In this chapter, we examine materials and practices in SHL programs that constitute discrimination or that otherwise contribute to negative affect for learners who identify as both Latinx¹ and queer—a term we will use interchangeably with LGBTQ+² to refer to people whose sexual and/or gender identity do not align with social norms that collectively fall under the label of heteronormativity. Our examination centers on an analysis of the representation and social positioning of queerness and of LGBTQ+ people in SHL textbooks and is supported by discussions about the ways queer-identified Latinxs relate to the Spanish language and Spanish-speaking social networks and by reflections on the role and status of queer faculty in the SHL classroom. We conclude with thoughts about ways that contesting heteronormativity constitutes good pedagogical practice and ways to construct classroom environments that are more supportive of LGBTQ+ identities.

Heteronormativity refers to the complex of socially privileged norms established by heterosexuals that impose a strict male/female sexual binary, compel adherence to distinct gender roles, and constrain sexual or romantic relationships to opposite-sex couples. Research shows that the enforcement of heteronormativity generates a hostile climate in school settings for queer youth (see Kosciw et al., 2014; Rankin, 2006). Warner (1991), queer theorist who first popularized the term, decried heterosexual culture’s “totalizing” tendency and its “exclusive ability to interpret itself as society” (p. 8), highlighting the especially negative consequences for young people whose identities stray beyond heteronormative parameters:

Heterosexual ideology, in combination with a potent ideology about gender and identity in maturation, therefore bears down in the heaviest and often deadliest way on those with the least resources to combat it: queer children and teens.

Enforcement of heteronormative ideology in school settings may take many forms, including exposure to biased language, harassment, restrictions on participation in activities, prohibition
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of LGBTQ+ content, and policing of gender identity or expression (Kosciw et al., 2014). Our chapter directly addresses the ways that SHL materials and practices may represent this type of hostile ideological enforcement.

This chapter adopts models of sexual identity articulated by queer theorists (e.g. Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1982) who espouse an expansive, poststructuralist view of social constructivism—one that regards sex, gender, and sexual attraction as separate constructs, not fixed, biologically determined classifications. Sexual orientation, sex, and gender are understood to be fluid and subject to interaction with other socially constructed facets of identity such as race and ethnicity. It is the intersection of identity markers that defines one’s positionality within systems of power and privilege. The intersection of queerness and Latinx identity, for example, creates potential for the racialization of a sexual identity, which in turn leads to compounded marginalization within most domains in U.S. society. That said, important implications of a broad view of social construction and intersectional theory are that the identity “crossroads”—to borrow Anzaldúa’s (2012) metaphor—can be a position of power and that reconstruction can bring greater social and political self-realization for queer-identified individuals.

Although we have adopted terminology and concepts from mainstream contemporary queer theory, queer of color criticism challenges the Eurocentrism of this approach and its failure to address issues like race and class that form part of the complex identities present in the SHL environment. As Hames-García (2011) notes:

Indeed transformative understandings of the relationships among race, capitalism, gender and sexuality are probably stronger precisely when elaborated from outside of Eurocentric frameworks and intellectual genealogies rather than from within them.

We argue that adequate representation of queer Latinx identities in the SHL setting means going beyond the discourse of marriage equality, adoption, and open military service. These concepts are arguably heteronormative, white-centric, and “homonationalist”— tied to maintaining nationalist/capitalist structures (Puar, 2007)—and fail to address issues such as racialized violence, economic injustice, and racial privilege that impact queer communities of color. Indeed, elements of this analysis fall outside the life experience or academic training of many queer-identified language faculty and textbook authors.

Queer Latinxs, language, and identity

We do not have evidence that LGBTQ+ Latinx language proficiency and language practices are qualitatively different from those of non-queer Latinxs. Queer Latinxs appear to fall on the same linguistic continuum described in current literature (e.g. Valdés, 2001), with speakers that occupy all points of a spectrum between monolingual English and monolingual Spanish extremes. LGBTQ+ Latinxs are born in the U.S. and immigrants who arrived as adults; they are DREAMers and they are citizens; they are out of the closet and they are silent about their sexuality; they live in cities and in rural areas. In other words, the diversity of people in the U.S. who are both Latinx and LGBTQ+—in terms of language proficiency, language practices, life trajectory, immigration status, and degree of openness about their sexuality—is such that making generalizations is impossible. What is certain, however, is that there are queer Latinx students and teachers in SHL classrooms across the country whose experience merits attention.

Motivation to learn a language may be impacted by affective factors associated with the language, culture, and speakers. Fishman (2001) defines heritage languages by learners’ personal
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and cultural connection to these factors. Valdés (2001) notes that this gives them a motivation for learning language that differs from that of non-heritage learners. Although there is research on the relationship between Latinx students’ attitudes and motivations to study SHL (reviewed in Ducar, 2012, for example), there is no exploration of the language attitudes of LGBTQ+ Latinxs, their experiences as heritage language learners (HLLs), or their motivations to study the language. We hope that this brief discussion underscores a significant gap in the literature and a need to know more about LGBTQ+ HLLs.

In her exploration of language maintenance and social ties among LGBTQ+ Latinxs, Cashman (2015) describes the interconnectedness of language, ethnic identity, and sexuality. She notes that:

It is most often the case for bilingual Latin@s in the US that their parents, grandparents, and members of their generations are the most consistent Spanish language influences; yet it is precisely these family ties that are most threatened by when queer Latin@s come out... In other words, it is precisely the people who are most proficient in Spanish who are most likely to react negatively toward LGBTQ+ people, such as a son or daughter or other relative coming out. If Spanish-speaking network ties tend to promote the maintenance of Spanish, as has been argued elsewhere, then it follows that coming out might threaten Spanish language maintenance among LGBTQ+ Latin@s.

