

# Catchalls and Conundrums: Theorizing “Sexual Minority” in Social, Cultural, and Political Contexts

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## Article abstract

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# Catchalls and Conundrums: Theorizing “Sexual Minority” in Social, Cultural, and Political Contexts

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*The term “sexual minority” functions in social, cultural, and political contexts as a catchall for minority sexuality categories. Yet, apart from serving as an umbrella term, its uses are contradictory. On the one hand, the term emphasizes “sexuality,” which serves the purposes of religious fundamentalist and political groups that demonize minority sexualities to the exclusion of identity, background or family status. On the other hand, the term can be useful for readers and researchers in sexuality studies to become more globally aware of, and to reconceptualize, sexuality outside of tightly contained LGBT boxes. Such a contradiction has implications for education practice and policy. We suggest, for instance, using the term cautiously when describing same-sex sexualities because, as an umbrella term, it can homogenize people who represent a highly diverse spectrum of racialized categories, class backgrounds, genders, sexualities, and other social markers of difference. As a pedagogical heuristic device, the term is useful in delineating the differences between queer and sexual minority pedagogies when deciding upon the approach that will best draw an audience into the discussion. Our overall goal through this critical exploration is to support new understandings and insights of sexual diversity in ways that effectively challenge heterosexism and homophobia.*

The term “sexual minority” currently claims a space within common lexicon to identify sexualities and corresponding identities other than heteronormative ones. Generally speaking, the term has two purposes. First, it fosters inclusivity of people and groups who could be described as such a minority, yet avoids bulky identity-categorizations such as “LGBT.” Referring to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people, “LGBT” is a Western concept and arguably the most common linguistic marker to denote—some might say lump together—people of same-sex sexualities and non-cisgender people. Second, unlike the term “queer,” it detours around accusations of being offensive or elitist. “Queer” is common among academics who discuss queerness as a framework for deconstructing identity categories, and among activists who invoke “queer” as political resistance against dominant regimes of sexuality and gender expression (de Lauretis, 1991). For others, “queer” is a broad category that could refer to practically any non-heterosexual (i.e., straight) identity and positionality, leaving aside the notion that some straight people position themselves as “queer.” For still others, the term “queer” recalls a grim history of stigmatization, marginalization, and violence (Gamson, 1995). For some activists and scholars (such as Chan, 2013; Morrison, Morrison, Carrigan & McDermott, 2012), “sexual minority” functions as a current catchall term of choice, perhaps in competition with, and even superseding, “queer.” Leaving these complications aside, our focus for this paper is on the term “sexual

minority” and some of the religious, social, political, and cultural conundrums enmeshed within its deployment.

“Sexual minority” attempts to be a politically correct version of “queer” and avoids the proprietary debate of who gets to use terms that have been reclaimed as expressions of pride rather than shame. We see it as problematic in at least two ways. First, it privileges “sexuality,” meaning same-sex sexual fantasies and practices, at the expense of identity, meaning how people privately and publicly define themselves based on same-sex sexuality. A focus on sexuality for sexual minorities can be emancipating and empowering, but also politically troubling because religious-right organizations exercise political leverage with aplomb against such minorities. For them, it is a usual and effective strategy for dehumanizing and demonizing queers. Their focus, one might even say obsession, on sexual practices excludes other dimensions such as identities, relationships, families, and communities by which we are fully human (Walton, 2014a).

An additional problem with the term “sexual minority” is that it gives the impression that actual sexuality determines or is synonymous with identity, neither of which are necessarily the case. In other words, *what you do is not necessarily who you are as a sexual identity or whom you choose to present yourself to others*. The conflation of sexuality with identity relegates key debates around sexual identity to the margins and bolsters sexual practices as being a centrifuge to queer rights movements. Although it is the case that actual homosexuality has been illegal at various points in history, which is the current state of affairs in countries such as India and Uganda, civil rights on the basis of sexual minority status have highlighted marriage, family, and adoption, among other issues, over actual sexuality. As Held (2007) puts it in the context of marriage equality, “gay marriage is a political and legal issue, one that relates to the distribution of rights and privileges” (p. 222). Evidently, then, respectability has been, and continues to be, politically advantageous and “sexual minority” has become key in the discourses that favour social respectability. The issue of respectability is key because LGBT activists tend to portray themselves as mostly the same as conventional straight people and, thus, are not to be feared (Richardson, 2005). Such a position is a political strategy to gain equal access in society through legal mechanisms that regulate marriage, adoption, and other issues.

