The background features several vertical stripes in red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. There are also some abstract shapes, including a large black circle and a smaller green circle, partially visible behind the stripes.

Teachers' Perceptions  
of Policies and Practices  
of LGBTQ-Inclusive  
Curriculum in Rural  
Appalachian High  
School English  
Language Arts Classes

Dawn J. Viles

# Problem

## Law makers

restricted diverse curricula, reinforcing restrictions on teachers including LGBTQ topics in their classes

## La w s

reinforced the marginalization of LGBTQ high school students

increased isolation and risk for physical and mental harm

restricted LGBTQ students' voices

contributed to a lack of academic success

# Research Questions



## Research Question 1

What were rural Appalachian high school English Language Arts teachers' **perceptions about policies** on using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer inclusive literature in the curriculum?

## Research Question 2

What were rural Appalachian high school English Language Arts teachers' **practices** on using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer inclusive literature in the curriculum?

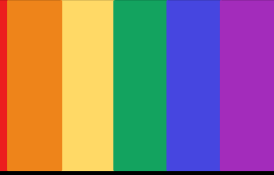


# Purpose



The purpose of this basic qualitative interpretive study was to examine rural Appalachian ELA high school teachers' perceptions of policies about using LGBTQ-inclusive literature and teachers' practices and whether or not they used LGBTQ-inclusive literature in their classrooms.

# Theoretical Framework



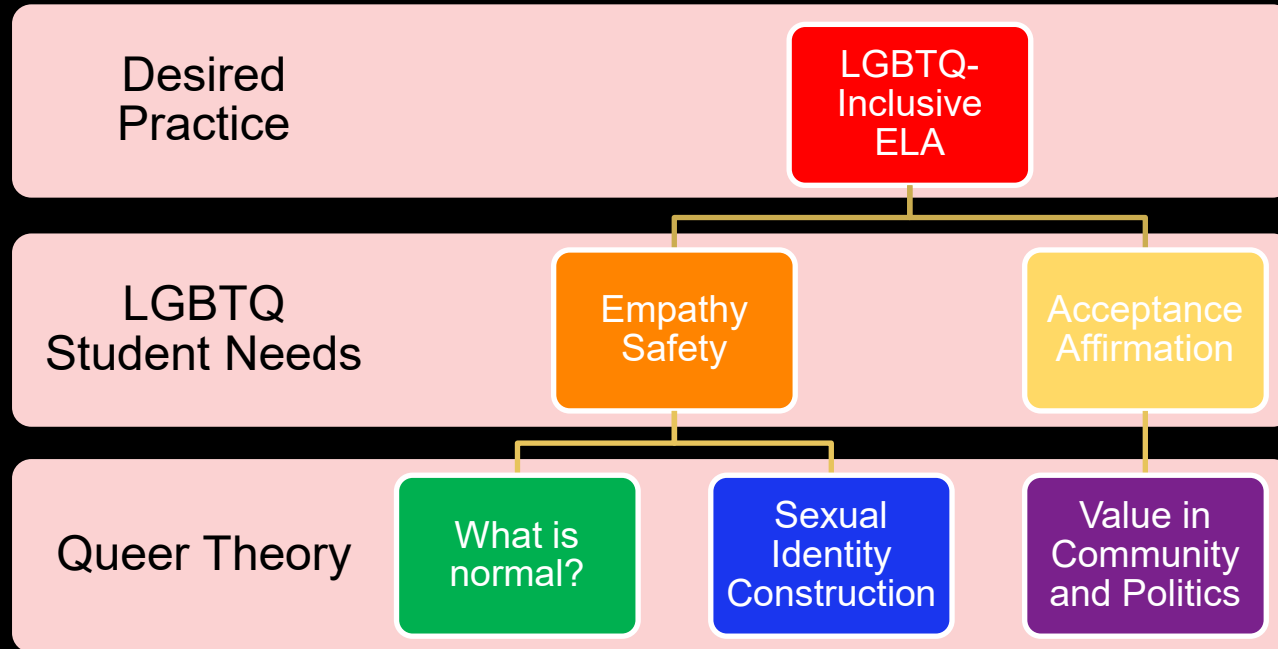
## Queer Theory

- Challenges assumptions on what is normal (heteronormativity)
- Questions how sexual identities are constructed
- Explains how sexual identities are valued in community and politics

(Meem, 2010)



# Theoretical Framework



# Literature Review

## Physical

Blackburn and Miller (2017) stated LGBTQ students faced challenges in school related to homophobia, which often appeared as physical violence or verbal abuse.

## Social

Hall and Rodgers (2019) explained 90% of youth under the age of 24 had engaged in sexual intercourse, which had significant life-long consequences.

## Concerns for LGBTQ Students

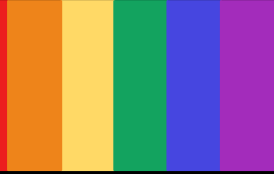
## Psychological

Hall (2018) found 60% of LGBTQ students felt sad or hopeless almost every day.