Although Cashman uses the term “bilingual,” many of the participants in her ethnographic research do not consider themselves bilingual for a variety of reasons, and in interviews many revealed complicated relationships with the Spanish language.

LGBTQ+ Latinxs are not necessarily more alienated from Spanish than their heterosexually identified peers due to their sexuality or gender identity and expression. However, we believe that sexuality and gender identity may interact with other factors in the lives of LGBTQ+ Latinxs to promote alienation from Spanish with a resulting impact on their relationship with the language and/or their orientation toward SHL classes and curricula.

Although we do not have specific information about the experiences of queer Latinxs in language classes, we do know a great deal more generally about the experiences of LGBTQ+ and non-binary students. Data from the 2013 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2014) published by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) tell us that over half of LGBT students felt unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation, and over a third of students felt unsafe due to their gender expression. More than seven of ten LGBT students heard “gay” used negatively frequently or often at school, nearly two-thirds heard other homophobic remarks frequently or often, and over half reported hearing homophobic remarks from teachers and staff. Against this backdrop, the survey found that LGBT students in schools with Gay-Straight Alliances, inclusive curricula, and supportive faculty and staff were less likely to hear harassing or homophobic speech, less likely to report feeling unsafe at school, less likely to report missing school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, more likely to report feeling connected to their school community, had higher GPAs, and were more likely to continue their education. Among the five recommendations made by the survey’s authors, is “Increasing student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history, and events through inclusive curricula and library internet resources” (Kosciw et al., 2014, p. 14). The GLSEN survey focuses on student experiences in the K-12 setting, but there has been less research of this kind at the post-secondary level (Renn, 2010). Rankin (2006), in a survey of
the literature on the experiences of LGBTQ+ students on college campuses, summarizes that, “These studies suggest high rates of victimization of LGBT people in the form of verbal harassment, physical assault, and negative campus climate” (p. 114), and she emphasizes that “this is particularly true for minorities within the LGBT community such as students with disabilities, transgender students, and students of color” (pp. 113–114). She noted further that many studies across different social groups indicate a connection between perception of discriminatory environment and academic attainment, while recognizing that “students from different social identity groups experience, or at least perceive, campus climates differently” (p. 113).

Heteronormativity in SHL textbooks and materials

As we described earlier, heteronormativity prescribes a social framework rooted in acceptance of biologically determined binary sexes leading to couple relationships between opposite-sex people. This framing of heterosexual couples as a socially privileged model is reinforced through legal institutions such as marriage and through cultural representation in literature, media, and visual arts. Despite the rapidly changing legal status of same-sex relationships in many places around the world (e.g. marriage equality at the national level in the U.S. and in many Latin American countries), queer folk, and particularly queer and trans(gender) people of color (QTPOC), face real and continued discrimination in housing, employment, health care, and other arenas. Avoiding heternormativity requires going beyond positive representations of same-sex marriage and coming out. This is especially important to understand in the SHL environment where participants are not only queer, but overwhelmingly QTPOC, whose life experience has not been well represented in mainstream queer theory or by national LGBTQ+ political organizations (Hames-García, 2011). For example, anti-trans(gender) violence soared while the nation’s attention was focused on events leading to the landmark marriage decision in the Supreme Court. The Human Rights Campaign (2015) reports that of the 53 known transgender murder victims from 2013–2015, at least 87% were people of color.

SHL materials have been critiqued with regard to Spanish language ideologies (Leeman, 2014, 2012, 2005; Leeman & Martínez, 2007), Spanish language variation (Beaudrie, Ducar, & Relaño-Pastor, 2009; Ducar, 2009; Martínez, 2003), and representation of Latinx cultures (Ducar, 2006), but not for their treatment of LGBTQ+ identities. This lack of attention by researchers appears to follow a silencing of queerness by textbook authors as well. Despite a growing awareness of the need for greater racial and ethnic diversity, and the elimination of even covert racism and sexism in the curriculum, inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities appears to lag far behind. This invisibility in teaching materials can negatively impact queer students’ experiences in the classroom (Gray, 2013; Nelson, 2008). Liddicoat (2009) asserts that “For gay and lesbian students, the language classroom can be an environment that silences much that is central to their lives” (p. 191). Nelson (2006) describes the language teaching profession’s collective notion of a “monosexual community of interlocutors” in which “straight people are interacting exclusively with other straight people” (p. 1), leading to one-dimensional understandings of the language student and language communities. Attempts to assert non-heterosexual identities are often treated as examples of linguistic failure (Liddicoat, 2009).

ESL and EFL researchers began to ask about the experience of gay and lesbian learners and the invisibility of queer people in language textbooks and curricula over two decades ago (see Nelson, 1993; Snellbecker, 1994), but even relatively recent research indicates that ESL and EFL textbooks still fail to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals (Goldstein, 2015; Paiz, 2015; Pawelczyk & Pakula, 2015; Sunderland & McGlashan, 2015). Discussions of sexual diversity in the teaching of languages other than English, including SHL, have lagged behind ESL/EFL.
To our knowledge, there are no studies of representations of LGBTQ+ people in Spanish language textbooks designed for native English speakers, so our discussion of SHL textbooks is necessarily lacking a comparison to L2-centered Spanish language textbooks. Even in very recently published overviews of the state of SHL theory and practice (Beaudrie, Ducar, & Potowski, 2014; Beaudrie & Fairclough 2012), there is no reference to queer or LGBTQ+ identities in the SHL classroom or curriculum. SHL professionals might find themselves pondering the following questions that we intend to address in the analysis that follows: Are LGBTQ+ identities represented in the most recent SHL textbooks and materials? If so, how? To what extent are any apparent efforts at inclusion reinforcing a heteronormative ideological frame rather than opening up the conversation to include queer and feminist of color critiques of the existing social order? Do the materials create space for the negotiation of a QTPOC identity within an Anglo-dominated environment?

