGBTQ scholarship produced. There is a rise in scholarship being published more recently indicating a potential upward trend.

Second, we found it important to consider the types of manuscripts published. In Table 2, we drew on descriptive statistics to illustrate that less than half of published scholarship (48.68%; $n = 37$) were empirically based research and 27.63% ($n = 21$) were coded as philosophical/theoretical papers.

Lastly, we examined the outlets where LGBTQ scholarship was published. Notably, 63.16% ($n = 48$) of all scholarship has been published in research journals and 30.26% ($n = 23$) of manuscripts were published as book chapters (Table 3).

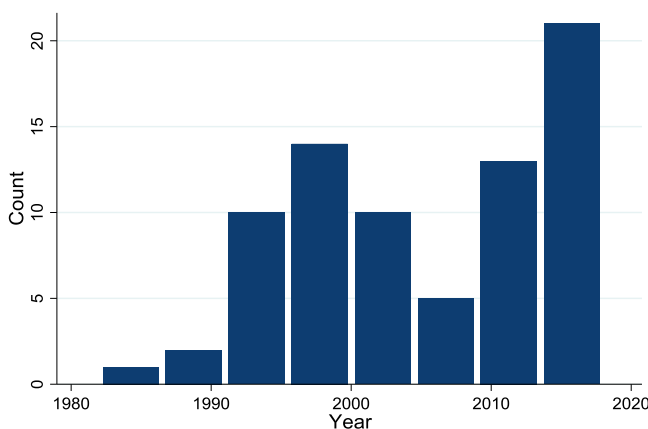


Figure 1. Overall LGBTQ scholarship yearly trends.

Table 2. Research by manuscript type.

Manuscript Type	Frequency	Percentage
Creative Piece	3	3.95%
Historical	1	1.32%
Literature Review	6	7.89%
Conceptual/ Theory Paper	21	27.63%
Practitioner Article	8	10.53%
Research	37	48.68%
Total	76	100%

Analysis of empirical research

The second part of our analysis is an in-depth examination of the empirical research studies (manuscripts with methods and data) on LGBTQ issues in PE. As noted previously, there have only been 37 empirical papers published through 2018. Our first analysis was to examine these published empirical papers by year band. The first empirical paper on LGBTQ issues in PE was not published until the 1990s. Since then, there has been an upward trend in empirical studies. For example, 40.54% ($n = 15$) of the overall empirical research has been published from 2012 to 2018. Figure 2 outlines this trend more explicitly.

The second area we examined were the outlets by which these empirical manuscripts have been published. Research journals published 81.08% of all empirical manuscripts ($n = 30$). Book chapters published 16.22% of manuscripts ($n = 6$) and one report was published (2.70%).

The third area we found to be important is where research took place. The United Kingdom (U.K.) ($n = 9$) and the United States (U.S.) ($n = 9$) combined served as the setting for 48.64% of research manuscripts on LGBTQ issues in PE. Both Spain ($n = 5$) and Canada ($n = 5$) respectively produced 13.51% of published research. As noted in Table 4, four other countries and one international study was responsible for 24.34% of the empirical research. It is important to elaborate on the empirical scholarship from Spain and Canada. Of the five Canadian publications, four are sole authored by Heather Sykes (e.g. 2001, 2004), with none published in PE journals. In Spain, the University of Valencia has a group of scholars working on LGBTQ scholarship (Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2016; Devís-Devis et al. 2018b, 2018a) (Table 4).

In addition to the setting, we found it important to examine where LGBTQ research is published. *Sport, Education and Society* (SES) and *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* (PESP) are journals based in the UK. Combined, SES ($n = 4$) and PESP ($n = 6$) account for 27.03% of all research publications. *Quest* and *The Physical Educator* (TPE) are PE journals based in the U.S. These journals account for a combined 5.04% ($n = 2$) of empirical publications. We did not classify *Research*

Table 3. Research by output type.