## Academic

Hall (2018) and Snapp et al. (2015) concluded that school-based victimization of LGBTQ high school students had negative consequences for students' school success

# Literature Review



## LGBTQ- Inclusive Policies

Even though all states were required to implement anti-bullying programs such as the Safe Schools Act, some states lacked curricula or implementation uniformity.

—Bickford (2017)

Three in four LGBTQ students in Tennessee reported discriminatory policies or practices at their schools.

—Kosciw et al. (2019)

LGBTQ high students whose schools had LGBTQ-focused policies and GSAs perceived both greater classmate support and teacher support.

—Day et al. (2019)



# Literature Review



## LGBTQ- Inclusive Pedgogy

Kosciw et al. (2019) further reported 19.4% of these LGBTQ high school students were taught positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events, and 17% had been taught negative content about LGBTQ topics. Kosciw et al. (2019) found less than half of LGBTQ high school students found information about LGBTQ-related issues in their school library and concluded U.S. high schools failed to provide adequate access to resources and supports for LGBTQ students.



—Kosciw et al. (2019)


# Literature Review



## LGBTQ- Affirming Curriculum & Climate

When the school climate was positive and safe and contained supportive teacher/student relationships, student health and academic outcomes were better than intolerant school climates.

Educators who created positive school climates created greater school engagement, better academic performance, and better social-emotional well-being.




—Day et al. (2019), MacGillivray & Jennings (2008), Swartz (2003)

# Literature Review



## Teacher Training

Professional development and preservice education for teachers focusing on LGBTQ figures in the curriculum was a key strategy for combatting heteronormativity and for improving impressions of safety for LGBTQ students.



—Gower et al. (2017), Chaudoir et al. (2017), Swartz (2003)

# Role of the Researcher

## Potential Bias as Sole Researcher

Personal: LGBTQ child, students who have come out to me

Professional: curriculum and instruction expertise, veteran ELA teacher

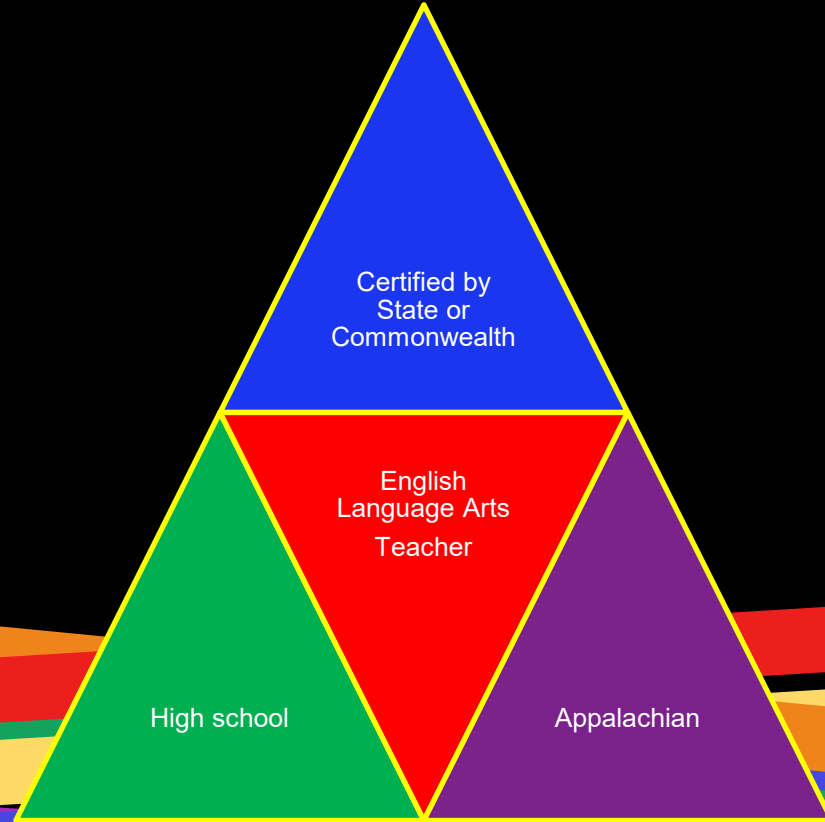
## Mitigate Bias

Continually referred to  
-theoretical framework  
-research questions and  
-reviewed the literature