Data and analysis

In order to examine the treatment of LGBTQ+ identities in SHL textbooks, we chose the following nine texts (see reference section for full bibliography):

- *Conozcámonos!* (Mrak & Aponte, 2007)
- ¡*Sí se puede!* (Carreira & Geoffrion-Vinci, 2008)
- *Conversaciones escritas* (Potowski, 2011)
- *Nuestro idioma, nuestra herencia* (García, Carney, & Sandoval, 2011)
- *La lengua que heredamos*, 7th ed. (Márquez, 2012)
- *Nuevos mundos: lectura, cultura y comunicación; curso de español para bilingües*, 3rd ed. (Roca, 2012)

We limited our examination to textbooks published from 2004 to present and only included books aimed at the post-secondary level, since discussions of sexuality or sexual diversity in K-12 curricula remain limited. Following Gray (2013), which explores LGBTQ+ invisibility in English language teaching materials in the UK, we examined the textbooks closely for their representation of LGBTQ+ people and compared this with their representation of heterosexuality.

There were five textbooks that included no representation of LGBTQ+ people or topics: ¡*Conozcámonos!*!, ¡*Sí se puede!*!, *Entre mundos*, *Manual de gramática y ortografía para hispanos*, and *Nuestro idioma, nuestra herencia*. *Manual de gramática* focused almost exclusively on grammar rather than culture, thus the majority of the textbook consists of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling/accentuation exercises with little representation of any type of sexuality. In *Entre mundos*, ¡*Conozcámonos!*!, *Nuestro idioma, nuestra herencia*, and ¡*Sí se puede!*!, however, the total lack of representation of LGBTQ+ people was accompanied by some degree of representation of ‘traditional’ families and heterosexual relationships or desire. We found the most extreme and remarkable example of this in ¡*Conozcámonos!*!, where the textbook’s readings and grammar activities all revolve around the Guerra family, a Mexican American family of five whose
family tree even appears on the inside front cover of the textbook for reference. Topics of readings and cloze grammar and vocabulary activities include how the family celebrates holidays, for example, and marriage difficulties between the family’s oldest son and his wife emerge as a topic. The diversity in the Latinx community is represented through the opposite-sex mates each of the adult children is paired with—from El Salvador, Miami (Cuban), and New York (Puerto Rican). Through the use of the trope of the Guerra family, ¡Conozcámonos! roots itself in a framework that privileges heterosexuality, and this privileging is underscored by the complete erasure of queer people.

Other textbooks’ heteronormative frameworks are more subtle and varied than that of ¡Conozcámonos! In Entre mundos, for example, we find activities that are quite typical instances of heteronormativity in language textbooks. In one activity, students fill in the blanks in a paragraph reportedly describing the results of a survey on what girls (chicas) look for in a man (hombre). In a follow-up activity, students must write a paragraph on the topic of what men look for in a woman, after conducting an informal survey of their classmates. This same idea is echoed in chapter 9 in a game show-style activity in which students have to attempt to guess the top five things a man looks for in the ideal woman. Even more problematic is a writing activity in which students are compelled to describe what they look for in an ideal mate. This type of activity, while innocuous at first glance, creates a situation where students are forced to out themselves (which they might not be prepared to do), put on an inauthentic heterosexual identity (which no one should be forced to do), or silence themselves, opting not to participate actively in the activity (which goes against the very purpose of this kind of activity—to encourage students to use the language, engage with the material, and participate actively in class). Entre mundos also has two chapters on families, a site where heteronormativity is likely to be found. Here, however, the first chapter on families seems to be concerned mainly with already problematic tasks of contrasting Anglo and Latinx families, while the second focuses on the question of divorce, which is presented as a kind of social problem. In both chapters, the normativity is clear; they are talking about heterosexual parent-headed families. All these activities and topics reinforce the invisibility of queer lives, creating a potentially hostile classroom environment for queer students and instructors.

In both ¡Sí se puede! and Nuestro idioma, nuestra herencia the family is generally presented as headed by a heterosexual couple with children. In a discussion of naming practices, for example, in the first chapter of ¡Sí se puede!, there is a discussion of what happens when women marry men and have children, and students are asked to brainstorm male and female names, normalizing the gender binary and heterosexual coupling practices. Where LGBTQ+ people, facts/events, or contributions could be mentioned, they generally are not, such as in a list or profile of writers or artists at the end of the chapter, or in readings on contemporary issues (e.g. why not include LGBTQ+ tourism in the extensive list of tourism types in chapter 4 of Nuestro idioma, nuestra herencia). Where LGBTQ+ folks are mentioned—like ¡Sí se puede! references to Frida Kahlo (pp. 24–25) and Ricky Martin (p. 118), or Nuestro idioma, nuestra herencia discussing Pedro Almodóvar in profiles of Penelope Cruz and Antonio Banderas (pp. 183–184) and Ricky Martin in a short reading about Shakira (p. 28)—their sexuality is not discussed. Of course, in Nuestro idioma, nuestra herencia, none of the profiles mentions anything about the (hetero)sexuality, gender identity, or romantic/sexual relationships of any individuals, and the textbook’s creative structure avoids the usual traps (such as a chapter on the family). This does not mean, however, that heteronormativity is not woven into the book in more subtle ways. In spelling and grammar exercises and some readings as well, the traditional family headed by a mother and father with children comes into play again and again, as do sentences involving heterosexual desire:
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1 Mi abuelo me (18. explicar) que las historias de entonces eran sencillas y las actrices María Félix y Dolores del Río (19. hacer) que valiera la pena ir al cine. (p. 49)
2 El actor de la nueva película es admirado por todas las chicas. (p. 125)
3 Los señores Ramos quieren que su hija estudie en la Universidad de Sevilla. (p. 175)

A reader aggressively looking for any kind of queer content might jump on the mention of Paul Leduc (1983), among a list of more respected Mexican cineastes from the 1980s for his direction of *Frida: naturaleza viva*, an artistic film about the bisexual artist in which her sexuality is explored, or the later Hollywood film *Frida*, directed by Julie Taymor (2002) and including music from the iconic Mexican lesbian singer Chavela Vargas. In one activity in this same chapter, *Y tu mamá también* and *Temporada de patos* are mentioned as possible films to investigate further. These examples, however, require background knowledge that the student likely would not have, and they are incredibly subtle compared to the explicit and regular inclusion of heterosexuality.