Output Type	Frequency	Percentage
Practitioner Journals	4	5.26%
Research Journals	48	63.16%
Book Chapters	23	30.26%
Report	1	1.32%
Total	76	100%

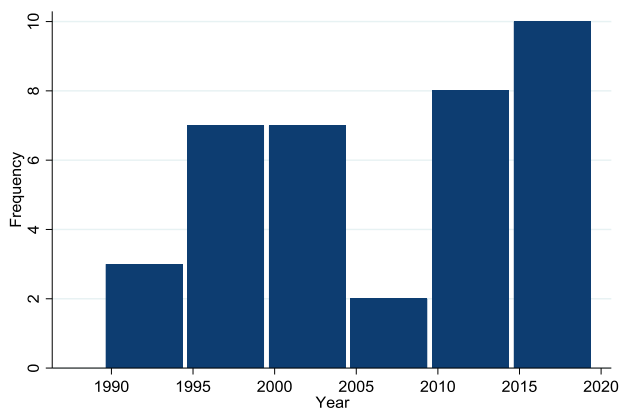


Figure 2. Trends in LGBTQ empirical research.

Table 4. Research by country of origin.

Country of Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Canada	5	13.51%
Greece	1	2.70%
International (Multiple)	1	2.70%
New Zealand	1	2.70%
Spain	5	13.51%
Sweden	3	8.11%
Turkey	3	8.11%
United Kingdom	9	24.32%
United States	9	24.32%
Total	37	100%

Quarterly for Exercise and Sport (RQES) as a PE journal because most of their manuscripts are in exercise science more broadly. According to Table 5, the overwhelming number of research manuscripts (64.86%; $n = 24$) were published outside of PE journals. It is important to recognize, again, that we only reviewed manuscripts written in English. We believe this influenced these results in particular.

In examining the methods of the papers, 67.57% of research was classified as qualitative ($n = 25$), 24.32% as quantitative ($n = 9$), and 8.11% as mixed methods ($n = 3$). The amount of qualitative empirical research published was significantly higher than quantitative and mixed methods. Qualitative research focused on teacher perceptions ($n = 15$), the PE environment ($n = 8$), and student perceptions ($n = 9$). Predominant forms of data collection included individual interviews (68% of cases, $n = 17$), oral life histories (24% of cases, $n = 7$), group interviews (12.0% of cases, $n = 3$), and observations (12.0% of cases, $n = 3$). Other methods such as questionnaires, digital methods, autoethnography, and others were used sparingly (in one or two cases). Qualitative research also used critical social theories 58.3% of the time ($n = 21$). Of the quantitative studies, the variables examined were student attitudes ($n = 5$), prejudice measurements ($n = 2$), identity construction ($n = 1$), and student perception ($n = 1$). Surveys were used in all quantitative and mixed methods studies. Only one mixed methods paper used interviews.

Table 5. Research frequency by journal.

Journal	Frequency	Percentage
Physical Education Journals		
Journal of Physical Education and Sport (Romania)	1	2.70%
Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy (UK)	6	16.22%
Quest (USA)	1	2.70%
Sport, Education and Society (UK)	4	10.81%
The Physical Educator (USA)	1	2.70%
Sport/ Physical Activity Focused Journals		
Journal of Sport Management (USA)	1	2.70%
Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport (USA)	1	2.70%
Sociology of Sport Journal (USA)	1	2.70%
Sport in Society (UK)	1	2.70%
Women in Sport and Physical Activity (USA)	1	2.70%
Journals More Broadly		
Education Journals	4	10.81%
LGBTQ and Gender Studies Journals	5	13.51%
Psychology Journals	2	5.41%
Youth Theatre Journal	1	2.70%
Non-Journals		
Book Chapters	6	16.22%
Reports	1	2.70%
Total	37	100%

The last area we examined were the participants. Notably, none of the participants were current K-12 students. Additionally, despite this systematic review being focused on LGBTQ scholarship, only 70.27% ($n = 26$) of the research papers involved LGBTQ participants. Most of the participants were in-service teachers ($n = 16$, 43.24%). The subjectivities reported of the LGBTQ participants varied within individual articles and across the empirical scholarship. Of the 26 studies that had LGBTQ participants, 73.08% ($n = 19$) of cases included lesbians, 26.92% ($n = 7$) gay men, 23.08% ($n = 6$) queer identified, 15.38% ($n = 4$) bisexual, and 3.85% ($n = 1$) transgender. Clearly, there is a lack of research amongst many LGBTQ persons and all LGBTQ youth.

Discussion: a rising tide?