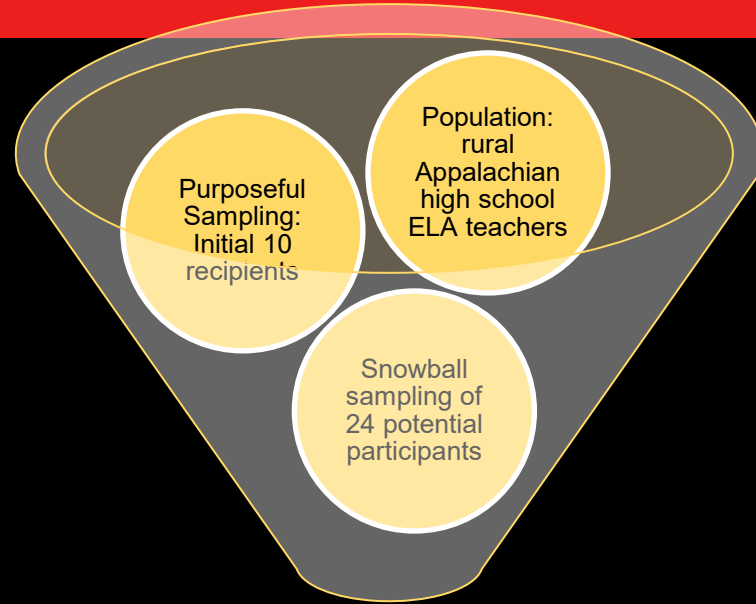
Developed data collection instrument and collected data to point of saturation

Administered questionnaire online to  
-provide anonymity for candid responses  
-avoid biasing participants with tone, facial expressions, comments

# Participants



# Data Collection: Sampling



Sample of 16 participants  
(67% participation rate)

# Data Collection: Instrument

## **Questionnaire**

Purpose: Identify ELA teacher's thoughts and feelings on LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices

~Google Forms

- \*digital to easily send to participants no matter the geographical location

- \*set to not collect email addresses for anonymity

- \*time flexibility

~Pilot Tested and Edited

~8 open-ended questions

~1 question for snowball sampling referral

## **Question Composition**

Research Question 1

- Questionnaire #2, 4, 8 policies

- Questionnaire #5, 7 curriculum

Research Question 2

- Questionnaire #1, 3, 6 practices

# Data Analysis: Coding



Open coding in Google Sheets – annotating and color coding raw data



Axial coding – grouping raw data into similarly themed categories  
teachers' practices  
local, district, and state policies  
and curriculum choices



Selective coding – developing thematic statements  
Participants overwhelmingly expressed negative feelings about policies on using LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum in the classroom.  
Participants' perceptions of policies about LGBTQ-inclusive topics affected classroom practices and curriculum.



# Research Questions

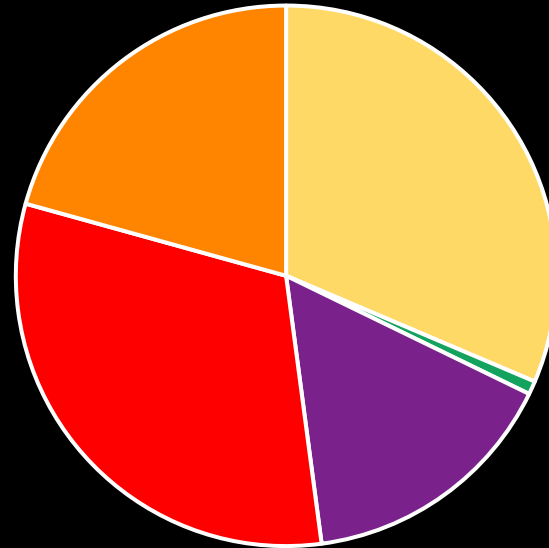
01

What were rural Appalachian high school English Language Arts teachers' perceptions about policies on using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer inclusive literature in the curriculum?

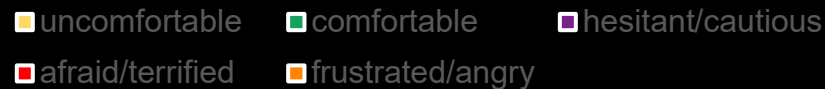
**Rural Appalachian high school English Language Arts teachers' perceptions about policies on using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer-inclusive literature in the curriculum were overwhelmingly negative.**