**Challenges of “inclusion”**

Four of the nine textbooks we reviewed included some degree of explicit inclusion of LGBTQ+ people or themes: *La lengua que heredamos*, *Nuevos mundos*, *Conversaciones escritas*, and *Español escrito*. In *La lengua que heredamos*, we see a minimal effort to include one gay celebrity, singer Ricky Martin, in a chapter about Puerto Rico. The inclusion takes the form of a reading on Ricky Martin’s career, his becoming a father, and his decision to come out of the closet. The reading is relatively superficial but mentions the potential threat that coming out could pose to his success and the criticism that he has received. The reading (pp. 119–121) is followed by two sets of questions, the first comprehension-related and the second reflection-oriented. The reflection questions ask students to give their opinion on homosexuality and beliefs about whether homosexuality is genetic or learned, whether it’s important to know artists’ sexual orientation, whether knowing a friend was gay would change your affection or respect for them, or if they are in favor of laws to protect against discrimination:

1 ¿Qué opina usted de la homosexualidad? ¿Cree que es algo congénito, o una orientación aprendida?
2 ¿Es importante para usted saber la orientación sexual de los artistas?
3 ¿Sabe cuál es la palabra apropiada para referirse a una mujer homosexual?
4 Si usted descubre que un familiar suyo o una amistad es homosexual, ¿cambiaría en algo su afecto o respeto por esa persona?
5 ¿Está a favor de las leyes que protegen contra todo tipo de discriminación, o hace alguna excepción?

*Márquez, 2012, p. 121*

Later in the chapter, one of three options for reflection and writing are the “asuntos . . . muy controversiales” of same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples (p. 123). The questions, although they may appear neutral, are skewed toward a rejection of LGBTQ+ people and queer visibility. The use of “homosexual” rather than “gay” or “queer” when both of these English-language words are used extensively in Spanish-language contexts, already slants the questions toward a pathologizing orientation and brings along the issues of power, legitimacy, and the policing of sexual identities. The framing of the issues of LGBTQ+ rights as controversial is not an objective description of a landscape of public opinion that is much more complicated. Putting LGBTQ+ identities up for debate is a strategy for inclusion seen in multiple textbooks, but the frequency of its use should not numb us to the alienating effect that it could have on the queer
student or faculty member. The profile of Ricky Martin may be a positive example (albeit obvi-
ous and totally devoid of nuance—a use of the “good gay” token described by Bell & Binnie,
2000), but any benefit of this inclusion is immediately undercut by how the inclusion is framed.

In Nuevos mundos, more than in any other textbook reviewed, there is a sustained effort to
include LGBTQ+ people and themes, from the mention of a character’s sexuality in El beso de
la mujer araña as part of a profile of Puerto Rican actor Raúl Juliá or a photo of a tuxedo-clad,
male couple and a mention of gay rights and legalization of same-sex marriage in an article about
contemporary Spain, to a reading on marriage equality in Argentina in a chapter on human
rights. The activities and questions around the inclusion seem carefully designed to avoid making
LGBTQ+ rights a topic of debate while at the same time fostering discussion. This difficult bal-
ancing act can be exemplified by the story about Ricky Martin, one of several celebrities featured
in the chapter on Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans. The article, which is the same as that featured
in La lengua que heredamos, is followed by questions that differ markedly from those discussed
above. Although the pre-reading questions focus on popular interest in the lives of celebrities and
the personal vs. public divide, a question about how coming out might help to combat stereoty-
pees about “hombres y mujeres gay” is included. The questions following the reading include:

1. ¿Por qué cree que pudiera ser tan difícil para algunas personas salir del closet?
   ¿Qué cree que hace que una persona no se acepte a sí mismo tal y como es y que
   se niegue a sí mismo y a otros acerca de su identidad o sentimientos verdaderos?
2. ¿Qué otros grupos en la historia del mundo han tenido que luchar por sus dere-
   cho?: ¿Cómo ha sido la lucha? Dé ejemplos y comenten qué luchas se han ganado
   y cuáles quedan por ganarse.
3. ¿Sabe usted cuál es la situación legal de los gays y lesbianas en los Estados Unidos? ¿En su
   estado? ¿Se pueden casar legalmente? En los estados en que existe una unión civil o un
   registro de domestic partner, ¿cómo es diferente a un matrimonio entre heterosexuales?
4. ¿Conoce algunos países donde los gays se pueden casar por ley civil y tienen los mis-
   mos derechos que los heterosexuales? Mencione algunos y, si tiene tiempo, investigue
   para la próxima clase cuál es la situación en algunos de estos países (Canadá, Argentina,
   España, Gran Bretaña, Bélgica, por ejemplo) para compararlas con los Estados Unidos.
5. ¿Por qué razones cree usted que en estos países se logró legalizar el matrimonio gay
   mientras que en los Estados Unidos no se ha logrado uniformemente a nivel nacional?
6. ¿Qué ocurre en países como China, Irán o Uganda? Investigue si le interesa aver-
   iguar y compartir la información en clase.
7. ¿De qué manera cree que la salida del clóset de Ricky Martin puede ayudar a otras
   personas a aceptarse a sí mismo o a sí misma?
8. ¿Cree que los ataques del cardenal Luis Aponte Martínez contra Ricky Martin son
   injustos? ¿Y qué cree que quiere decir Ricky Martin con su contestación cuando
dice que él sólo se enfoca en el amor y en la igualdad . . . y dice «Yo solo sumo,
   no resto y aquí lo único que se habla es del amor».
9. Ricky Martin es padre de dos niños, Matteo y Valentino, y hay gente que dice
   que los niños deben tener un padre y una madre. Sin embargo, en el mundo hay
   muchos tipos distintos de familias. Algunos niños crecen sin madre o sin padre.
   Otros sin los dos y se crean con un familiar o en una institución. Cuente anóni-
   mamente de personas que usted conoce que son de una familia no convencional.
10. ¿Por qué cree que a veces hay personas que esconden ser gay o se lo niegan a sí
    mismos(as)? ¿Qué cree que sería lo mejor para esas personas?