The emphasis on such politics is sameness with straights, or, in other words, respectability for the sake of their acceptance and approval. There may be political advantage in adopting such a strategy, but Simpson (2009) argues that, “gays seem to have forgotten that gay sex isn't terribly respectable and that it never will be, no matter how much you talk up gay domesticity” (para. 5). Disavowing sameness and respectability, many queer activists prefer to highlight difference from conventional straight society (for example, gender diversity rather than male/female binaries). The nutshell version of the debate is that while some LGBT activists accuse queer activists of undermining legal and social equality, many queer activists accuse LGBT activists of selling out. With this polemical debate in mind, “sexual minority” strikes us as liberal discourse designed to woo the straight majority and curry acceptance at the expense of articulating difference.

The term “sexual minority” alleviates some of the colonizing patterns that are often critiqued of “LGBT” usage in non-Western contexts. Thus, it acts as a transnational concept sensitive to persons with same-sex sexualities in non-Western cultural, transcultural, and diaspora communities who perceive Western sexuality labels such as “LGBT” and “queer” as being counter-cultural, taboo, and destructive of Indigenous movements around sexuality-difference (Daniel, 1994; Dunne, 1998; Eichler & Mizzi, 2013). “Sexual minority” imprints and homogenizes a new Western sexuality marker onto non-Western societies, and still avoids Indigenous terms (and a deeper discussion of gender roles) that are used in non-Western contexts. A discussion on gender as it relates to “sexual minority” may consist of how homosexuality in certain cultures is predominately viewed through strict masculine and feminine norms.

In what follows, then, we unpeel layers of “sexual minority” as a discursive move, deployed within a broader field of psychosocial politics. We expound on the aforementioned conundrums, and suggest implications for education not limited to schooling. While we ultimately do not disregard the term altogether, our goal here is to discuss its limitations and to offer suggestions that may help readers in their deployment of the term. First, however, we offer a brief history.

## A Historical Snapshot

Although it was Alfred Kinsey who famously brought the notion of sexuality and its practices into Western public discussion in the 1940s and the 1950s, with much fanfare and controversy (Jones, 1997), the concept “sexual minority” first appeared in Rust (1992). Deployed as “sexual minority identity,” it was offered without much explanation as to how or why it was used. This term was used almost casually to describe the sexual attractions and behaviours of lesbian and bisexual women from mixed ethnic backgrounds. The term resurfaced a few years later in Fassinger and Miller’s (1996) model on “sexual minority identity formation,” which only involved gay men, as well as McCarn and Fassinger’s (1996) revision of the model to include lesbians. In both of these contexts, the term was used to emphasize the “minority” status of lesbians and gay men on par with racial minorities, except that, in this instance, the minority group faces oppression based on their homosexuality. The term is a shift away from the political and controversial nature of the term “homosexuality,” specifically its association with medicalized deviance.

Since then, the term has persisted as a catchall of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender identity, without much interrogation of the term in education (see Bettinger, Timmins & Tisdell, 2006; Hill, 2009) and broader social science literature (see James, 1998; Philips, McMillen, Sparks & Ueberle, 1997). Heterosexual people who claim minority practices or identities are not counted in this earlier work.