# Research Question 1

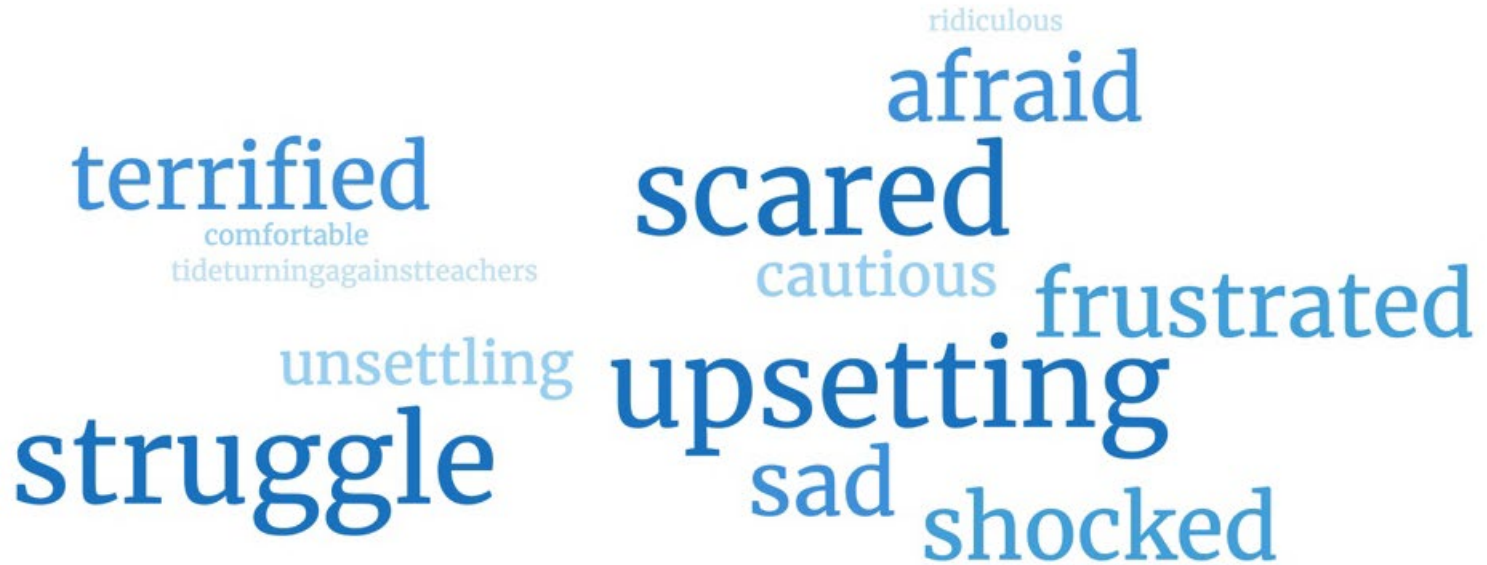
## Feelings



100% of participants had negative perceptions of LGBTQ topics regarding policies, practices, and curriculum



# Research Question 1



A word cloud of various emotions and feelings, with the most prominent words being 'scared', 'upsetting', 'struggle', 'terrified', 'afraid', 'frustrated', and 'shocked'. Other words include 'unsettling', 'sad', 'shocked', 'cautious', 'ridiculous', 'comfortable', and 'tideturningagainstteachers'.

terrified  
comfortable  
tideturningagainstteachers  
unsettling  
struggle  
scared  
ridiculous  
afraid  
cautious  
frustrated  
upsetting  
sad  
shocked


# Research Question 1



“I am already so concerned and paranoid about anything I teach. I am worried about what I say in class, too, and what will possibly be recorded on a phone. I think this is unfortunate that parents would view a curriculum of this nature as indoctrination.”

The background features several vertical stripes in red, yellow, green, blue, and purple. A horizontal bar at the bottom left contains a small rainbow-colored segment followed by a red segment. The text '—Participant 14' is written in white on the red segment.

