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Introduction

What happens when university students in Ecuador are presented with the opportunity to engage with LGBTQ-themed literature over the course of a semester? LGBTQ literature can play a crucial role in combating homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity. When LGBTQ literature is studied in the classroom, "windows and mirrors are created for an exploration of the world and self" (Dinkins & Englert 2015, p. 393). By offering a diverse array of LGBTQ characters in literature, LGBTQ-identifying students can identify with the characters they read about (mirror metaphor) and non-LGBTQ-identifying students can engage with LGBTQ characters and their experiences (window metaphor), so that all students can be called upon to consider what it means to be LGBTQ, an ally or homophobic (Clark & Blackburn 2009). While a student merely reading a book with a LGBTQ character does not mean that the student will gain sensitivity or an understanding of LGBTQ people, it must be noted that by "adding these voices in literature could provide an opportunity to understand the LGBT identity. The voices should not be put aside by the practice of heteronormativity" (Sanders & Mathis 2013, para. 5).

Heteronormativity is the set of practices and institutions "that legitimize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and 'natural' within society" (Cohen 2005, p. 24). Heteronormativity, therefore, positions homosexuality and bisexuality as abnormal and inferior, and is often less direct than homophobia. Combatting heteronormativity does not merely consist of including books with LGBTQ characters. There must be classroom discussion of LGBTQ themes because "if not, silence regarding LGBT characters or themes in a text only reinforces the idea that homosexuality should be kept hidden" (Sanders & Mathis 2013, para. 13). By studying LGBTQ literature, students and professors have the opportunity to challenge and disrupt heteronormativity, especially the "normative notions of sexuality, gender, families, and homes" (Blackburn, Clark & Nemeth 2015, p. 43).

A 200-level LGBTQ literature course was proposed and accepted for the fall semester in 2018 at a private liberal-arts university in Ecuador. It was the first of its kind for a literature course in the country. Surprisingly, enrollment for the class exceeded the maximum 25 students, with 28 students in total. In 1998 Ecuador, a primarily Catholic country, had become the third country in the world, after South Africa and Fiji, to adopt a constitution that banned discrimination based on sexual orientation. The 2008 Ecuador constitution added gender identity as a protected category, and permitted same-sex civil unions with all the same rights of marriage, except for adoption; however, the same constitution defined marriage as between a man and a woman. Although Ecuador regards discrimination based on sexual orientation as illegal, "heteronormativity is still central in shaping the contours of this paternalistic regime" and norms are based on "machista" models and binary conceptions of gender (Rausenberger 2016, p. 4). LGBTQ people in Ecuador are still sometimes forced by their families into gay-conversion clinics, where there have been reports of physical, mental and sexual abuse. Even though these clinics are illegal, with over 100 clinics shut down between 2012 to 2015, many reopened with a different name within months of being closed; there are currently about 200 of these unlicensed clinics operating across Ecuador (Moloney 2018). Despite the progress Ecuador has made with LGBTQ issues, most recently a 2016 law that allows people to choose their preferred gender on their identity cards and the legalisation of gay marriage in 2019, socially conservative and heteronormative-grounded ideologies are entrenched.

An LGBTQ literature course in Ecuador at a private liberal-arts university provides the backdrop for the focus of this analysis. I have been an educator for over 20 years, but this was my first semester at this university. I identify as a gender non-conforming lesbian and was eager to plan and teach this

course. I carefully selected the texts and activities for the class. To "combat heteronormativity, quality texts must be chosen and cannot be 'sanitized'" (Sanders & Mathis 2013, para. 5). The main texts chosen for the course were *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin, *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg and *It Gets Better* by Dan Savage and Terry Miller. The course also included a poetry unit and a film unit. The texts and readings were selected to portray a variety of LGBTQ characters; by achieving this level of variety "educators can begin to develop and incorporate pedagogy that will combat heteronormativity" (Sanders & Mathis 2013, para. 17). This inquiry examined students' written reflections and essays, as well as a questionnaire at the end of the course, followed by 12 individual interviews with students who volunteered after the course had ended. The guiding questions for this study were:

1. Does an LGBTQ literature course in Ecuador help to build LGBTQ allies?
2. What did students learn in an LGBTQ literature course in Ecuador?

