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Intersectional Identities: LGBTQIA+ and Disability in Adolescents

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Intersectional Identities:
LGBTQIA+ and Disability in Adolescents
Sarah Konowitz
Museum Education: Childhood (Certification)

Mentor:
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Abstract

Sarah Konowitz

Intersectional Identities: LGBTQIA+ and Disability in Adolescents

This integrative master’s project explores the intersections of LGBTQIA+ and disability in the identity formation of adolescents, particularly those in middle school (ages 11-15). The material first maps out the gaps in scholarship on intersectionality regarding queerness and disability in young people. Recent statistics on the rampant bullying, harassment, and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ adolescents with disabilities provide a rationale for focusing on this often-underserved population. The project then features an extensive handbook for teachers on how to best support positive identity development in LGBTQIA+ adolescents with disabilities. The handbook includes a LGBTQIA+ glossary of terms; a guide to the language of disability; first-person accounts from students; tips for teachers; online role models for students; relevant organizations that support youth development; recommended books for teachers and students; and magazine articles for further reading.

Keywords:
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Author’s Note

This integrative master’s project stems from my deep commitment to the positive identity development and mental health of youth. Because this material addresses complex issues of identity, I want to map out some of the facets of my identity in an effort to be transparent about what I can and cannot claim as my own. I am a white cisgender woman who uses the pronouns she, her, and hers. Since college, I have identified as queer, but my sexual orientation fluctuates—as many people’s do. I have a history of anxiety, depression, and body dysmorphia, and I am physically able-bodied and generally healthy. I benefit from white privilege, from wealth privilege, and from educational privilege.

Since this work discusses adolescence, I want to be clear that in middle school and high school, I did not identify as queer or as disabled. While this identity does not explicitly exclude me from studying and speaking to the intersections of queerness and disability, all of my work comes from my perspective. Therefore, my work reflects a point on a continuous process of learning, as this project is not intended to be conclusive or static. Instead, the project is meant to evolve with developments in the language and practices we use to support both queerness and disability.

Following almost two years of graduate work focusing on the LGBTQIA+ community, my work expands on a number of related projects: I wrote a sexual education curriculum on intimacy, centering on a visit to the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art in New York City; I created a parents’ brochure on how children make sense of gender roles and the gender binary in early childhood; I studied four middle-grade fiction books that prominently feature characters who are LGBTQIA+; and I developed a
teachers’ handbook for how to use gender-inclusive language in the classroom. All of these projects inform and build into my integrative master’s work. By delving into the intersections of queerness and disability in adolescents, I hope to pinpoint strategies for educators to best support and empower students’ identities.
Rationale

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectional* to describe the compounded oppressions that arise for Black women because of their gender *and* racial identity. In her discussion of feminist theory and anti-racist politics, she points to the distortion and erasure of Black women’s experiences within single-axis analytical frameworks (Crenshaw, 1989). More explicitly, feminist theory historically equates sexism with the oppression of white women, and anti-racist politics historically equates racism with the oppression of Black men—both fields ignore the very real presence and doubly marginalized existences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Nearly three decades later, the term has been appropriated and regurgitated to encompass the gamut of intersecting identity facets, many times without acknowledgement of Crenshaw or the context from which *intersectional* was introduced into our collective lexicon (Crenshaw, 2015).

In applying *intersectional* to the experiences of adolescents who are LGBTQIA+ (please see definition p.18) and have disabilities, I am indebted to Crenshaw’s (1989) seminal arguments against single-issue analysis when it comes to understanding identity and power. Too frequently, marginalized identity groups tokenize people instead of practicing genuine inclusion, claiming the diversity of members without actually representing their interests (Crenshaw, 2015). Despite the existence of queer people with disabilities, queer theory and disability theory are often silos, written with a façade of neutrality that effectively assumes ability for queer folks and hetero/cisnormativity for folks with disabilities. Additionally, both fields of theory tend to nullify other significant
identity markers, defaulting to “norms” of whiteness, middle-class status, and United States citizenship.

In July 2017, I first began exploring the intersections of queerness and disability as part of a course on developmental variations and disabilities in children. In approaching the course’s final research project, I was concerned that I was painting in disturbingly broad strokes by looking at all LGBTQIA+ identities and all identities that can be included when considering disability. A student who is gay and hard-of-hearing has a vast set of experiences that are distinct from those of a student who is genderqueer and has cerebral palsy. A student who is transgender and uses a wheelchair may or may not share perceptions of school with other LGBTQIA+ students with disabilities. The spectrum of gender and sexuality is as expansive and fluid as the spectrum of disabilities. For this reason, I started looking into existing scholarship with the assumption that I would have to narrow down the scope of my research.

However, I quickly noticed gaps in scholarship when looking for relevant studies. Some literature has addressed the intersections of disability and queerness in adults, most often from a clinical psychology perspective (O’Toole & Bregante, 1992; McAllen & Ditillo, 1994; Thompson, Bryson, & de Castell, 2001; Elderton, Clarke, Jones, & Stacey, 2013; Mizock, Covello, & Ferreira, 2013; Abbott, 2015). Most studies that focus on students are limited to undergraduate college students (Underhile & Cowles, 1998; Harley, Hall, & Savage, 2000; Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, & Savage, 2002). Some articles concentrate on this intersectional identity in high school students (Thompson, 2008; Payne, 2010; McGee, 2014; Dykes & Thomas, 2015; Eisenberg, Gower, McMorris, & Bucchianeri, 2015). However, very few articles explicitly deal with middle
school students (teens and pre-teens ages 11-14) (Duke, 2011; O’Keefe & Medina, 2016).