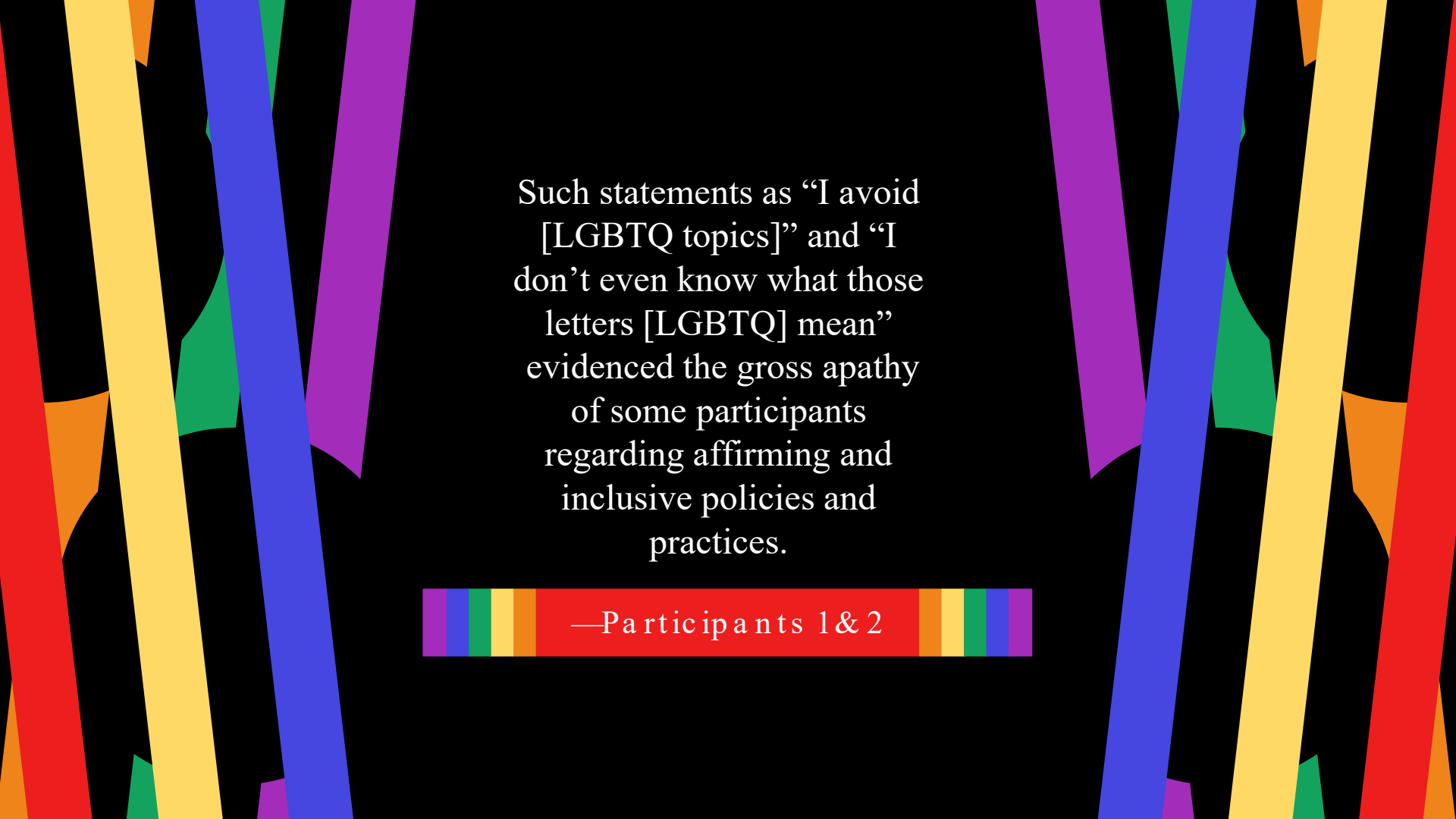
—Participant 14



“It's further unsettling to hear some of my own colleagues express [negative] views against these students. It shouldn't be such a reach for teachers to respect students' chosen identities and pronouns. I feel further sad for our students who grapple with beloved mentors and teachers disrespecting who they are as people.”

—Participant 12





Such statements as “I avoid [LGBTQ topics]” and “I don’t even know what those letters [LGBTQ] mean” evidenced the gross apathy of some participants regarding affirming and inclusive policies and practices.



—Participants 1 & 2

# Research Questions



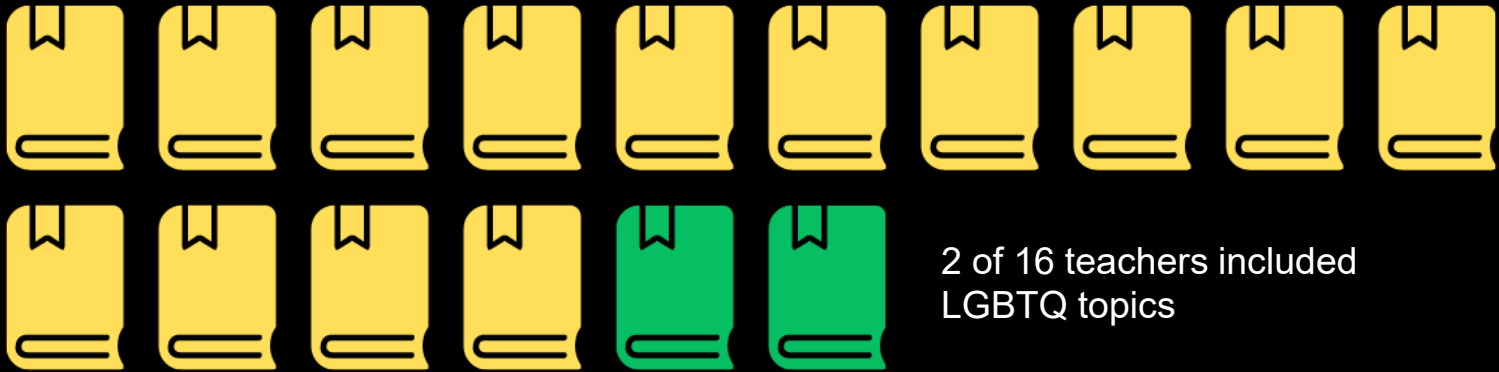
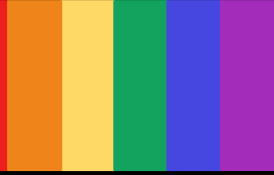
## 02

What were rural Appalachian high school English Language Arts teachers' practices on using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer-inclusive literature in the curriculum?