Savin-Williams (2001) further reconceptualized the deployment of the term to include non-identifying lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals in light of accessing populations that engage in same-sex sexual practices, but do not subscribe to a corresponding identity category. This point becomes evident in some of the more contemporary deployment of the term. For example, in an international development perspective, Clarke (2003) uses the term to depict an alternative to the fixed identity “gay” or “lesbian” in order to debunk the Western-oriented nature of fixed identity labels and to allow for consideration of Indigenous representations of same-sex sexualities in other parts of their world. From a health perspective, Young and Meyer (2005) suggest that the term may be more useful than women-who-have-sex-with-women (WSW) or men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM), which are often deployed in health-care settings. WSW and MSM terminologies may erase those who identify as gay or lesbian, want to be socially visible as such, and do not want their identities to be reduced to mere sexual practices. Lastly, from a sociological perspective, Diamond and Butterworth (2008) use “sexual minority” as a means to assert a feminist theoretical framework of intersectionality as a means to account for race and gender identity intersections with sexuality. Such work points out how “sexual minority” is slowly emigrating outside of North America. Pizmony-Levy and Shilo (2012) characterize this development and its implication in an Israeli context. Study participants in their research on perceptions of the identity-categorizations of “LGBTQ” and “sexual minority” point out that the term “sexual minority” causes discomfort and irritation because it “weakens” the unity stance often assumed with the LGBT label.

Other work indicates how the term continues to evolve over time. The term “sexual minority allies,” for instance, was introduced by Duhigg et al. (2010) as a means to incorporate heterosexual supporters of queer social politics in the sexual minority lexicon. “Sexual minority” has also been applied to transnational communities including refugees (Lee & Brotman, 2011) and immigrants (Eichler & Mizzi, 2013) to North America as a means of acknowledging same-sex sexualities who originate from non-Western contexts, and of considering a pluralistic approach to sexuality that takes into account multiple practices and understandings in respects to homosexuality.

In short, “sexual minority” abbreviates a number of minority identity-categories. Yet various scholars have carved out their own use of term. The overwhelming practice of using “sexual minority” as a catchall term harkens back to a similar function performed by “queer.” Yet, unlike queer, the problem in much of the literature that uses “sexual minority” lies in how it is used unproblematically. It signals inclusion while attempting to avoid controversy. In addition, the practice in contemporary social science literature of using the term in transnational contexts seems to be growing, which demonstrates how the term has become a political attempt for readers and researchers in sexuality studies to become more globally aware. At the fore of this historical and contemporary literature is a reconceptualization of identity and a veneer of heightened inclusivity in language. Problematic, however, is the ‘minority’ discourse.

## Privileging Sexuality as an Identity Marker

Rutherford (1990; 2007) argues that identity refers to individual categories that remind us of expressions of sex, race, and class, among other markers of social difference, that summon experiences of discrimination and domination in society. Dominant and subordinate binaries, such as black/white, hetero/homo, and male/female, construct racial, sexual, and gender identities and form internalized hierarchies within the self. He (2007) observes that

...the individual struggle to create a personal identity has become the defining paradigm of how we live in Western cultures: we are called upon to invent our own identity and live in our own way to be true to ourselves. It is the means by which individuals struggle to give themselves meaning and representation. (p. 19)

According to Rutherford, without meaning and representation, or a sense of identity, people may perceive themselves as socially invisible and, thus, not legitimate. In our view, such second-class status stems from a Western tradition of invalidating particular sexual identities through being classified, managed, and considered subordinate by dominant institutions (for example, schools).