The lack of literature on this specific sub-population strikes me as problematic for a number of reasons. First, in terms of development, teens and pre-teens are in a pivotal stage of identity formation, experiencing hyper-awareness of bodily and hormonal changes. They often express feelings of self-doubt, isolation, and powerlessness while straddling the nebulous divide between childhood and adulthood (Muus, 1998). For many adolescents, it is tricky to negotiate their heightened sense of responsibility and autonomy in some contexts with their lingering need for support in other contexts. Adolescence can be a testing ground for risky behavior and rejection of authority. It can be a trial-and-error time when consequences may not feel significant. Because of these developmental hallmarks of adolescence, one can imagine the compounded feelings of inadequacy and exclusion for those teens and pre-teens that are at intersections of multiple marginalized identity groups.

Second, much of scholarship in the past two decades reflects a changing understanding of when and how concepts of gender and sexuality become salient for young people. Children as young as two-years-old begin to form assumptions about gender norms: they are quick to absorb information, to categorize according to stereotypes of the gender binary, and to exercise in-group bias towards those who have a similar gender identity (Martin & Ruble, 2004; Hilliard & Liben, 2010; Conry-Murray & Turiel, 2012). Between the ages of five and six, most children reach peak rigidity when considering expectations of gender; however, by seven, children become more flexible (Martin & Ruble, 2004; Ruble, Lurye, & Zosuls, 2007). In adolescence, understandings of gender become even more complex and fluid—sometimes altogether transcending
cultural norms—especially as pre-teens begin to develop hormonally (Slavin, 2013). (To be clear, I am not suggesting that gender identity and sexual orientation are wholly interdependent; however, gender and sexuality can be linked in terms of identity formation in young people). As adolescents undergo the changes of puberty and experience amplified feelings of attraction, new questions of intimacy and sexuality arise (Wood, 2015). However, many LGBTQIA+ folks report that questions of gender and sexuality pop up internally long before any sex education is offered (Goldstein, 2017).

Even so, most sex education programs in U.S. schools teach only about heterosexual couples and cisgender individuals (Sager, 2017). Naturally, queer youth turn to the image-saturated Internet to cull together information, to find role models, and to construct their own identities through cyber personas (GLSEN, 2013; Lucero, 2017). If many adolescents are exploring gender identity and sexuality before adulthood, before college, and even before high school, where is the abundant scholarship on queerness in middle-school-aged youth? Where are the inclusive, accessible resources for adolescents to learn about the fundamentals of sexuality, gender identity, and intimacy between partners?

Third, while queer visibility in the media may be on the rise, visibility for youth with disabilities has been slower to evolve—in the media, in the classroom, and elsewhere. This is especially true for youth with “invisible” or “hidden” disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, chronic health disorders, and mental health conditions. Because of cultural stigma and unawareness, students with invisible disabilities often go undiagnosed, unsupported, and misunderstood by teachers as disruptive or low achieving (Cavet, 2000; Anderson & Cardoza, 2016; Leary, 2017). Peers of students with invisible disabilities may perceive certain needs and behaviors as
bizarre or melodramatic (Round, 2012). Just based on their appearances, students with invisible disabilities are assumed to conform to the same behavioral expectations that apply to students without disabilities. Adolescent students often have trouble navigating the nuances of their increasingly complex social spheres, so violating any behavioral expectations can result in a student’s being ostracized or ridiculed.

For this age group, fitting in with peers and being well liked are paramount to feelings of security and to sense of self (Wood, 2015). At the same time, adolescents can often be rather self-centered, resorting to judging others as a way to bolster their own self-worth (Round, 2012). Therefore, students with disabilities—whether or not readily perceptible to others—are often at heightened risk for being bullied by their non-disabled peers. Without adult intervention, the bullying and harassment of students with disabilities can go dangerously unchecked.

Recent educational studies underscore the need for teachers who can support students who are LGBTQIA+ and have disabilities: 47.8% of LGBTQIA+ students who reported having an educational, emotional, or physical disability have experienced school discipline, compared to 36.9% of LGBTQIA+ students without disabilities; 5.8% of LGBTQIA+ students with disabilities indicated that they may drop out of school, compared to 2.6% of LGBTQIA+ students without disabilities; and LGBTQIA+ students with disabilities were 4.4% more likely to have been involved in the justice system due to school discipline, compared to 1.7% of LGBTQIA+ students without disabilities (GLSEN, 2016). These statistics reveal ineffective or inconsistent school policies and a general lack of institutional support for LGBTQIA+ students with disabilities.
Furthermore, when compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, queer youth are “Three times more likely to experience a mental health condition [and] four times more likely to attempt suicide, experience suicidal thoughts, and engage in self-harm” (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2016). In this sense, LGBTQIA+ students need unfettered access to support systems, such as peer affinity groups and one-to-one counseling.

Providing mental health resources for queer students is not enough, though. In order to nurture positive identity development in students who are LGBTQIA+ and have disabilities, teachers must work consistently to shift classroom culture, creating identity-affirming spaces in which students feel comfortable expressing themselves and learning freely. In the following guide for teachers, I map out key strategies for educators to support this population. I also offer myriad resources, online and in print, that educators and students can reference for further learning.

The educator’s work does not stop here. The work continues through sustaining a commitment to learning, practicing empathy and critical self-reflection, and, most importantly, listening to students as agents of truth and power.
QueerAble Classroom
A Guide for Teachers

Justin Hubbell, 2015.

How to Support Adolescent Students at the Intersections of LGBTQIA+ and Disability
# Table of Contents

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8. Further Reading
When speaking about identity markers that fall under the inclusive LGBTQIA+ umbrella, it is important that we use updated, respectful, and transparent language. Culled together and adapted from three queer advocacy organizations—Human Rights Campaign, TransWhat?, and PFLAG—the below list provides teachers with a comprehensive glossary of terms to use inside (and outside of) the classroom.

A

Ally (n.): A term that describes a person who speaks out or takes actions on behalf of someone else or for a group that they are not a part of.

Androgynous (adj.): Identifying and/or presenting as neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine.

Asexual (adj.): A term that describes a person who lacks sexual attraction or desire for other people.
Bi or bisexual (adj.): A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex, gender, or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Butch (adj.): Commonly used to refer to masculinity displayed by a female-identifying person but can also refer to masculinity by a male-identifying person.