Roca 2012: p. 121
In stark contrast to the questions in *La lengua que heredamos*, these questions prompt students to reflect on why self-acceptance and coming out might be difficult for people, and they contextualize the LGBTQ+ movement within a civil rights framework. Rather than asking students to judge queer people and weigh in on whether or not they are deserving of equal rights, these questions attempt to put students in the place of an LGBTQ+ person, to try to imagine the world through their eyes, and to ponder both the inequality that exists as well as the benefits and contributions LGBTQ+ people make. Finally, question 9 attempts to engage students in a critique of heteronormativity, as seen in the dominance of the “traditional” family.

Despite this careful, more nuanced inclusion, several problems remain: Why does the gay celebrity not just get to be featured for his work, artistic contributions, and/or family? Why does the profile choose to focus on coming out, marriage equality, and adoption? Although the questions are worded carefully to avoid asking students to give their personal opinion, this subtlety could easily be lost on students and even instructors, leading to the same debate purposely provoked by the first treatment in *La lengua que heredamos*.

Another challenge of inclusion that we see in *Nuevos mundos* is the stereotype. When we think “gay,” too often we think only of the gay man and let him stand in for all queer people. This is a problem in *Nuevos mundos*, where, despite the serious attempt at thoughtful inclusion, only gay men are represented. Other than a brief mention in a question following the Ricky Martin reading, the only mention of lesbians is a problematic one in a short reading by Rosa Ontiveros about women’s rights organizing: “Cuando las mujeres nos agrupamos para defendernos, entonces las cosas cambian, y sólo nos agrupamos porque, de repente, somos feas, lesbianas, amargadas” (p. 292). This negative reference to lesbians is part of a larger sexism that the author is trying to critique, yet the necessary unpacking is lacking. Although *Nuevos mundos* endeavors to be inclusive, there is no inclusion of lesbians, people who identify as (gender)queer, or people who identify as trans(gender), and the inclusion takes a normalizing form with a focus on coming out, a process and practice that has been critiqued by QTPOC (Acosta, 2011; Yon-Leau & Muñoz-Laboy, 2010), and marriage, which is viewed by some as a capitulation to “respectability politics” through which many queer people are marginalized (LaSala 2007), although it remains an important equality issue for others.

In *Conversaciones escritas,* inclusion takes the form of debate, but in a more extended way than a few questions following a reading as in *La lengua que heredamos*. *Conversaciones escritas* takes an argumentative writing approach that focuses on contemporary topics in order to help students use their language skills in “a broad array of contexts, ranging from personal experience to public policy debates” (p. iii). In chapter 6, this debate approach focuses on gender and sexuality. The first three readings examine the relationship between sex and gender, and students are led to debate whether gender differences are real or whether gender is a social construct. Reading four explores the concept that “Cambiar para los homosexuales es posible”, which puts the question of whether sexuality is biological or socially created and whether, therefore, it’s possible to overcome same-sex desire through therapy; the chapter’s final reading is a debate on “El matrimonio entre gays” (pp. 214–232). Although debate and argumentative writing are frequently used activities in language learning, this set-up is problematic when the debate is centered squarely on the topic of students’ marginalized sexual identities in the heteronormative classroom environment. Focusing solely on the last two readings, we find a number of serious issues. First, although we recognize that the book intends to be provocative in its selection of texts, the inclusion of National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) crosses a line. This is a fringe group whose therapy is completely discredited. It promotes long-debunked junk science that has harmed countless people, and its inclusion in a textbook gives it more weight and credibility than it deserves. Given the higher rates of suicide, self-harming, and
drug and alcohol abuse among LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly QTPOC (O’Donnell, Meyer, & Schwartz, 2011), it is irresponsible to give NARTH a platform even when followed by after-reading activities that may nudge students toward suspicion of their claims. Two after-reading exercises ask students to write something in which they argue for or against an issue related to LGBTQ+ rights or identities: the first is to write a letter to an imagined condo association weighing in on whether a gay couple should be allowed to sublet an apartment in the building, and the second is a thesis of their choice related to the topic. Given the set-up, it is quite likely that students may argue against equal rights or for the possibility of therapy, which might make for a particularly difficult peer editing exercise for a queer classmate, whether they are out or closeted, struggling with their identity or not. Even in the grammar explanations we can find surprisingly problematic examples such as: “¿Has visto «Brokeback Mountain»? Yo no pienso ver ninguna película que vaya en contra de mi moral.” or “Ellos han aceptado que su hijo es gay, pero ella lo ve como un trastorno” (p. 221). Examples such as these validate exclusionary discourse in what should be a welcoming and nurturing environment for all students regardless of sexual identity. A final example of problematic inclusion in Conversaciones escritas is found in a grammar activity where incorrect or offensive language is included. In one sentence, Juan Gabriel is described as “un putazo,” which is highlighted in a textbox as an offensive term but is nevertheless disturbing to see in a grammar activity. In another sentence, a trans person is described as a person who “was born a man but later transformed into a woman” (our translation), an essentializing discourse that is generally rejected by trans communities.