We agree with Rutherford. Yet, on the surface, “sexual minority” implies little about actual identity because of the absence of the word ‘identity’, and emphasizes “minority” status of sexuality. Furthermore, the identity binaries that he highlights, while important to consider, do not account for another binary of particular significance to matters of sexuality or, rather, expressions of it in society. Sexuality is not just a private matter, yet expressions that announce straightness, such as references to cross-sex partners, are not relegated to the realm of the private as such expressions tend to be for queers. Thus, the deployment of “private” as a form of regulation mirrors privilege of some and marginalization of others. What we mean by “public” in this context is the expression of sexuality apart from actual sex, such as public displays of affections, everyday stories of cross-sex partners and family, pictures of spouses on office desks, and use of opposite-sex pronouns when referring to one’s partner or spouse. Such expressions *announce* sexual identity and make them public. While sexualities, including heterosexuality, have long been regulated in the workplace, community, school, and in other public places (Kinsman, 1996; Weeks, 1989), it is also the case that such regulation is not an equal opportunity regulation. Sexuality is hierarchized, heterosexuality being dominant and visible in society, not only in public displays of affection, but also in pop culture and advertising media. Its ubiquity is a testimony, not of mere visibility, but of compulsive and conspicuous visibility (Rich, (1980/1993). Heterosexuality may be the norm by virtue of sheer numbers of people who identify as straight, but it is as though it is in constant need of reassurance and validation in perpetuity.

By contrast, people who call themselves, or are attributed by others as being, gay, lesbian, or bisexual, based on their sexual interests, relationships, and families, are not readily accorded such visibility. On the contrary, they have been accused of being perverted, mentally ill, morally corrupt, and a danger to children, particularly by religious fundamentalists and other social conservatives who use sexuality as a means to sway voters, create division, and incite moral panic. Of significance here is that these marginalized sexuality categories (LGBT) are utilized not just in a private way, but in a *privatized* way—meaning a process of becoming private. In this case, the process is not only about “becoming.” It is also about being relegated to the private realm through social regulation and policing. Social regulation is a process. Yoshino (2006) refers to “covering” as being more than conversion and passing while in the closet. Covering results from the pressure of needing to assimilate so that a gay identity is not so obvious—or, in our view, does not threaten the dominant status of heterosexuality. For example, in Western contexts, when straight people hold hands as couples, others around them do not readily interpret such expression as “private.” Yet, queer people place themselves at risk of verbal judgment and physical attack when they perform the same expression in public. Such a double-standard is the root of the accusation that queer people “flaunt” their non-normative sexualities and genders appropriately in public while straight people are, by inference, just doing what comes naturally in *their* space. Yoshino adds that this accusation can come from different perspectives. He reflects on his experience and writes, “Others in the vigorously progay environment in which I work echoed the sentiment in less elegant formulations. *Be gay*, my world seemed to say. *Be openly gay, if you want. But don’t flaunt!*”

(p. 17, italics in original). The point is that our emphasis on *privatized* brings into view the double-standard as a process of creation and re-creation. The term “sexual minority” does little to aid in this de-privatization process, but restates the binary that Rutherford describes as hetero/sexual minority.

Most people believe that their sexuality says something very personal about them, even a quality with which they were born, possibly through genetics, as argued by openly gay neuroscientist Simon LeVay (1993). Sourcing homosexuality through genetics is entirely debatable and politically dubious even though LeVay’s intent was to legitimize queers. That debate aside, it is the case, of course, that sexuality is, in part, deeply personal. But incorporating identity is a more confounding and complex matter. For one thing, identity actually says very little about sexual practices, fantasies, or desires, which collectively comprise “sexuality.” Some straight-identified women, for instance, find themselves in a same-sex relationship for the first, and perhaps only time, which may or may not have any effect on their sexual identity as straight. The proverbial “closet-case” (those who enjoy same-sex sexual activities in secret) also comes to mind, which is a rather dismissive way of describing people who appear in public as “straight” and identify themselves as such, complete with opposite sex partner and children. These people lead so-called double lives. Yet, their usually covert sexual practices would indicate that straightness may be a strategy to protect professional interests, family acceptance, and status.