Cisgender (adj.): A term that describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Closeted (adj.): Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is possible that someone will be out in one context and closeted in another.

Coming out (n.): The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts, and appreciates their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and begins sharing that identity with others.

Disclosure (n.): A word that some people use to describe the act or process of revealing one’s transgender or gender nonconforming identity to another person in a specific instance. Some find the term offensive, implying the need to disclose something shameful, and prefer to use the term coming out, whereas others find coming out offensive, and prefer to use disclosure.

Drag queen or drag king (n.): A man who dresses as a woman, typically as a performance. A woman who dresses as a man, typically as a performance. (Note: these terms are NOT the same as transgender and cannot be used interchangeably).

Dysphoria (n.): In this context, the term describes a variety of negative feelings that are related or connected to someone’s gender or sex. Trans people who experience dysphoria may be profoundly uncomfortable with certain aspects of their bodies, particularly sex characteristics. They may also have a strong aversive reaction—perhaps sadness, anger, or disgust—upon being called by the
(inappropriate) pronouns of their birth-assigned genders, or the inappropriate-gender names that were used for them before they came out.

Femininity (n.): A term that refers to qualities that are thought of as being womanly, that are typically ascribed to women, and that are considered to be socially appropriate for a woman’s behavior. People who exhibit self-described femininity do not necessarily think of themselves as women: some men (including trans men) are feminine, some women are, and some genderqueer people are.

Female-to-male (FTM) (adj.): A term referring to a person, assigned female at birth, who identifies and lives as a male person.

Gay (adj.): A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to some members of the same sex.

Gender (n.): A person’s internal sense of self as male, female, both, or neither (gender identity), as well as one’s outward presentation and behaviors (gender expression). Gender norms vary among cultures and over time.

Gender-affirming surgery (GAS): Surgical procedures that can help people adjust their bodies to more closely match their innate or internal gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This term should be used in place of the older and often offensive terms sex change, sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), genital reconstruction surgery, or medical transition.

Gender binary (n.): The idea that there are two distinct and opposite genders (man and woman). This model does not account for the full spectrum of gender identities and expressions.

Gender-expansive (adj.): A term used to describe people that identify or express themselves in ways that broaden the culturally defined behavior or expression associated with one gender.
Gender expression (n.): How a person expresses their gender through outward presentation and behavior, including but not limited to clothing, hairstyle, body language, and mannerisms.

Gender identity (n.): An internal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, a blend of both, or neither—how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender neutral (adj.): Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (e.g. bathrooms), or identities (e.g. genderqueer).

Gender role (n.): A set of social and cultural beliefs or expectations about appropriate behaviors for men/boys or women/girls. Gender roles can vary from culture to culture. Strict gender roles can limit a person’s identity development.

Gender spectrum (n.): The broad range along which people identify and express themselves as gendered (or not gendered) beings.

Genderqueer (adj.): People that typically reject the binary categories of gender, embracing a fluidity of gender identity and/or expression. People who identify as genderqueer may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female, or as falling completely outside these categories.

Heteronormative (adj.): The assumption of heterosexuality as the given or default sexual orientation instead of one of many possibilities, and that the preferred or default relationship is between two people of opposite genders.

Heterosexism (n.): The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid or “normal” sexual orientation. This can take the form of overt negative comments or actions towards LGBTQIA+ people (macroaggressions) or subtle actions or assumptions that marginalize LGBTQIA+ people (microaggressions).

Heterosexual (adj.): A term describing a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of a different gender. Also known as straight.

Homophobia (n.): The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex or gender.

Homosexual (adj.): A term describing a person who is attracted to members of the same sex or gender. It is usually used in medical or scientific references.
Intersex (adj.): The term used for 2% of people who are born with naturally occurring variations in chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and other sex characteristics. Formerly the medical terms hermaphrodite and pseudo-hermaphrodite were used; these terms are now considered neither respectful nor scientifically accurate.

Latinx (adj.): A gender-expansive terms used to be more inclusive of all genders than the binary terms Latino or Latina permit, as these are terms of identity found in Spanish, a binarily gendered language. (Pronounced Latin-EX).

Lesbian (adj. or n.): A term describing a woman who emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to some other women.

LGBTQIA+ (adj.): An inclusive acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, and asexual. The plus (+) sign indicates that this acronym encompasses and recognizes the full spectrum of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Male-to-female (MTF) (adj.): A term referring to a person, assigned male at birth, who identifies and lives as a female person.

Masculinity (n.): A term that refers to qualities that are thought of as being manly, that are typically ascribed to men, and that are considered to be appropriate for a
man’s behavior. People who exhibit self-described masculinity do not necessarily think of themselves as men: some women (including trans women) are masculine, some men are, and some genderqueer people are.

**Misgender (v.):** To refer to someone, especially a transgender or gender non-conforming person, using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify. Misgendering a student in the classroom can have dangerous implications for that student socially, including harassment, bullying, and other forms of school violence. Teachers need to take extra care and pay attention to the pronouns and words they use to describe and refer to students.

**Mx. (title):** An English language honorific title that is gender-neutral (instead of Ms., Mrs., or Mr.). Pronounced *MIX*.

**N**

**Non-binary (adj.):** An umbrella term for people who transcend commonly held concepts of gender through their own expression and identities. Other terms for this might include *gender expansive*, *gender creative*, or *genderqueer*. Some non-binary people also identify as trans.

**Non-op (adj.):** Short for non-operation, this term describes people who do not plan to undergo any surgery related to their trans status. There are a variety of reasons for this decision, ranging from pervasive medical difficulties to discontent with the surgical results to simple lack of desire.

**O**

**Out (adj.):** Generally, describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQIA+ in their private, public, and/or professional lives.