In this discussion, we return to two concepts that we outlined in the beginning of the paper. The first of which is the title, ‘a rising tide’ in PE. One might argue that because of the upward trend documented in overall scholarship and empirical research, that the PE field may be experiencing a rising tide. As such, we are optimistic in the continued proliferation of such scholarly endeavors. Yet, the results also provide a more nuanced view of this optimism and, at many times, could be considered cruel (the second concept). In other words, with this framework of cruel optimism, we cannot address those hopeful promises without attention towards ethical, political, and social questions of LGBTQ research in PE. We present a few of these ‘compromised conditions of possibility’ (Berlant 2010, 94) here.

First, we acknowledge that research by, on, and with lesbian physical educators and teacher educators as the foundation for this line of research. The early work of Griffin, Clarke, and Lenskyj served as a starting point for researchers and practitioners to build. Such work was followed by the insights of Sykes and Gill. Both of these scholars in different ways, refined the field methodologically qualitatively and quantitatively respectively. Sykes for example, pushed the boundaries by using queer and psychoanalytical theories in sophisticated ways as part of qualitative data analysis (e.g. Sykes 1996, 1998b). Gill, on the other hand, was instrumental in quantitatively measuring sexual prejudice and attitudes (Gill et al. 2006), as well as developing a measure to understand physical activity climates for sexual minorities (Gill et al. 2010). It is because of these scholars that we are in a position today to even begin to imagine a progressive sense of optimism for the future.

Yet, little mention is given to the path-finding work these women have produced over the years. This is one such cruel aspect of LGBTQ research in PE. It is possible, even as scholars push these issues forth, they are mired in discourses of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity (Flintoff 2000; Fitzpatrick 2013; Oliver and Kirk 2015) and, as such, fail to be recognized. So, whilst we celebrate the achievements of the women who came before us, we cannot help but return to Berlant’s concept of cruel optimism due to complexities in this line of research.

These complexities were found in the numerous silences that stuck out in this analysis. These are the silences regarding the countries (and scholars) engaged in this research, the journal outlets that publish such work, and the future of research with current LGBTQ youth. For instance, specific individuals and/or research groups have strongly affected LGBTQ research in the twenty-first century. In Canada, this has been Sykes (Chapman, Sykes, and Swedberg 2003; Sykes 2011, 2001). In Spain, it has been Devis-Devis and others from the University of Valencia (Pérez-Samaniego et al. 2016; Devis-Devis et al. 2018a, 2018b). In Sweden, Larsson and colleagues (Larsson, Redelius, and Fagrell 2011; Larsson, Quennerstedt, and Öhman 2014) are at the forefront. Publications from the UK were greatly influenced by Clarke (1997, 1998, 1996) in the 1990s but have become sparser in recent years. LGBTQ scholarship in the U.S. has been led by Gill and colleagues (Morrow and Gill 2003; Gill et al. 2006; Gill et al. 2010).

We do not necessarily wish to single out individuals or specific groups, but it is essential to note, even in upward trends, it is a cruel optimism when we ask is it really a ‘rising tide’ if this area of scholarship rests on the shoulders of a few individuals? If this is to get better, we cannot solely

rely on LGBTQ authors to do such work. Rather, straight allies are crucial partners in helping move the field forward by conducting research with LGBTQ persons and issues. One such example of ally work is that of Katie Fitzpatrick in New Zealand (Fitzpatrick 2013; Fitzpatrick and Enright 2016; Fitzpatrick and McGlashan 2016). By being an ally, not only is she publishing important work, but she is also attracting postgraduate students that research these issues (McGlashan 2013; Landi 2018). Given this, straight allies are integral to shifting the field forward.

This brings us to another consideration from the systematic analysis: the sensitivity and accessibility of working with LGBTQ youth in school settings. This connects to issues of methods, participants, and consent/assent. 'Gender and sexualities are affect-laden topics' (Niccolini 2016, 244) that can illicit affects deemed unsafe and homophobic in educational settings. Schools can be precarious settings for LGBTQ youth, and we run the risk of making the lives worse for these children by conducting such research. In this light, it is important to note, there were few studies that used observations perhaps because of this risk or access.