**Rural Appalachian high school English Language Arts teachers' perceptions about practices of using Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer-inclusive literature in the curriculum were overwhelmingly negative.**



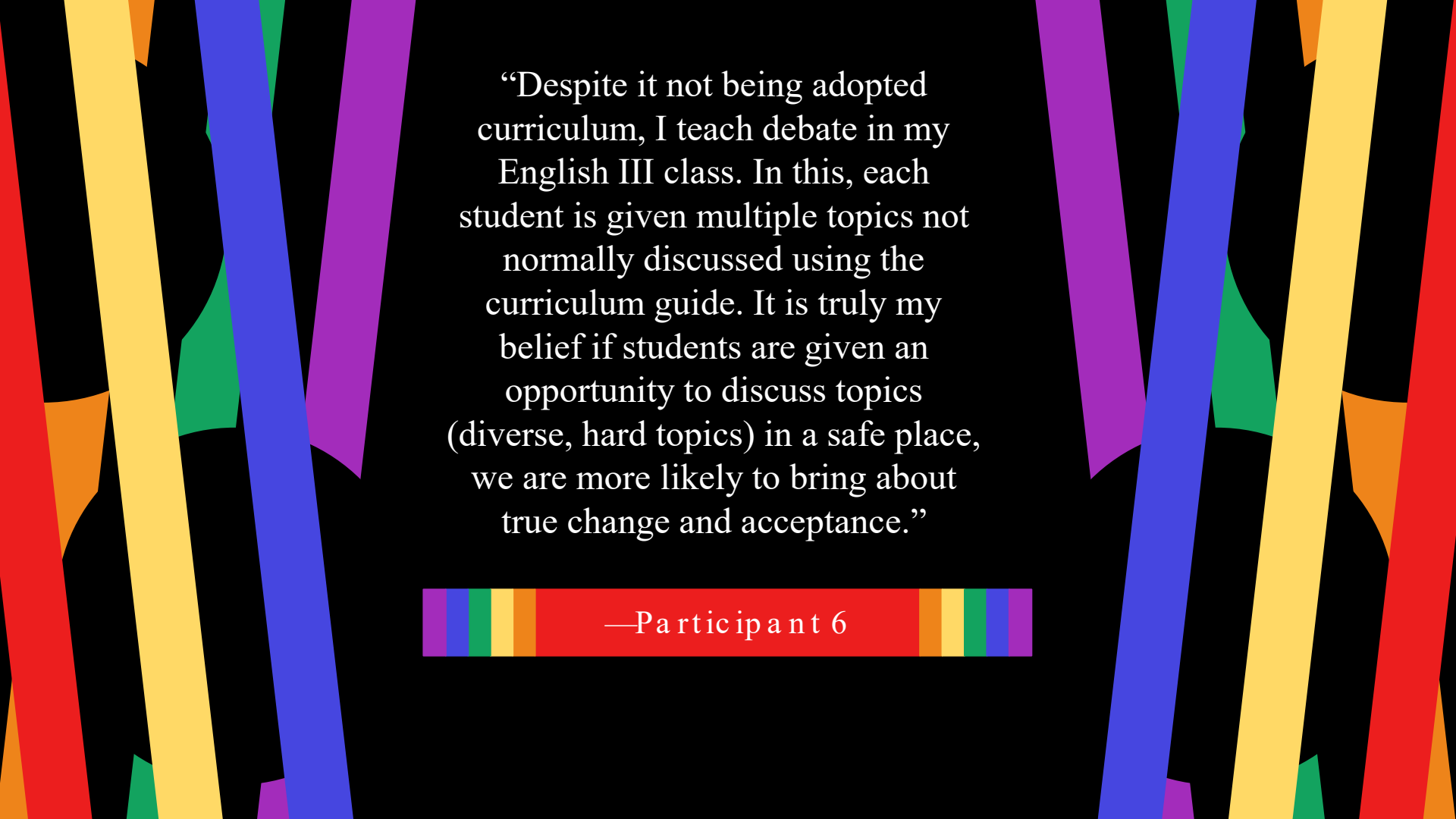
# Research Question 2



“I am very cautious, and I have to have my list of literature choices approved by my department chair, who censors anything she deems controversial; therefore, not having access to any of the literature, I have not had the opportunity to address any LGBTQ topics. [The Department Chair] even cleaned out the English Department closet and removed controversial paperbacks.”

—Participant 11





“Despite it not being adopted curriculum, I teach debate in my English III class. In this, each student is given multiple topics not normally discussed using the curriculum guide. It is truly my belief if students are given an opportunity to discuss topics (diverse, hard topics) in a safe place, we are more likely to bring about true change and acceptance.”

—Participant 6

“I do not have any materials that I include in my curriculum that directly speak to LGBTQ topics, though I do normally discuss ideas of same-sex friendship/sexuality as it pertains to one of my teams' core 10th-grade texts.”