**Outing (n.):** Exposing someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity to others without their permission. (Even if unintentional, outing someone is never acceptable. For example, just because a student speaks about their sexual orientation in school, it does not mean you can share this information with the student’s parents without the student’s consent. Some students come out gradually or do not come out in certain social contexts).
Pansexual (adj.): A person can be attracted to any sex, gender, or gender identity.

Queer (adj.): A term some people use to identify themselves with a flexible and inclusive view of gender and/or sexuality. Also used interchangeably with LGBTQIA+ to describe a group of people such as “queer youth.” It is also seen in academic fields, such as queer studies or queer theory. Historically it has been used as a negative term for LGBTQIA+ people but has recently been reclaimed as a term of pride. Some people still find the term offensive while some embrace the term as an identity.

Sex (n.): One’s biological and physical attributes—external genitalia, sex chromosomes, and internal reproductive structures—that are used to assign someone as male or female at birth.

Sex assigned at birth (n.): This is generally determined by external genitalia at birth—female, male, or intersex.

Sexual orientation (n.): Describes a person’s emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Some examples of sexual orientations are gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, and pansexual.

Stealth (adj.): Descriptor of people who, after beginning transition and living in their preferred genders, do not readily tell others about their upbringings or past lives within the birth-assigned gender. Some people are only comfortable when living in "deep" stealth, some practice stealth to a degree, and some choose to be more or less open about their trans statuses. The term is increasingly considered offensive by some as it implies an element of deception. The phrase maintaining privacy is often used instead, though some individuals use both terms interchangeably.

Straight (adj.): A slang term for heterosexual.
**They, them, theirs, themselves (pro.):** Gender non-binary pronouns used in the singular form (e.g. “The student turned in their homework on time”).

**Trans or transgender (adj.):** An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation; transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

**Transition (v.):** A term sometimes used to refer to the process—social, legal, and/or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one’s gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormones, having surgeries, and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control. The validity of an individual’s gender identity does not depend on any social, legal, and/or medical transition; the self-identification itself is what validates the gender identity.

**Transphobia (n.):** The fear or hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people.

**Transvestism (n.):** An outdated word that is equivalent to “cross-dressing,” and is usually used in reference to men who dress as women. Its use should be avoided, as many find it offensive.
Disability Guide to Language

Ableism (n.): Set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, psychiatric, or learning disabilities, often resting on the assumption that people with disabilities need to be “fixed.” It is a cultural system of oppression established and enforced by non-disabled people to wield power inequitably (Smith, n.d.).

When speaking about disability and people with disabilities, it is crucial to use person-first language to emphasize the whole person, instead defining that person by their disability. Adapted from resources by APA Style (1992), Arizona State University’s National Center on Disability and Journalism (2015), and Autistic Hoya (2017), what follows is a guide to using respectful, non-stigmatizing language when speaking about or addressing a person with disabilities.
Put people first, not their disability.

Preferred expressions avoid the implication that the person as a whole is disabled or defective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Use the term(s)...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>disabled person</td>
<td>person with (who has) a disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defective child</td>
<td>child with a congenital disability or child with a birth impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentally ill person</td>
<td>person with a mental illness or psychiatric disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do not label people by their disability.

Because the person is not the disability, the two concepts should remain separate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Use the term(s)...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>schizophrenics</td>
<td>people who have schizophrenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>epileptics</td>
<td>individuals with epilepsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amputee</td>
<td>person with an amputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paraplegics</td>
<td>individuals with paraplegia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the disabled</td>
<td>people with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the retarded</td>
<td>people with intellectual disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the mentally ill</td>
<td>people with a mental illness or psychiatric disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alcoholic or addict</td>
<td>person experiencing a problem with alcohol or drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autistic child</td>
<td>child with autism spectrum disorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do not label persons with disabilities as patients or invalids.

*These names imply that a person is sick or under a doctor’s care. People with disabilities should not be referred to as patients or invalids unless the illness status (if any) is under discussion or unless they are currently residing in a hospital.*

Do not overextend the severity of a disability.

*Preferred expressions limit the scope of the disability. For example, a child with a learning disability does not have difficulty in all areas of learning. Do not use blanket statements or labels that lack nuance.*

| Instead of...            | Use the term(s)...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the physically disabled</td>
<td>individuals with a physical disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the learning disabled</td>
<td>children with specific learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retarded child</td>
<td>child with an intellectual disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chronic mental illness</td>
<td>long-term or persistent mental illness or psychiatric disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the disabled</td>
<td>people with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the retarded</td>
<td>people with intellectual disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the mentally ill</td>
<td>people with a mental illness or psychiatric disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alcoholic or addict</td>
<td>person experiencing a problem with alcohol or drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autistic child</td>
<td>child with autism spectrum disorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use emotionally neutral expressions. Be direct and accurate instead of using euphemisms.

Problematic expressions have excessive, negative overtones and suggest continued helplessness or victimhood. Euphemisms imply that having a disability defines a person or reduces the quality of that person’s life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Use the term(s)...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stroke victim</td>
<td>individual who had a stroke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afflicted with cerebral palsy</td>
<td>child with cerebral palsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suffering from multiple sclerosis</td>
<td>people who have multiple sclerosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the mentally challenged</td>
<td>individuals with intellectual disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differently abled</td>
<td>person with a disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diffability</td>
<td>disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emphasize abilities, not limitations.

*The person is not confined to a wheelchair but uses it for mobility; a person is not homebound who is taught or who works from home.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Use the term(s)...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>confined to a wheelchair</td>
<td>uses a wheelchair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homebound</td>
<td>child who is taught at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corrective hearing device</td>
<td>cochlear implant, an electronic device that assists a person who is deaf or hard of hearing in understanding speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Avoid offensive expression and correct any ableist language you hear in the classroom.