Much of the LGBTQ research related to perceptions of students in PE has been reflective in nature (adults looking back) (Sykes 2011). Not a single published manuscript through 2018 explicitly worked with current LGBTQ youth. The first published manuscript to do so was published last year (Landi 2019b), based on work from my (Dillon) PhD thesis in New Zealand. Furthermore, the literature also has major gaps around transgender persons, gay men, bisexual persons, and queer identities more broadly. Whilst most of the research in this review was with lesbian participants – the majority were teachers. Given this, there are still critical silences amongst lesbian youth. It should be noted that some of these gaps are starting to be addressed, for example transgender experiences in PE are being explored in Spain (Devís-Devís et al. 2018b, 2018a; López-Cañada et al. 2019) and New Zealand (Landi 2019a). Research has also been conducted with gay/ queer and lesbian youth (Landi 2019a). Despite this, there is a critical lack of research with LGBTQ persons, and especially transgender youth, that needs to be addressed across multiple settings.

We consider the lack of research with queer youth to be one of the affective bargains that researchers must consider. Methods, participants, and consent/assent are ethical issues. While policy and educational advancements make New Zealand a convivial place to study LGBTQ issues, where the age of consent is 16, this is not the case everywhere. In the U.S., anyone under the age of 18 requires consent from their parents and/or guardians prior to engaging in research. As researchers in critical (and sensitive) topics, we recognize a need to be cognizant in working with LGBTQ youth. Young people may not be ready to disclose their sexual orientation/gender identity to their parents and/or guardians as there is no guarantee they will be supported and/or accepted. Also, to respect the privacy of these youth, we may choose not to conduct observations to limit the chances of 'outing' students to their classmates. As such, even if youth are interested in engaging in research and even if we work to make our efforts more inclusive and collaborative, there are cruel and mitigating circumstances that affect our efforts.

This brings us to the last pattern, or concern, that arose from the systematic analysis: the lack of empirical publications in PE journals, and more specifically, within U.S. PE journals. Only one-third of the empirical scholarship in LGBTQ issues (33.33%; $n = 12$) were published in PE journals. Importantly, 75% ($n = 9$) of those empirical papers from PE journals were published in *PESP* and *SES*. United States PE journals, on the other hand, have rarely published such research in their outlets. Thus far, only *Quest* and *The Physical Educator* are U.S. PE journals to have published LGBTQ manuscripts. Again, we are met with a cruel optimism as we make decisions about where to publish our research.

We want to be clear. In deeper analysis, we are not suggesting this is the fault of any single journal, field, or individual. The results from the systematic analysis are connected to broader political, social, and organizational factors. For example, while 25% of all research manuscripts were based in the U.S., only 5.56% of manuscripts were published in U.S. PE journals. This large gap needs to be examined and we argue this disparity may be affected by a number of reasons. For one, it may be tied to

the affective bargains that LGBTQ PE researchers make along the way. If researchers choose not to use particular methods (like observations) for ethical concerns of students, editors and reviewers may consider this a limitation according to traditional methodological standards. There are additional methodological and political questions about the research process itself. For example, there are way more heterosexual students than LGBTQ students. As such, making a quantitative (or even qualitative) analytical comparison between the two groups will prove to be difficult. In reflecting on research in PE more broadly, overwhelming majority of research in PE, we argue, has been ‘straight’ research, or conducted with a heteronormative lens and void of any questions around sexualities or genders. As LGBTQ researchers, we may have a political and cultural need to *queer* these straight approaches rather than reproduce them. By queering, we mean subvert normative understandings around sexuality, gender, and research (Coll, Ollis, and O’Keeffe 2020). Such queering, or subversion, of traditional norms may not be favorable with editorial boards and reviewers that have benefitted from the heteronormative system.

Finally, the limited number of LGBTQ manuscripts in U.S. PE journals may also be tied to the lack of peer-reviewers and editorial board members available to thoroughly evaluate critical topics (e.g. research based in critical theories). In the U.S., there are only a handful of active critical researchers. This links to a broader concern of paradigmatic closure. Nearly 60% of LGBTQ research in PE is informed by critical theories. As noted by Gard and Pluim (2017), the U.S. has a lack of critical scholarship in PE. From claims made by Gard and Pluim, there are ethico-methodological, political, and social issues to contend with in the U.S. and, we add, this might connect to LGBTQ research. Thus, while we have high aspirations for LGBTQ research in PE, as U.S.-based researchers, we may ultimately make affective bargains, often publishing critical scholarship in non-U.S. based journals, which currently offers that platform. These silences – from the lack of research with LGBTQ youth to the publication discrepancies between U.S. and U.K.-based PE journals – again, bring us into a cruel optimism that affects the tenurability of LGBTQ research focused faculty.