Perhaps no SHL textbook exemplifies compulsory heterosexuality more than Español escrito. The elementary-level textbook in its sixth edition is centered on two characters: Fernando González, an engineering student from El Paso, Texas, and Marisela Suárez, a nursing student from the Dominican Republic who lives in New York City. Both Fernando and Marisela are from large, nuclear families—mom and dad, with six or seven children. Each of the textbook’s chapters begins with a reading about some member of one of the main characters’ families. The readings are artificial at best, and, at worst, stereotypical, offensive, and highly problematic. Space limitations prevent us from analyzing in depth the gender stereotypes that are pervasive in these readings or the ideologies of race and class that are woven into the stories. We will focus instead on the heteronormativity that permeates the text, where the heterosexual relationship and the so-called traditional family structure are imposed at every turn. No queer family members are found in this fictional family, but LGBTQ+ characters and references do arise. In chapter 9, in a story about overcoming obstacles, Elvira, Marcela’s aunt, tells us about how she managed to become the principal of an elementary school in New York after having only six years of formal education in the Dominican Republic. After losing her job working for a family in New York City, Elvira says she did two things quickly in order to secure her future in the U.S. The second thing—getting her GED—is in line with the chapter’s education theme, but the first thing Elvira is reported to have done is quite surprising:

[m]e casé con un americano homosexual que quería darles gusto a sus padres quienes exigían que “por fin se portara como un macho” (él era amigo de esa amiga de una amiga con la que pasé mi primera semana en Nueva York y con quien nunca había perdido contacto), así que yo ya tenía la ciudadanía asegurada si sabía guardar bien las apariencias matrimoniales (vivimos juntos por cinco años).

After achieving her goal of becoming an elementary school principal, Maricela happily reports that Elvira could finally divorce her husband, whose parents had died. Other than the
comprehension question “¿Cómo se hizo ciudadana Elvira?” (p. 122), there is no follow-up to this outrageous element of the story. The writing prompts that follow focus on education, bilingualism, and job opportunities, not on the marriage nor even the attempted rape that Elvira survives in her first job as a domestic in the Dominican Republic. Although marriages such as this do occur, it is problematic having this as the only reference of any kind to LGBTQ+ persons in this textbook.

There are additional items of interest in terms of LGBTQ+ representation in Español escrito. In chapter 17, the topic of women’s role in society is examined. The main reading is from Marisela’s grandmother, who argues that the only role for women is to be wives and mothers, and that artificial insemination is a scandal and degeneracy. In the second set of questions that follows, students are asked to reflect in writing on the following questions:

¿Crees que es necesario que todos nos casemos? ¿Qué opinas de los solteros? ¿De las solteras? ¿Qué derecho tiene la mujer soltera de ser madre? Si un hombre no se casa y no se hace sacerdote de la iglesia católica (que no permite que los sacerdotes se casen), ¿qué significado tiene eso para ti?

pp. 268–269; emphasis added

While this question is certainly open to interpretation, it clearly constructs men and women who do not marry a person of the opposite sex as a suspicious aberration that requires explaining. It is almost impossible to imagine that the answer to the final question would be anything other than the presumption of a non-conforming sexual identity.

The final chapters involve Marisela and Fernando writing diary entries about their ideal partner and then, predictably, meeting and falling in love. Fernando begins his reflection on his ideal woman, writing:

Ahora que me falta solo un año para graduarme, he decidido empezar a salir seriamente con mujeres. Bueno, no es que haya salido yo con hombres, pero no comenzaron a gustarme mucho las mujeres—bueno, las muchachas—hasta que tenía quince años.

p. 318; emphasis added

This alienating joke serves to underscore the heteronormative orientation of the text and highlight the heterosexual assumption that permeates the language classroom. This assumption that students are heterosexual is made explicit in the writing task that follows Marisela and Fernando’s reflections:

(Pregunta para mujeres:) ¿Qué es lo que tú quieres en un hombre?
(Pregunta para hombres:) ¿Qué es lo que tú quieres en una mujer?

... ¿Deben tener el derecho de casarse las mujeres lesbianas además de los hombres homosexuales? ¿Deben tener el derecho de tener hijos propios o de adoptarlos? ¿Deben recibir las parejas sexuales los mismos beneficios que los matrimonios heterosexuales? Explica tu punto de vista. (p. 320)

The first two questions make it virtually impossible for a queer student to participate. It is made perfectly explicit that women are the only people who have the right to describe what they look for in a man, and only men are allowed to describe what they look for in a woman.
The final question in the activity puts LGBTQ+ rights up for debate, an activity whose marginalizing effect we have discussed in more detail earlier.

In summary, the textbooks examined overwhelmingly normalize heterosexuality. In some cases, the heteronormativity takes an aggressively anti-queer tone either by erasing LGBTQ+ identities or by the use of pathologizing language and situations. In other cases, there is an attempt to be inclusive by referring to celebrities with broad appeal or to unavoidable political discussions, although in the latter case queer lives are treated as controversial.

We found that *Entre mundos* came closest to challenging heteronormativity in a meaningful and consistent manner, and at least one book we analyzed—*Conversaciones escritas*—has undergone major revisions resulting in a new edition that addresses concerns raised in our analysis. However, no textbook we analyzed merits an unqualified endorsement. Even in the best books, no effort was made to engage any of the issues explored in contemporary queer Latinx scholarship such as the negotiation of anticolonial queer identity, the relationship between queer of color communities and white gay cultural institutions, the disproportionate victimization of queer and trans people of color, or transnational queer identities (e.g. the Undocuqueer movement). The vast cultural production of queer Latinxs, central to contemporary Chicana/o Studies, was also completely absent.

