Fostering Acceptance of Sexual Identity and Expression of the LGBTQ Community in the Classroom

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**Abstract**

This exploration of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ)-related literature serves to offer insight and recommendations related to the integration of LGBTQ content into nursing curricula. A synthesis of the current state of the nursing, health care and nursing education literature surrounding the LGBTQ population identifies barriers to, and opportunities for, the integration of LGBTQ-related content into nursing courses. The state of the evidence-base can inform the development of educational practice and policy focused on positively impacting the acceptance of sexual identity and expression.

**Purpose**

To identify how the current state of the literature can:

- support formal recommendations to address the lack of inclusion of LGBTQ-specific language in policy statements and guidelines related to LGBTQ content in nursing curricula.
- guide the development of effective strategies to foster the acceptance of sexual identity and expression of the LGBTQ community in the classroom.

**Literature Review**

The high prevalence of health disparities affecting the LGBTQ population is well reported throughout the literature. There are many factors that are thought to contribute to the lack of access to quality health care for LGBTQ individuals. Notably, the literature shows there is an insufficient number of nurses and other health care providers who are knowledgeable about LGBTQ-related health issues, and who are competent to care for this population (Healthy People 2020, 2018). Some of the most explored topics in the literature are the unique health care needs of LGBTQ individuals, their long-term and end of life care (Coulter, Kenst, Bowen, & Scout, 2014; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Hoy-Ellis, Goldsen, Emlert, & Hooyman, 2014). Other current literature focuses on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of practicing nurses and other health care professionals (Klotzbaugh & Spencer, 2014). Studies focused on assessing and developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of nursing faculty and students related to the care of the LGBTQ population are starting to emerge (Cornelius & Carrick, 2015; Lim, Johnson, & Eliason, 2015; Tillman, Creel, & Pryor, 2016). Inquiry surrounding how to meaningfully and effectively integrate LGBTQ-related content into nursing curricula has begun to surface in the literature as well (Echezona-Johnson, 2017; Orgel, 2017; Sugden, Bosse, & LeBlanc, 2016). However, the inclusion of LGBTQ-specific language and formal curricular guidelines are still lacking despite a call for the inclusion of, and for prioritization by, multiple national health care organizations (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014; Healthy People 2020, 2018; Institute of Medicine, 2011).

**Relevant Findings**

**The health of LGBTQ-individuals is recognized as a national priority:**
- Healthy People 2020, (2018) details that addressing the shortage of competent LGBTQ-related health care providers is necessary to decrease health disparities in this population.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) identifies LGBTQ-related culturally competent health care and preventative services as essential.
- Institute of Medicine (2011) acknowledges the need to ameliorate the health care inequality related to the LGBTQ population as a research priority.

**The guidelines for nursing practice and education are not inclusive of LGBTQ-specific language:**
- The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2008) calls for individualized, patient-centered care that respects and incorporates culture and diversity, but do not specifically address the care of LGBTQ individuals.
- Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (2007) competencies do not specifically mention LGBTQ individuals.
- According to the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality (2013), the American College of Nurse-Midwives purports to “Work toward the incorporation of information about gender identity, expression, and development in all midwifery educational programs.”
- The Canadian Nursing Students’ Association have launched initiatives to promote an increased emphasis on the LGBTQ community in Canadian nursing curricula (Jones, 2017).

**Clear recommendations exist for medical education:**
- Association of American Medical Colleges has clear recommendations for medical school curricula to promote student mastery of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to provide comprehensive care for LGBT patients.
- Additional medical education associations offer policy statements and guidelines for the inclusion of LGBT health issues in medical curricula as highlighted by the Compendium of Health Profession Association LGBT Policies (Gay and Lesbian Medical Association: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality, 2013).

**The National League for Nursing’s Achieving Diversity and Meaningful Inclusion in Nursing Education (2016) cited studies supporting the critical need to incorporate LGBTQ-inclusive content into nursing education curricula.**

**Recommendations**

**Nursing education regulatory bodies should:**
- address the lack of inclusion of LGBTQ-specific language in position and policy statements.
- develop and promote evidence-based guidelines for the inclusion of LGBTQ content in nursing curricula.

**Nursing education should:**
- heed recommendations to improve the health of LGBTQ individuals by providing education focused on the competent care and unique needs of LGBTQ individuals.
- focus on the creation of effective strategies to foster the acceptance of sexual identity and expression of the LGBTQ community in the classroom.