Conclusions (and beginnings)

We want to ‘end’ on an optimistic note and suggest that, in raising awareness of these silences, we can push for change in LGBTQ research in PE. We take our cue from Burrows, Leahy, and Wright (2019) in that, just because cruel optimism produces an unachievable utopia, doesn’t mean we should ignore efforts to engage in critical work. This paper is significant because it is the first attempt to systematically track the trends of LGBTQ scholarship in PE. In so doing, the paper highlighted methodological issues, critical silences, and presented an overview of the field. Whilst this analysis raised attention to the cruelty associated with LGBTQ research in PE, we offer three suggestions for potential ‘new’ beginnings – or ways to enhance, improve, and help the proliferation of LGBTQ research.

First, we believe to enhance LGBTQ scholarship, PE may do well to look at educational research more broadly. Innovative educational research has increasingly been inclusive of new types of research methods (Strom and Martin 2017). Such formations conceptualize data as something to be generated (Tinning and Fitzpatrick 2012) rather than collected. It entails working with students, building relationships, and being aware of subjectivities each step of the way (Ringrose and Renold 2014; Niccolini, Zarabadi, and Ringrose 2018; Safron 2019). In this case, it may require editors, reviewers, and other stakeholders (advisors, critical friends, etc.) to allow LGBTQ (and other) researchers ‘elbow room’ (Renold 2018) to work with new forms of inquiry that are better suited for their participants. This also means an awareness that, just because this research may not use ‘traditional’ (linear) methods (Lather and St. Pierre 2013; St Pierre 2015), there are critical stories to tell and these (often untold) stories are backed by rigor and a sense of trustworthiness (Fox and Alldred 2015, 2017). By adopting from broader educational fields and taking unique approaches, we see potential to fill the gap regarding the lack of research with LGBTQ, and especially transgender youth.

Second, we want to offer a renaissance of pedagogical practices in the field of PE. To do so, we have to consider the pedagogical practices that underpin PE and how these can be transformed to address LGBTQ issues. We contend that LGBTQ culture, scholars, and stakeholders have a lot to offer in such a transformation. As Oliver and Kirk (2015) have shown, a gendered activist approach in PE shifts the goals of the field to be inclusive of socio-political, contextual, and equity issues. We wonder what an LGBTQ activist approach could look like. Or perhaps an entire approach developed using a queer theoretical lens as suggested in teacher education (Coll 2019)? Notably, we recognize the complexity of this and that not all persons under the LGBTQ umbrella experience, understand, or perform queer the same way. We argue, however, that as the field includes more LGBTQ topics, perhaps more LGBTQ persons and advocates may join our ranks.

Lastly, we consider the role journals/editors play in pushing back on LGBTQ silences in PE. Returning to the discrepancy in publications between U.S. and U.K.-based PE journals, we ask what can be done to create additional pathways for this critical scholarship. There are few critical scholars and even fewer ‘experts’ in LGBTQ issues who sit on the editorial boards of U.S. based journals and, as such, LGBTQ scholars and those who draw on critical theoretical strands may opt to submit manuscripts elsewhere. One suggestion would be for journal editors to examine their editorial boards and reviewer pools to ensure more LGBTQ persons and critical scholars are included. For example, *PESP* and *SES* have a wide variety of critical and queer scholars on their boards – and this may be why they are more likely to publish LGBTQ research. While this brings us back to Gard and Pluim’s (2017) argument regarding paradigmatic closure, as U.S. based (critical) researchers, we are hopeful that, by recognizing this, we may also produce change.

Thus, despite problems and silences, we want to make it clear that we are optimistic about the shape and future of LGBTQ research in PE. We understand this optimism comes with cruelty, or obstacles that prohibit LGBTQ researchers from flourishing. We also recognize that we cannot do this alone – it does, ‘take a village’. The above recommendations are just that, recommendations. We know that others inside (and outside) PE may develop initiatives to ameliorate the cruelty under which LGBTQ researchers operate. In so doing, we ask those reading this paper to consider the ways in which they can help shape PE to be LGBTQ-inclusive. Only through these combined efforts can we shake the ‘chilly silence’ (Lenskyj 1986) that has lingered in our field.

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