*Learn which terms are outdated and/or have negative connotations and which terms are the most respectful of people with disabilities. If you make a mistake, acknowledge it, apologize, and move forward.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Instead of...</strong></th>
<th><strong>Use the term(s)...</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cripple</td>
<td>person who has a limp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deformed</td>
<td>person with a shortened arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mongoloid</td>
<td>child with Down Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crazy, paranoid</td>
<td>person with symptoms of mental illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spaz, spastic</td>
<td>individual with spastic cerebral palsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>able-bodied person</td>
<td>non-disabled person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>midget</td>
<td>person with dwarfism or person of short stature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus on the right and capacity of people with disabilities to express their own goals and preferences and to exercise control over their own services and supports.

In many instances, people with disabilities are not given opportunities to participate in decisions regarding the services and supports they will receive as part of treatment or rehabilitation. Instead, they are viewed as requiring “management” as patients or cases, rather than individuals with goals and preferences that should be considered. This can be especially tricky when working with minors under 18 who legally must defer to a guardian’s judgment and consent.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Use the term(s)...</th>
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<tr>
<td>placement</td>
<td>discussion of suitable and preferred learning arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional judgment</td>
<td>opinion that is subject to the consideration of a person’s goals and preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patient management or case</td>
<td>care coordination, supportive services, resource coordination, or assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management</td>
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See people with disabilities as a resource and as contributing community members, not as a burden or problem.

Discussions regarding the services or needs of a person with disabilities and their families often use terms that paint the individual in a negative light, casting them as a burden for the family or community. Instead, use terms that reflect the abilities, contributions, and special needs of people with disabilities. Language should clearly recognize the responsibility of communities and environments in the support of people with disabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of…</th>
<th>Use the term(s)…</th>
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<tr>
<td>family burden</td>
<td>family supports or needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem of mental illness</td>
<td>challenges that people with psychiatric disabilities may face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community support needs of individual</td>
<td>responsibilities of communities for inclusion and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>handicapped person</td>
<td>person with a disability (“handicapped” is more appropriate to describe environments not individuals)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As part of the research for this guidebook, I conducted a survey of self-volunteering adults from the United States who are LGBTQIA+ and have disabilities. These folks responded to my call for participants via social media and generously shared their experiences with me. Participants range in age, geographic location, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and disability status, but they all self-selected as members of this broader intersectional identity. Most participants chose to remain anonymous, but names are shared when consent given to do so. What follows is a selection of their comments, anecdotes, suggestions for teachers, and hopes for students who may have similar intersectional identities. Some comments have been edited for length and/or clarity, but all the words are their own.
I wish my teachers had known that there are multiple ways of learning and various ways of learning are valid. The messages I received in middle and high school were that if you can’t learn in this one way we’re teaching you in school, then you are incapable of being a learner. I wanted desperately to be a learner, but instead began internalizing these messages that I was incapable and less than. It wasn’t until my senior year of college when I learned about embodied learning and was able to interpretive dance to express my ideas for a final project that I learned what it felt like to be truly heard and appreciated for my learning in a school setting.

—ANONYMOUS, CISGENDER LESBIAN WOMAN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES
In my experience, disabled people might still be seen as ‘less than’ by society. Regular [sic] abled people are able to get married and no one bats an eye. If a disabled person is even dating someone, the abled partner is doing such a huge sacrifice/good deed/etc. If they treat disabled people as people first, and recognize and normalize being LGBT, then future students would have less of an already awkward middle school experience. Instead, they’re doubly perceived as weird/undesirable/whatever because of their ‘strange, sinful sexuality’ and/or their disability. In addition, some may think that their unusual sexuality IS a disability!

—ANONYMOUS, CISFEMALE PERSON WHO IS BISEXUAL AND HAS A DISABILITY
I am what a lot of folks would consider ‘high functioning’ autistic (I don’t agree with functioning labels for many reasons) but because of this, I feel like people don’t view me as ‘autistic enough’ to be disabled. I feel similar identifying as bisexual because people think I am not straight enough to be straight and not gay enough to be in the LGBTQIA+ community. It can feel isolating to be on the edge of those two communities.

—ANONYMOUS, FEMALE PRESENTING PERSON WHO IS BISEXUAL AND AUTISTIC
Having sex ed [through the Unitarian Universalist Church] at age 13 that showed images of disabled people and couples/groups made up of people of different sexual identities, and fat people, and people of different races/ethnicities and having that accompanied with a forum that was completely open to ask follow-up questions and get factual answers was so... important in my life (and my non-UU friends’ lives, because I became their go-to source of knowledge) and while I suspect that most middle school teachers don’t have that much control over that aspect of the school curriculum, it should absolutely be changed.

—ANONYMOUS, FEMME WOMAN WHO IS QUEER AND HAS A CHRONIC ILLNESS
I was sexually harassed by jocks in middle school in my social studies class, where the teacher acted like she understood my concerns, and proceeded to sit me adjacent to my abuser, ignore any complaints I gave, and pair me with him for every group assignment. At one point during class he took a book I was reading, wiped his penis on it, and then threw it in my face while saying, ‘You will like this better now, faggot,’ and the teacher did nothing at all.

—ANONYMOUS, CISGENDER MAN (THEY/THEM PRONOUNS) WHO IS QUEER AND HAS POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)
There isn’t enough sex ed or consent education for either LGBTQ+ or disabled students. At the intersection, it’s even tougher. People tend to desexualize disabled students, to the point where a lot of people don’t believe we can have a sexuality.

—ALAINA LEARY, GENDER NON-BINARY PERSON WHO IS QUEER/BISEXUAL AND AUTISTIC
I wish my teachers had known how to create *safe spaces* for students to explore their identities and be compassionate towards each other. I think I might have been far less alienated and disaffected and suicidal in middle school, which would have helped me *be more successful* as I transitioned to high school, when my depression and anxiety worsened.