—Participant 12

# State-Level Influence on LGBTQ-inclusive Practices



3

not very comfortable doing it, especially in current political climate

4

most likely to shy away from discussion of controversial topics or

4

new legislation is geared towards LGBTQ and is unacceptable

8

have not taught anything that deals with LGBTQ

10

will not include LGBTQ topics or materials in lessons now that this law is in effect

11

current legislation in Tennessee (i.e. prohibited concepts) is informed by fear

16

law places a stigma on such topics and acts as a deterrent in exploring them

16

law has not had any impact on me or my classes



Participants included the following LGBTQ-inclusive topics:

1. Shakespeare
2. Tennessee Williams
3. Sir Gawain & the Green Knight
4. The 57 Bus
5. The Great Gatsby
6. The Canterbury Tales

# Implications

## Resources

Teachers should use the research-based resources from GLSEN to better understand their LGBTQ students and learn ways to meet their unique needs in the classroom.

## Meeting Needs

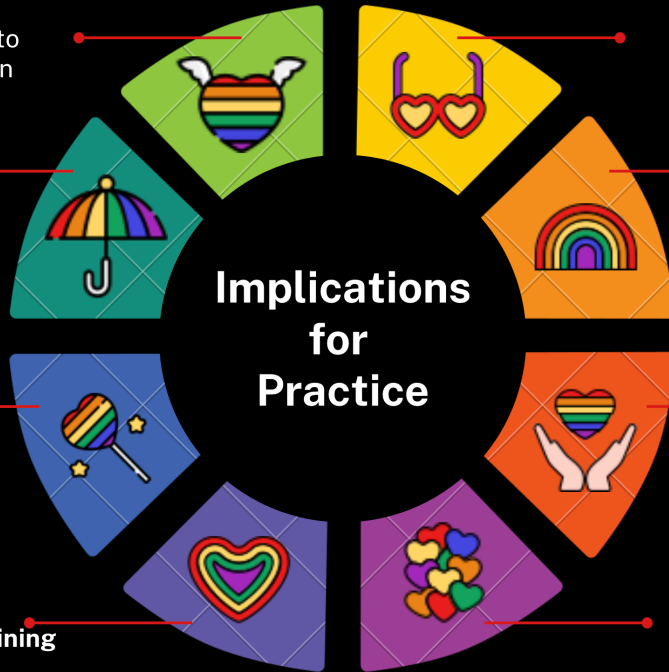
School districts should protect the mental, social, physical, and academic needs of LGBTQ students and teachers who acknowledge and affirm the LGBTQ students.

## Curriculum

Districts should allow teachers the freedom to select relevant and age-appropriate LGBTQ literature and authors.

## Diversity & Inclusion Training

Districts should train teachers in diversity and inclusion curricula and instructional practices.



## LGBTQ Representation

ELA teachers should include LGBTQ topics, discussions, authors, and literature in their instruction.

## LGBTQ Community

School districts must create schools where LGBTQ students feel they are valued and important members of the school community.

## Self-Reflection

Educators should reflect on responses to LGBTQ students; educate themselves on the inclusivity and affirmation students.

## Affirming Classrooms

Educators should create affirming classroom environments in which all other students learn to respect and accept all.

# Future Researchers Should



## focus

on other cultural and/or geographic regions within the United States

## expand

the study to include teachers from other subjects in which LGBTQ topics were addressed

## evaluate

course subjects in which teachers have the opportunity to select supplemental reading materials to add to their curriculum (science and social studies)



## conduct

a qualitative study by using an interview

## observe

classrooms to determine whether or not supplemental materials in their curriculum and instruction helped LGBTQ students