**Queering the SHL environment**

Current SHL materials fall demonstrably short in their representation of queer identities and perspectives, often asserting heterosexual privilege in ways that feel overtly hostile to LGBTQ+ students and faculty and ignoring issues of concern to QTPOC. We now turn to a discussion of how the SHL learning environment might be made more welcoming and inclusive. Given the shortcomings of published materials, we find that the greatest possibility for meaningful and timely change lies in cultivating a knowledgeable faculty—teachers who can bring their lived experiences to the SHL classroom, implement practices drawn from critical pedagogy, and, when necessary, engage in what Reagan and Osborn (2002) refer to as “curricular nullification,” a strategy for challenging curriculum elements that are at conflict with social justice principles.

**Queer Latinx faculty**

One clear way to improve the SHL learning environment for queer students is to attend to the diversity of the teaching staff and, in particular, support the needs of queer Latinx faculty who can serve as role models and repositories of subaltern knowledge that is lacking in the official curriculum. We do not have data specifically about LGBTQ+ Latinx SHL faculty, but there are some important conclusions to be drawn from general literature on “minority” or “diverse” faculty in U.S. colleges and universities (e.g. Fryberg & Martínez, 2014). These are faculty who must navigate their own complex identities while dealing with personal and institutional discrimination aimed at them from multiple directions.

One concern is the pattern of bias that emerges in both formal and informal evaluations of teaching of queer and non-white faculty. DiPietro and Faye (2005; cited in Huston, 2006) found significant bias against Latinx faculty in student evaluations of teaching. Reid (2010) found that “students evaluated racial minority faculty more negatively than White faculty across a variety of factors” on a popular internet faculty rating site (p. 145). Anderson and Kanner (2011) report that students use different criteria to assess faculty objectivity based on their perception of the professor’s sexuality, attributing a political agenda to lesbian and gay faculty but not to straight faculty when analyzing identical course materials.
Pressure to reduce the visibility of performances of LGBTQ+ or other Latinx identities in exchange for approval continues outside of the faculty/student relationship as well. Anecdotally, it is not unusual for language faculty from an SHL background to face challenges to their linguistic and cultural authenticity from colleagues—often non-Latinx L2 learners themselves—who defend Eurocentric language norms and Octavio Paz-inspired notions of gender roles in Latin American society. In addition to having to constantly assert sexual agency and defend themselves from charges of inauthenticity, queer Latinx faculty are in short supply at most colleges and universities, which leads to extraordinary service demands. Little time or energy remains for producing scholarship once the diversity needs of the institution have been met.

Critical pedagogy

The critical pedagogy movement was launched by Paulo Freire in his seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, originally published in 1968, a book that came as a direct response to dehumanizing practices he observed in educational settings (Freire, 2000). The call to decenter power in the classroom and to engage in student-centered dialogic inquiry around relevant social issues made by critical pedagogy advocates (Giroux, 2005; hooks, 1994; Shor, 1997) could not be more on point for environments like the SHL classroom where participants—queer or not—are targets of multiple systems of oppression.

The applicability of critical pedagogy to language acquisition is further confirmed in Norton and Toohey (2004), Reagan and Osborn (2002), and especially Osborn (2006), which carefully articulates critical pedagogy principles with the World-Readiness Standards or “Five Cs” (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) that form the foundation of much of today’s language curriculum. Even more specific advocacy for the use of critical pedagogy in the SHL classroom comes from Leeman (2005, 2012, 2014), Trujillo (2009), and Villa (2010), among others.

Critical theory calls for an educational experience that invites personal and social transformation—an education that asks participants (both students and teachers) to recognize their role in systems of oppression and to engage in dialogue with their world and their lived experiences to upset the unfair distribution of power. Critical theory, above all, requires educators to interact with students in a way that is humanizing and that enhances the agency and subjectivity of learners. This is in clear alignment with the underlying ethos of queer communities of color, and it is what we have shown to be lacking in most SHL materials.

Most of the concrete recommendations we offer to both classroom practitioners and textbook authors are rooted in Freire’s (2000) call to engage fully with students—not just intellectually, but emotionally—as co-constructors of knowledge. This requires an explicit rejection of language and practices that objectify and marginalize individuals, particularly those who are targets of discrimination from the dominant culture. Cammarota and Romero (2006; cited in Sálazar, 2013) specify that the right kind of connection between faculty and student happens when there are “reciprocal opportunities to share their lives” (p. 128), when dehumanizing experiences shared with each other are met with compassion, and when learning is situated in issues relevant to marginalized participants. When we as faculty apply these criteria to the LGBTQ+ issues, specific solutions to the dehumanizing elements found in SHL materials begin to emerge:

- We approach non-heteronormative experiences of sex, gender and sexual orientation as facets of human existence worthy of our curiosity and interest rather than topics of debate or controversy, never assuming that all of our learners are heterosexual.
• We acknowledge the way certain terms resonate within queer communities—from the pathologizing force of words like “homosexual” to the deep violence of hate speech (e.g., fag, puto, marimacha, etc.)—and we choose better ways to describe queerness.

• We hold space for those who have been targeted so that their experiences can—on their terms—be shared, acknowledged, and validated.

• We celebrate the diverse forms and expressions of gender and sexual identity that help constitute the individuality of our learners, and we question deficit-based tropes and stereotypes that serve only to objectify, categorize, and dehumanize.