Leaving such “closet cases” aside, we turn to queer activism which, over the past thirty years, has made in-roads in gaining social visibility and social acceptance of queer people and their families among the heterosexual majority, especially if such families represent a reasonable facsimile of what is broadly assumed to be the heterosexual original. The popular and critically acclaimed U.S. television sitcom *Modern Family* in the United States is a pop-culture case in point. Gay couple Mitchell Pritchett (played by Jesse Tyler Ferguson) and Cameron Tucker (played by Eric Stonestreet), complete with adopted children, depict the quintessential gay family that mirrors the contemporary middle-class heterosexual model. Mitchell and Cameron demonstrate that, to straight viewers, their family is not (much) different and that they need not be feared. Certainly such gay families are not the only kinds of families that are perceived by some as potentially threatening. Scholarship on queer families (such as Davies & Robinson, 2013) has, in some measure, aided in conceptualizing and including other non-nuclear family formations, such as families with divorced parents, single-parent families, parents with mixed age groups, grandparents as legal guardians and other arrangements. Yet, this work is political within transnational context, as openly queer families in places like Canada and the United States have led countries like Russia to bar international single-parent family adoptions as a means to not allow their children into foreign queer families (Sonne, 2014). It seems obvious to suggest that ideologies of monogamy and family patterns shape public and state policy, in matters not only of sexuality, but also state-recognized family, women’s reproduction rights, legal access to adoption, and other issues pertaining to sexuality. The additional point here is that debates and contestations over such policy reveal the complexities of which sexualities and families are hetero-normalized and, by necessary extension, which ones are marginalized. We argue that sexuality is the discursive underpinning of “sexual minority” that obscures other dimensions of queerness that make us multi-dimensional human beings. These dimensions could be, but are not limited to, gender-queer and other disruptive performativities. In short, queer people are not just sexualities. By this we mean that sexuality is more than semantic: it is also discursive. As such, it shapes and perpetuates meaning as people constantly navigate their social lives. It invokes relations of power, not only between and among sexual partners, but within the broader field of social politics (Foucault, 1978/1990).

“Sexual minority” as discursive is highly evident in its deployment in social politics, apart from LGBT equality campaigns and queer activism. For instance, a minority of mainstream Christians, known broadly as the religious right-wing but whom we refer to as Christian fundamentalists and even religious extremists, seem quite preoccupied by the “sexuality” of queers even as they purport to be repelled by it. The highly vitriolic Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church are an extreme example. Famously and egregiously, they proclaim that “God hates fags.” As part of their political platform that imposes their moralities upon everyone else and arrogantly tries to claim the corner on “Truth”, fundamentalists and extremists demonize queers by willfully misconstruing and misrepresenting queer sexualities into versions that corrupt children, promise all sorts of perils upon the earth under the banner of “God’s wrath,” blame queers for all manner of natural and human-made disasters, and ignore the multidimensional shape of queer lives. In fact, identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer says utterly nothing about our actual sexual practices as individuals, or of

our fantasies and desires (Grace, 2002). Utterances of identity do not reveal how much sex queer people have (if any), nor with whom. On this basis, there is not much distinction between straight and queer people. Yet, a key difference in the eyes of Christian fundamentalists and extremists is that the relationships, families, and communities of straight people are normatively taken into account. They are presumed, identified, and valorized. For queers, there can be no acknowledgement among fundamentalists of our identities, relationships, families, and communities because such utterances would humanize us. The cost to be paid for doing so is losing dominance over social politics.

The point is that the term “sexual minority” can unwittingly work against queers and with religious fundamentalists who refuse to acknowledge other dimensions of our humanity. Humanizing queers means that the fundamentalist agenda of whipping up anxiety and hate among social conservatives to curry political clout would lose its edge. Our argument is not that fundamentalists deploy the term against us. In fact, it is highly doubtful that fundamentalists would describe queers as a “sexual minority” at all, for that would imply a recognition of community. It would also be an implicit acknowledgement of “minority rights” because, simply put, heterosexual people who engage in minority sexual practices in secret may also be excluded from doctrine. Unlike “LGBT”, “sexual minority” seems too vague for the harsh political practices of Christian fundamentalists who condemn and demonize same-sex sexuality.