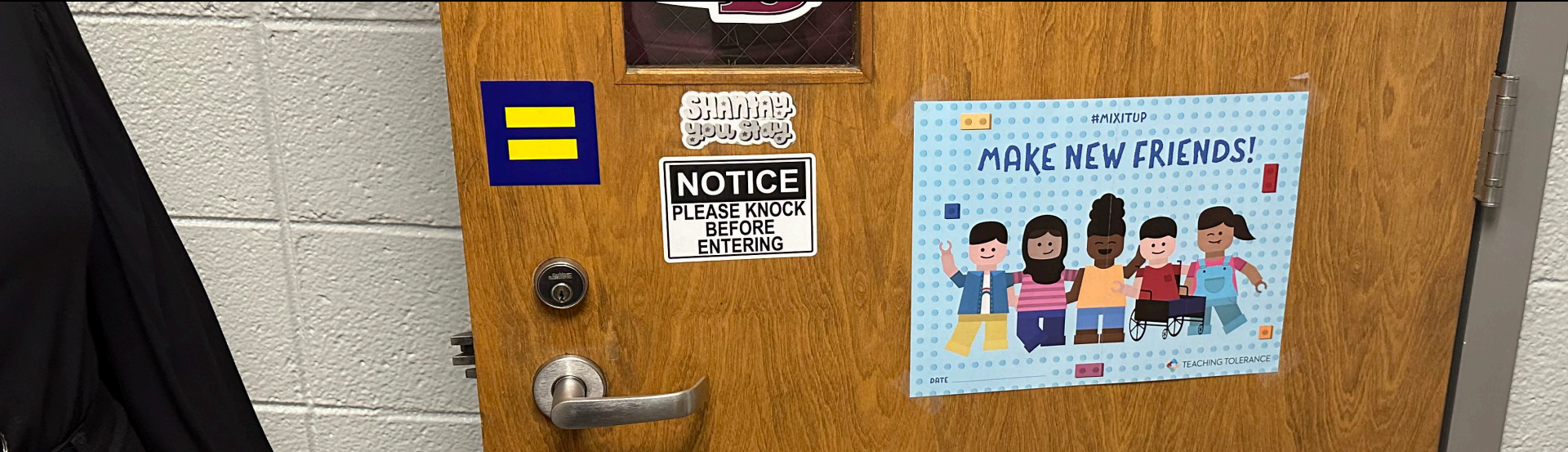
## expand

the participant sample to include LGBTQ students





An ELA high school teacher intentionally chooses the rainbow pillow as a symbol of LGBTQ welcome to her reading nook.

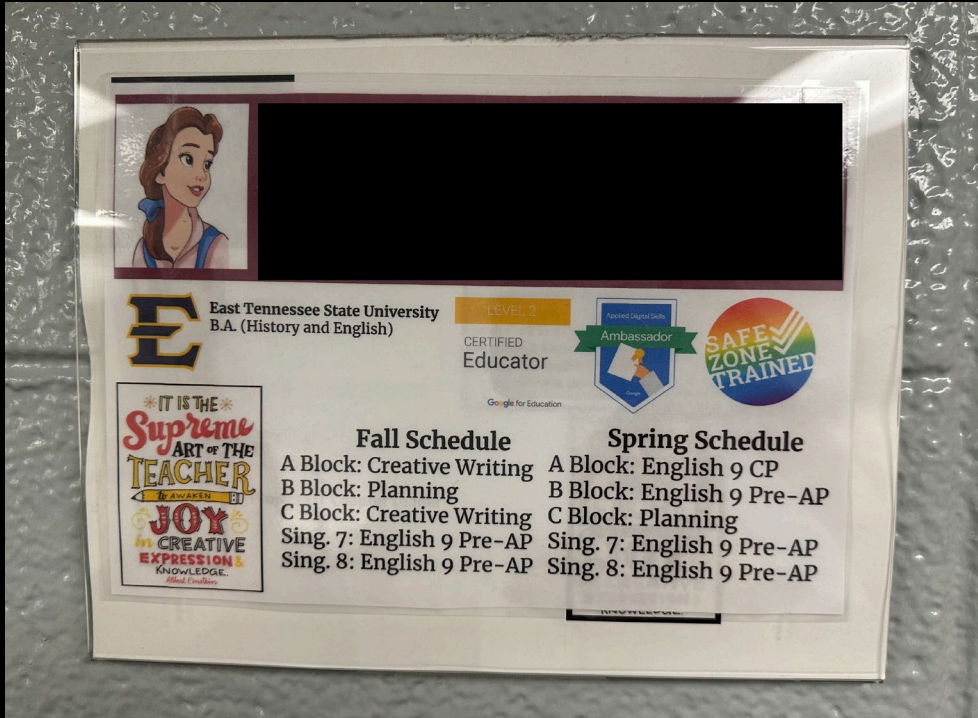


An ELA high school teacher encourages acceptance and tolerance of diverse students with door decorations, which include a Human Rights Campaign logo.





An ELA high school teacher displays an LGBTQ rainbow sticker on the computer cover.



An ELA high school teacher displays the Safe Zone seal on the doorplate indicating a safe classroom for LGBTQ students.

# Conclusion

Without **representation**, LGBTQ students, who are already the most vulnerable population in high schools, will continue to be at risk for failure to thrive academically, at risk for being victims of bullying, and at risk for **feelings of not belonging, all of which lead to behavior problems, dropping out, self-harm, and suicide.**

**LGBTQ students deserve to hear the voices** of LGBTQ artists, figures, characters, and authors. LGBTQ students deserve to **feel safe** in classrooms without being bullied and harassed. LGBTQ students deserve **allies** among their classmates and their teachers. LGBTQ students deserve **respect and understanding.**

**ELA teachers** have welcomed even the **groanings** of their students' souls in their creative works of poetry or other literary artistic expressions. Moreover, **ELA teachers broaden their students' understandings of life** through the heroic exploits or tragic consequences of literary characters.

Thus, **ELA teachers have the unique opportunity to change the classroom and school culture** by opening the door to **LGBTQ-inclusive literature** so that all students are **blessed with safety, acceptance, support, and love.**