—ANONYMOUS, CISGENDER GAY MAN WHO HAS CEREBRAL PALSY
I don’t think it’s taught to anyone, teachers included, that kids can be BOTH queer and disabled. Often when trying to pin down a problem a kid is having, I’ve seen teachers go ‘it’s either this thing or this thing’; rarely do they consider that one ‘symptom’ or ‘problem’ can have multiple causes. My social issues were informed, in equal parts, by autism, ADHD, and queerness, not just ‘intelligence’ (which was the factor that my teachers pinned down as the sole cause).

—ANONYMOUS, CIS WOMAN WHO IS LESBIAN, AUTISTIC, AND HAS ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE DISORDER (ADHD)
1. GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS.

Knowing your students isn’t just about matching faces to names, assessing reading levels, or being vaguely familiar with their extracurricular interest. Knowing a student means getting to know their family, knowing their circle of friends, knowing what makes them laugh, and knowing what makes them uncomfortable. It means understanding the student as a whole person who may display only one facet of themselves in the classroom. Knowing your students takes time and institutional support. It requires a lot of close observation and conversation. You won’t—and shouldn’t expect to—know them by the end of the first week or month of school. Don’t
rush: each day, ask them questions about themselves, and show that you care about the answers.

A great way to kick-start this process is to facilitate interactive activities that allow students to share themselves with you and with their peers. At the beginning of the year, you can ask students to bring in and present a personal artifact to the class, explaining why the object is meaningful. (Another less material-based option is to ask students to bring in family/community/cultural stories. Storytelling can give you a lot of information about what motivates a student to engage).

Another idea is to incorporate the “I Wish My Teacher Knew” strategy, an insightful initiative created by Kyle Schwartz, a third-grade teacher in Denver, Colorado (de la Cruz, 2016). She asked her students to complete the sentence frame, “I wish my teacher knew [blank],” and their responses were astounding: “Some responses were humorous; others were heartbreaking. All were profoundly moving and enlightening. The results opened her eyes to the need for educators to understand the unique realities their students face in order to create an open, safe, and supportive classroom environment” (Schwartz, 2016, para. 2).
2. ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION, NOT SILENCE.

With all of the responsibilities we have as teachers, including the most difficult beast that is time and classroom management, it is easy to curtail substantial conversations among students. However, creating a space for dialogue is essential for students—especially those at the intersections of marginalized identities—to feel heard and valued. If there is a hate crime or act of terrorism that is widely publicized in the media, such as the Orlando nightclub shooting in 2016 or Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in 2018, a teacher should address it directly in class and offer themselves as a source of support for students. If a marginalized identity group is attacked publicly, students who identify as members of that group may be particularly emotional and need a forum for expressing grief, anger, and fear.
3. BE EXPLICIT: TELL YOUR STUDENTS YOU CARE ABOUT THEIR SAFETY AND WELL-BEING.

As adults, we sometimes assume that our students think like adults. They must know who we are, what we think, and what our values are, if we’ve made them obvious, right? Depending on the developmental stage of your students, which can vary within age groups and among individuals, you may not as clear as you think you are. It can be a huge weight off a student’s shoulders simply to hear that their teacher genuinely supports their safety and well-being. Be explicit: tell your students that you are a resource for them and that they can talk to you honestly. Students who are LGBTQIA+ and have disabilities often feel disconnected from those around them, and you can relieve some of that alienation by being an outspoken, proactive ally.

4. SPEAK UP IF YOU HEAR BIASED LANGUAGE OR WITNESS DISCRIMINATION.

If a student uses disrespectful language toward or to describe someone who is LGBTQIA+ and/or has disabilities, a teacher should not stay silent. Casual uses of hateful language are unacceptable and should be called out immediately. For many adolescent social groups, words like “retarded” and “gay” are frequently thrown around as insults (Payne, 2010). Even though those that use those words may argue that words are “just words” and not intended to discriminate against anyone, language can reinforce cultural norms that are ableist, homophobic, cisnormative, racist, and sexist.

When a student who is LGBTQIA+ and/or has a disability tells you which words to use to address and describe them, use those exact words. For example, a student who is gender non-conforming may tell you to use singular they, them, and their pronouns. Even if you are an English teacher and a stickler for grammar, accept and model that the singular they is correct when it is applied to a person who has asked you to do so. Respecting a student’s name, title, and pronouns is paramount to validating their identity in the public setting of the classroom. If you model using
gender-neutral language, other students will follow suit. (A helpful way to do this is by introducing yourself with your pronouns in the beginning of the year: “Hello, folks, I’m Mx. Red and I use they/them pronouns;” “Hi, I’m Ms. Green and I use she/her or they/them pronouns”).

5. IMPLEMENT UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING.

As teachers, we frequently see signs of diverse learning in our classrooms. Not every student processes or produces information in the same way, and every learner has a unique set of strengths and areas of opportunity. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is “a curriculum designed approach to increase flexibility in teaching and decrease the barriers that frequently limit student access to materials and learning in classrooms” (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2002, p. 2). This framework focuses on differentiating instruction for all types of learners while still maintaining universally high expectations for performance.

At its core, UDL approaches learning with a deep commitment to inclusive, responsive practices. By providing content to students through multiple formats (digital and analog), such as audio books or transcripts of lessons, there is an equity of access to learning. Students who have disabilities (including but not limited to
those who are LGBTQIA+) benefit from the adaptive nature of UDL. (Non-disabled students also benefit from UDL!)

6. ADVOCATE FOR LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE AND DISABILITY INCLUSIVE SEX EDUCATION.

Instead of approaching sex education from a strictly anatomical or moral standpoint (e.g. abstinence-only training), advocate for a curriculum that aims to foster open, honest, and support conversations among students who are confronting puberty and might be beginning to explore sexual impulses. Most sex ed curricula (even in progressive schools) still uses a heteronormative, cisnormative, and ableist model from which to teach students about sex.
Instead of addressing the intricacies of human relationships by discussing the myriad ways to be intimate, most sex ed classes focus solely on the mechanics and risks of sex (e.g. pregnancy, birth control, sexually transmitted infections, sexual assault). If these classes show examples, share case studies, or display diagrams, they inevitably feature (mostly white or light-skinned) cisgender heterosexual couples without readily perceptible disabilities. If the classes do take account of queer sex, it is as an afterthought or subsection of the curriculum—not integrated within the entire approach to teaching young people about sex (Sager, 2017). Classes seldom even touch on what sex might mean for people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities.