Yet, an uncomfortable intersection between the discourse of sexual minority and the politics of religious fundamentalists is evident, which is that each one privileges sexuality, albeit for contrasting political purposes. As Walton (2009) has elaborated, queer people are reduced to mere “sexualities” as a “strategy of containment” (p. 212) by which homophobia as a practice and attitude, even vitriolic forms, is justified and encouraged. In Canada, political campaigns of some socially right-wing conservatives have flourished on dollars raised through sexuality discourse that positions and pretends to confirm queers as deviant, harmful to society, evil, and, most hysterically, detrimental to children. For example, in 2011, a right-wing Christian fundamentalist organization presumptuously called the *Institute for Canadian Values* published an advertisement in the *National Post* in opposition to LGBT activists who work towards curricular reforms that represents queer relationships and families. The “ad” claimed that children become “confused” about their gender identities when “exposed” to such curriculum, thus leading to their “corruption” (see Salerno, 2011; Walton, 2014b).

Sexuality, then, is a two-edged sword, both with political implications. One edge cuts a path toward social visibility, legitimacy, and personal agency. The other edge is wielded to reduce queers to one-dimensional entities for whom sexuality is front and central. This particular edge positions queers as sexual deviants from whom children should be protected at all cost. We next explore this two-edged sword in a transnational context as a result of the growing use of the term in this context.

## Sexual Minority and the Transnational

As the field of transnational sexuality studies grows, so does the global usage of the term “sexual minority.” Transnational sexuality studies is a significant body of work for education, as it can be helpful in understanding the lives of students, teachers, and leaders who cross borders as immigrants, refugees, visitors, and temporary workers (see, for example, Munro et al., 2013). Many choose not to subscribe to Western sexuality politics, eschewing cumbersome acronyms and “queer,” and opting instead to maintain their own form of sexuality expression and practice. Used as a tool to point out the colonizing effects of “LGBT” and the globalization of sexuality, a binary emerges when using the term in transnational contexts. On one hand, sexual minority in a transnational context enjoys a more fluid, non-categorical approach towards sexuality (Mizzi, 2008). Instead of subscribing to a specific “identity”, the focus is rather on problematizing gender-role expectations and practices, such as how masculinity may include same-sex sexual activities and feminine mannerisms of boys and men. Such masculinity may also resist stereotypical “male” roles in families and communities. A person with same-sex sexual attractions may not subscribe to a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity-category. To do so would mean social expulsion, harm, and perhaps death in some social contexts. “Sexual minority” as a concept elaborates on the life experiences of these individuals without assigning “gay”

or “lesbian” terminologies and deploying the term “queer” to histories that have never used the term nor understand its political power. In this regard, there is some benefit to using language that is more reflective of social realities.

On the other hand, the use of “sexual minority” in transnational contexts is problematic because it imprints yet another Western label on non-Western societies and acts as a soft form of queer colonialism. According to Nzwili (2014), for instance, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni signed a bill, with widespread support, including from Anglican Archbishops, that gives courts the power to imprison queers for life. In Museveni’s view, among other African leaders, homosexuality is an example of, as Nzwili puts it, Western imperialists “imposing their culture on Africa.” We are certainly not sympathetic to Museveni’s demonization of queers, whether “Western” or Ugandan. Yet, we recognize the problematics of the proliferation of Western discourse. Perhaps some queer activists and educators outside the “West,” including those in Uganda and elsewhere, view countries like Canada as highly progressive on the matter of sexuality and gender politics and try to emulate the paths that have been taken, including adoption of a term such as “sexual minority.” A missed opportunity presents itself in such a case. Under the homogenization of “sexual minority,” terms that describe the practice and power dynamics of same-sex sexualities or gender non-conforming behaviours embedded in culture, such as *hijira* or Two-Spirit, are obscured. This is not just a matter of mere words; language, itself, can shroud localized ways of knowing and being, thus reasserting Western dominance.