Freire (2000) explains that a primary goal of “rehumanization” in critical pedagogy is to lead both teacher and learner to a shared status of “Subject”; full agents in the process of co-creating knowledge in dialogue with each other and the world (pp. 68–69). Sálazar (2013) describes the negative impact of denying agency over the expression of marginalized identities to Spanish speakers: “I found that when Mexican immigrant students are denied access and use of their mother tongue in academic spheres, these students begin to devalue their native language and denigrate their culture” (p. 130) and are left with their minds in a colonized state. By extension, requiring queer Latinx learners to suppress expressions of sexual and gender identity contributes to a similar dehumanization and disempowerment. Respect for learner agency over sexual identities suggests additional good SHL classroom practices:

• Create conditions that allow queer students to feel safe disclosing their non-heteronormative identities (but that never force them to do so).

• Construct activities that do not coerce LGBTQ+ students into performances of heterosexual identity (such as role-playing that requires binary gender roles or heterosexual relationship patterns).

• Provide access to linguistic and cultural tools that enable learners to perform their identity in a variety of contexts (e.g. vocabulary, variant gender agreement, pronouns).

These recommendations admittedly require acknowledging aspects of our learners’ lives that are traditionally excluded from classroom discourse—our students are not just minds to mold, they are human beings with emotions and desires that can and should be engaged as part of the learning process.

Osborn (2006) deals explicitly with the application of critical pedagogy principles in the language classroom. He embraces the dialogic approach of Freire and operationalizes it in what he refers to as the critical inquiry cycle (CIC), a framework that involves examining issues of relevance to learners in four phases: 1) conduct informed investigation; 2) undertake inductive analysis; 3) formulate tentative conclusions; and 4) engage in mutual critical reflection. This process is intended to be used with questions that are not “overly specific” (p. 33) or geared toward reaching some predictable outcome, and it is expected to involve stakeholders beyond the classroom if possible. Osborn proposes 15 social justice–based themes that lend themselves to world language and culture education through critical inquiry. These include identity, affiliation, conflict and discrimination, rights, and resistance and marginalization, all of which can be approached effectively through structured examination of sexuality and gender. The examination of queer-themed discourse has been demonstrated effective with students as early as fifth grade (Moita-Lopes, 2006).

Finally, curricular nullification can be employed as a form of resistance against inappropriate or inadequate queer representation in SHL materials. Curricular nullification is any action undertaken by educators with the intent of subverting the message of the official curriculum.
Reagan (2016) points out that the “hegemony of the textbook” (p. 176) can be challenged by either subtractive nullification (removing or minimizing content) or, more frequently and perhaps more ethically, by additive nullification involving the introduction of materials or conversations that reframe problematic content. A faculty member required to teach from any of the books analyzed previously might find it useful to take the criticisms we identified directly to the students and make them part of the lesson or challenge the message of the textbooks less conspicuously by bringing in supplemental materials by queer Latinx writers and artists that present a different perspective.

Conclusion

Our analysis of specialized SHL materials reveals that although one or two textbooks show a commitment to fair representations of queer identities, across the board there is a pattern of erasure, stereotyping, and dehumanizing discourse. Current research on the learning climate for younger LGBTQ+ students indicates that this problematic representation is part of a larger system of discrimination that leads to lower academic achievement and, tragically, to higher rates of depression and lower self-esteem for learners (Kosciw et al., 2014).

We propose that the solution lies first in supporting the needs of queer faculty, particularly queer faculty of color, and capitalizing on their expertise in the production of SHL materials as well as welcoming their presence in the SHL classroom. Regardless of sexual or ethnic/racial identity, we see language faculty as key agents for transforming the learning environment through humanizing pedagogical practice and an ongoing commitment to challenge and reframe oppressive discourse.

There is always some risk involved in transformative education, not just for LGBTQ+ faculty of color but for allies as well. But as one teacher reported when asked about his choice to risk including queer-themed materials in his Spanish classroom, “I think I do it primarily for the gay or questioning students so that they don’t feel excluded in what otherwise is a very heterosexist curriculum.” We believe that there is great fulfillment to be found in creating an environment where faculty and student are all fully present and fully human, with all elements of their identity intact. It is hard to deny the value of deliberate LGBTQ+ inclusiveness once an educator has shared a tearful moment with a queer Latinx student who never believed he would see lives like his honored in the curriculum or witnessed another disclose his gay identity to classmates for the first time as part of a class activity. For us, the risk is worth it.

Notes

1 “Latinx” is used here as a non-binary, gender-inclusive alternative to the universal masculine (i.e. “Latino”) or the gender-binary reinforcing (“Latina/o” or “Latin@”). In other words, “Latinx” is a term meant to include all people across the spectrum of gender identities, people who identify as genderqueer or gender fluid, people who identify as trans(gender), people who identify as intersex, and people who identify as cisgender men and women.

2 LGBTQ+ is a common variant of the initialism LGBTQ, conceived as an inclusive and non-stigmatizing way to refer to minoritized sexual and gender identities. The initials stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans(gender), and queer or questioning. The plus sign acknowledges a vast array of additional identities such as intersex, asexual, two spirit, and straight ally.

3 This analysis is of the first edition (2011) of the textbook Conversaciones escritas. An updated, second edition of the text that addresses the concerns expressed in this chapter was published in 2017, and we acknowledge the work of the author and the publisher in their willingness, even eagerness, to thoroughly revise it.
4 In 2014, NARTH established an umbrella organization called the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity and re-branded itself as the NARTH Institute. Conversion therapy for minors has been banned in several states and municipalities in the U.S.

5 In the “Máscaras mexicanas” essay from Laberinto de la soledad, Paz reinforces the Madonna–whore concept for women and lays out a framing of male homosexuality centered on essentializing roles of penetrator and penetrated in the act of anal sex.

References


Queering Spanish as a heritage language