The U.S. sex ed approach teaches adolescents selectively and hierarchically, largely leaving students who are LGBTQIA+ and/or have disabilities to find information on their own. Speak up for inclusive sex ed, because every student has a right to learn about human bodies, sexual desire, romantic relationships, and intimacy.

7. ADVOCATE FOR GENDER-INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE BATHROOMS.

All students should have easy access to safe, private bathrooms that protect their rights to express freedom of identity and to be autonomous. According to the
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, all schools must have bathrooms with accommodations for those with physical disabilities, such as folks who use wheelchairs and need larger stalls. However, a bathroom’s supposed physical accessibility does not ensure its safety for students of all gender identities and expressions.

School bathrooms are isolated from adult supervision and can therefore serve as ideal sites for peer-to-peer bullying. Research has shown that 43% of U.S. adolescents fear harassment in school bathrooms (STOMP Out Bullying, 2018). For students who are trans or gender non-binary, this statistic skyrockets to almost 70%, meaning that gendered bathrooms are particularly uncomfortable and anxiety-producing for a majority of student populations (Rosen, n.d.). Some students are forced to use a bathroom that matches with their sex assigned at birth rather than their gender identity and/or expression.

Those who are LGBTQIA+ and have disabilities may avoid the bathroom by restricting their fluid intake or holding in their bodily functions, which can lead to
pain, infection, and dehydration. Going to the bathroom is a basic human right, and as a teacher, you should advocate for bathrooms that are safe, comfortable, and convenient for all students.

8. BE A FACULTY ADVISOR FOR A STUDENT ORGANIZATION OR CLUB FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE LGBTQIA+ AND/OR HAVE DISABILITIES.

Like any adolescent, students who are LGBTQIA+ and/or have disabilities are looking to fit in and find community with their peers. Student organizations or clubs, like Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) chapters, can help students feel safe and welcome in their school environment. They can also be places to learn, discuss, heal, support, and find solidarity.

If your school has a GSA chapter or similar affinity student group, assess its accessibility measures and evaluate the diversity of its members. Is the group as
inclusive as possible? Are there any potential (physical or social) barriers to entry? Is the group well-established and developed? A recent survey of 8,000 adolescent students nationwide found that 18% of LGBTQIA+ students had been prevented from forming a GSA chapter at their schools (Palmer, Greytak, & Kosciw, 2016). If your school does not have a GSA chapter or similar affinity group, collaborate with interested students to start one.

9. ENGAGE IN HONEST SELF-REFLECTION AND ASSESSMENT. CONFRONT YOUR IMPLICIT BIASES AND STAY ACCOUNTABLE.

Genuine implementation of intersectionality is an ongoing process, not a box to be checked off. If you believe you are “intersectional enough” or are “done” with the work, you can always do more to support and advocate for your students. Question yourself: are you thinking of identities in terms of either-or? Does your curriculum reflect the overlapping areas of diverse identities, or does it place people in mutually exclusive categories?

The intersection of LGBTQIA+ and disability should not be understood as merely the shaded section of a Venn diagram. Rather, intersectionality involves a complex web of identities that are evolving and often interdependent. Acknowledge as many nuances of difference as you can. Celebrate differences of race, class,
religion, culture, family structure, and learning styles. Let your students know that you are learning along with them, and that no one ever stops learning when it comes to identity.
Role Models for Students

“Just as in the L.G.B.T.Q. community, which I’m also a part of as a queer woman, finding camaraderie with other disabled people means creating a system of found family, people tied together by their identities and experiences...It is critical for disabled people to find a sense of community. Disability is the only marginalized identity that anyone can enter at any time; one in 20 Americans is disabled, but we’re often so disenfranchised that our rights are an afterthought...Our strength comes from the relationships with other disabled people that we create, whether these are online or in person, and the lifelong mentorship that these relationships foster” (Leary, 2017).

Your middle-school students are most likely on one or more social media platforms, and they use them often. To meet our students where they are, we must speak their language and engage in the activities they like. It is essential for all students—but especially students at the intersections of multiple marginalized identity groups—to have role models. How better to access a rich multitude of role models than online? Many of the role models in this section are LGBTQIA+ and/or have a disability or disabilities Share these social media accounts with your students! When we show students that social media does not always have to be a place for cyberbullying or negativity, we can provide them with positive imagery and mirrors for their own experiences.
Mama Cax

Mama Cax, Née Cassey Brunns is a Haitian American Blogger, Advocate and Motivational Speaker. She holds a B.A in International Studies and Currently working toward her Masters. Mama Cax uses social media as a platform to talk about body positivity, but more importantly, dismantle the image of what people with disabilities should be or look like. On September 15th, 2016, she was invited to the White House to walk in the first ever White House Fashion show. The event was a celebration of inclusive design, assistive technology, and prosthetics.

Instagram: @mamacax

Photo by Gillian Laub via Glamour.com

Sara Geurts

Sara Geurts is a 26 year-old model and activist who has Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), a rare skin disorder that slows down collagen production, making skin fragile, wrinkled, and less elastic at an early age. Her Instagram account promotes her body positivity, her half Korean identity, and her relationship with her girlfriend.

Instagram: @sarrageurts

Photo by Brit Bergland.
Alex Gino

Alex Gino loves glitter, ice cream, gardening, puns, and stories that reflect the diversity and complexity of being alive. They would take a quiet coffee date with a friend over a loud and crowded party any day.

Alex has been an activist and advocate for LGBTQ+ communities since 1997, has served as a board member for NOLOSE, and now works with We Need Diverse Books.

Alex believes young people need tools to talk about and reflect on real issues in our world. Their work in progress is a middle grade novel about Deafness, racist police violence, baby sitters, and learning about your own privilege.