One approach to circumvent such a conundrum is to qualify the origins of the term “sexual minority” and its application in research or practice. Like “queer,” “sexual minority” is a political term, meaning that it is embedded within a political context. Problematically, the term can function as colonizing discourse, as a means to prompt greater inquiry into what terms are actually being used in another context. This may provide an opportunity to learn of, and use indigenous terms about, sex/gender arrangements in diaspora and other globalized communities. On one hand, suggesting that every utterance of the phrase in common usage will be accompanied by a description of context is *pie-in-the-sky*. Language is never static. It evolves over time and in light of historical, social, and political circumstances. On the other hand, educational policy is a venue where terms can be defined and their parameters explicated. We are now in a position to provide suggestions that may provide some direction for the use of “sexual minority” in educational policy and practice.

## **Sexual Minority and Implications for Education Practice and Policy**

While we have pointed out religious, social, political, and cultural implications that demonstrate the problematics of using the term “sexual minority” as part of everyday speech, we do not advocate a complete reversal in its use. Certainly, as part of this themed issue illustrates, it offers new possibilities, such as exploring a catchall that does not come with excess baggage like the word “queer” does. In educational settings, we offer two signposts as scholars begin to “sexual minoritize” their empirical and conceptual work.

First, we advocate using the term cautiously when describing people of same-sex sexualities. Such caution means being clear in the deployment of “sexual minority”, and, more specifically, explicating the *roots* of why that term was chosen and the *routes* that scholarship agendas take through deployment of the term. Doing so is a conscious effort to resist replacing “queer” with “sexual minority.” Rather, the deployment of the term “sexual minority” extends from what queer or LGBT does not provide. It may be possible to use multiple terminologies, such as using “queer”, “LGBT,” and “sexual minority” wherever appropriate as a way to bring attention to the various contextual realities that engage descriptions of sexual difference.

Second, we advise using the term “sexual minority” in education discourse in the contexts of particular kinds of discussions (such as general sexuality) with certain kinds of audiences (such as those new to sexuality discourse). These considerations may mean delineating the differences between queer pedagogy (Bryson & de Castell, 1993) and sexual minority pedagogy and deciding upon the best approach that will draw an audience into the discussion rather than alienate them from it. Sexual minority pedagogy could be folded into some of the religious, cultural, political, and social implications we have outlined and could be taught in a manner that produces critical discussion into the implications of being a sexual minority. MacIntosh (2007) issues a stark



warning on how heteronormativity goes unchallenged despite queer politics of inclusion and visibility tactics being deployed in schools. In our view, sexual minority pedagogy considers processes, understandings, and values that, for instance, minoritizes the conversations about sexuality difference to a 75-minute seminar or Tuesday night gay-straight alliance meetings. Rather than an ad-hoc workshop on sexual minorities, a system-wide commitment to learn of and address all kinds of oppressions and opportunities would be a stronger approach. Our hope is that it could support new understandings and insights about the lives of sexual minorities in part by enabling a “critical eye [on] their own positionalities” (MacIntosh, p. 40). Emerging from such an umbrella term may be an inquiry into some of the transcultural realities for persons of same-sex sexualities, their languages, traditions, customs, and life challenges. Through these two sign-posts of cautious and context-appropriate use of the term, we see the term “sexual minority” as providing a pedagogical entry point into education discourse.

As a blunt instrument, “sexual minority” gives rise to some concerns. First, it may not be helpful at disturbing the hetero/homo binary that remains dominant in sexuality discourse. Second, it reinforces “sexuality” over identity, which has been a mainstay argument of neo-conservatives, some of whom are Christian fundamentalists and extremists. Third, it imposes another Anglo-American linguistic tool upon non-Western and transnational contexts as a part of a larger process of globalization, and lacks sophistication in teaching and learning about, as well as practicing, sexuality identity in various cultural settings. We advocate a sharper approach that begins with deeper and more nuanced understandings of the term at the fore of its deployment in scholarship and in practice. We see the education stakeholders as being particularly helpful in this approach, given the tradition of employing teaching and learning processes and policies that include gender and sexuality difference.

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