Twitter: @biggino

Photo via Wikipedia.org

Ericka Hart

A kinsey, poly, cancer warrior, activist, sexuality educator and performer with a Master’s of Education in Human Sexuality from Widener University, Ericka Hart has taught sexuality education for elementary aged youth to adults across New York City for the past six years. Her work in sexuality education was catalyzed by her service as a Peace Corps HIV/AIDS volunteer in Ethiopia from 2008-2010. Diagnosed with bilateral breast cancer in May 2014 at the age of 28, she realized that neither her identity as a queer black woman, nor her sex life as a survivor, was featured prominently in her treatment.

Instagram: @ihartericksa

Twitter: @ihartericksa

Photo via BeinMagazine.com
Jazz Jennings

Jazz Jennings is a YouTube personality, spokesmodel, television personality, and LGBTQIA+ rights activist.

Jennings is an honorary co-founder of the TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation, which she and her parents founded in 2002 to assist transgender youth.

Instagram: @jazzjennings
Twitter: @jazzjennings
YouTube: Jazz Jennings

Photo via the Advocate.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (they/them) is a queer disabled nonbinary femme writer and cultural worker of Butcher; Tamil Sri Lankan and Irish Roma ascen. The author of Dirty River: A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home (Publishing Triangle and Lambda Award 2016 finalist, American Library Association Stonewall Award 2016), Bodymap (André Lorde Poetry Award finalist, Publisher’s Triangle), Love Cabs (Lambda Award winner 2012) and Genocide Grade, she is also, with Ching-In Chen and Jai Dulani, co-editor of The Revolution Starts At Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities (AK Press 2016).

Currently a lead artist with the disability justice performance collective Sins Invalid, she teaches, performs and lectures across North America. Leah co-founded and co-directed Maupps With Chili, North America’s longest running queer and trans people of color performance art tour, from 2005–16 and also founded Toronto’s Asian Arts Freedom School.

Twitter: @brownstargirl

Photo via Moxitude Magazine.
Alaina Leary

Alaina Leary is a queer disability activist, a creator and storyteller across all forms of media. She is a book and magazine editor, a book publicist, and a social media editor for We Need Diverse Books. She is also an editor for Dzonc Studio: Life, Her Campus, Luna Luna Magazine, The Deaf Poets Society, Germ Magazine, and more.

Instagram: @alainasheys
Twitter: @alainasheys

Photo via AlainaLeary.com

Chella Man

Chella Man is a 19-year-old, deaf, genderqueer, queer artist currently transitioning on testosterone. He is studying virtual reality programming at The New School in New York City, while creating art on the side. His main focus is to educate others on issues regarding being queer and disabled within a safe space.

Instagram: @chella.man
Twitter: @chellamanart

Photo by Myles Loftin.
Mia Mingus

Mia Mingus describes herself as a queer physically disabled woman of color transracial/transnational adoptee — an identity that only begins to explain the personal background that informs Mingus’ cross-sectional social change work.

Mingus is an Oakland-based, nationally recognized organizer and writer who has traveled the country speaking about myriad frameworks for dismantling oppression, from racial justice to reproductive justice to queer liberation. Her current work centers around disability justice and child sexual abuse, which she addresses as a member of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (BATJC).

Twitter: @miamingus

Photo via Oakland Local.

Eddie Ndopu

Eddie Ndopu is a black, queer feminist thinker and disability rights activist from Johannesburg, South Africa. Ndopu recently became the first African with a disability admitted to the University of Oxford.

Instagram: @eddiendopu

Photo via OkayAfrica.com
Annie Segarra

Annie is a Content Creator and Intersectional Activist. She identifies as Disabled (EDS), Queer, Mixed Race, and Latina/x (She/They). Her YouTube channel features videos on introspective topics, social topics, disability, body image, sex/gender/dating, feminism, etc., as well as a variety of music/artistic media, tag challenges, and day-in-the-life vlogs.

Instagram: @annieelainey
Twitter: @annieelainey
YouTube: Annie Elainey

Photo via Tumblr.com

Rebekah Taussig

Rebekah Taussig is a writer, teacher, and advocate based in Kansas City. She is a PhD candidate in creative nonfiction and disability studies at the University of Kansas. Her academic work focuses on self-representation, narratives of embodiment, life writing from social media to memoir, and disability as an identity.

Instagram: @sitting_pretty

Photo via Design*Sponge.com
Alok Vaid-Menon

Alok Vaid-Menon (@they/them) is a gender non-conforming performance artist, writer, educator, and entertainer. Their eclectic sense of style, political comedy, and poetic challenge to the gender binary have been internationally renowned. Alok was recently the youngest recipient of the prestigious Live Works Performance Art Award granted to ten performance artists across the world. They have been featured on HBO, MTV, The Guardian, National Geographic, The New York Times, and The New Yorker and have presented their work at 300 venues in more than 50 countries.

Instagram: @alokvmenson

Twitter: @alokvmenson

Photo via AlokVMenson.com
Relevant Organizations

Organizations that Support Youth, People of Color, the LGBTQIA+ Community, and People with Disabilities

Advocates for Youth

amaze
SEX ED CAN BE
#MOREINFOLESSWEIRD

YOUTUBE.COM/C/AMAZEVIDS
Why Create Disabled Media?

Authenticity.

Equity.

Diversity.

Disability Visibility Project™

DisabilityVisibilityProject.com  @DisVisibility
Recommended Books

Children need windows and mirrors. They need mirrors in which they see themselves and windows through which they see the world.

—RUDINE SIMS BISHOP, ON THE POWER OF CHILDREN’S BOOKS, 1990

FOR STUDENTS
Further Reading

ON INTERSECIONAL IDENTITIES


**ON DISABILITY**


**ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY & EXPRESSION**

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**ON SEX EDUCATION**


ON BULLYING AND STUDENT SAFETY


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