Theoretical background

Queer literacy framework

Queer theory is the starting point for most queer pedagogies. Queer theory can be viewed as a tool for framing educational approaches and practices known as queer pedagogy (Britzman 1995; Elder 1999; Kopelson 2002; Sumara 2001). Queer theory is the disruption of norms, especially the disruption of sexual and gender norms. Queer theorists view sexual and gender identities as social, multiple, variable, shifting and fluid, and there is an expectation of movement among and beyond these identity categories (Britzman 1997). The use of queer theory as a lens invites students and teachers to critically examine these various identities in the pedagogical practice.

A queer framework asks students to apply a queer-theory lens and to challenge heteronormative understandings. The goal shifts from encouraging an understanding and tolerance of LGBTQ people and "toward developing a critical lens that enables students to understand and accept *all* complexity – in literature, history, their own lives, and the world" (Lin 2017, p. 9). The term "queer pedagogy" was perhaps first described by Bryson and de Castell (1993) as "a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of 'normalcy' in schooled subjects" (p. 285).

For this study, two different queer-literacy frameworks were employed, as well as the beginning stages of the formation of a new framework, that I propose be called LGBTQ+ Ally Development Framework. First is Miller's (2015) queer-literacy framework, which challenges institutional heteronormativity by using literacy practices and an LGBT*IAGCQ-inclusive curriculum (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, agender/asexual, gender creative and questioning). Miller's (2015) queer-literacy framework is a "critical interventionist and political strategy to challenge the taken-for-granted value of hegemonic demarcations of gender and sexuality assumed under patriarchy and hidden within and by curriculum" (p. 40). Miller (2015) argued that students must be allowed to self-identify however they want and be given opportunities to see themselves reflected in a positive way (p. 40). This framework, which is intended to be an ongoing, autonomous and non-hierarchical tool, sees teachers as "agents for social, political, and personal transformations" (Miller 2015, p. 38). Miller (2015) provides 10 key principles and commitments of educators who adopt a queer-literacy framework.

The second queer-literacy framework supporting this study is Van Leent & Mills's (2018) queer critical media literacies framework, which extended the work of Miller (2015). This framework is important within the context of the LGBTQ literature class in this study because it incorporated diverse digital resources, such as digital texts, podcasts, blogs, media and videos. Both frameworks are "grounded in similar epistemological underpinnings"; however, "the queer critical media literacies framework differs significantly from the queer literacy framework by suggesting pedagogies and learning experiences" (Van Leent & Mills 2018, p. 403). This framework consists of four components. The first is recognising rights, which engages "teachers in a pedagogy that challenged heteronormative privileges within a human rights domain" (Van Leent & Mills 2018, p. 404) in a safe space that encourages students to see and understand the rights of LGBTQ+ people. The second is reflecting dialogically, which "ensures that teachers provide a critical dialogic space for students to critique how norms about gender and sexuality are represented" (Van Leent & Mills 2018, p. 404). The third component of the queer critical media literacies framework is reconstructing representations, which encourages teachers to teach students "to critique historical and social constructions of institutions and cultures that frame textual production of gender and sexualities to reconstruct texts and identities" (Van Leent & Mills 2018, p. 407). The last component of the framework is reconnecting intersectionalities, which conducts a critique of how identities intersect with other identities and how they are represented or not. These identities may include, but are not limited to, culture, language, age, religion, race, social class, dis/ability and geographic location (Van Leent & Mills 2018, p. 408). Reconnecting intersectionality serves as a "critique of binary understandings of identity and systems of oppression, such as male/female, black/white, native/immigrant, or rural/urban" (Van Leent & Mills 2018, p. 408). The queer critical media literacy framework is "a tentative model to venture toward reflective dialogue and research about queering critical media literacies pedagogy in the classroom" (Van Leent & Mills 2018, p. 410), and it includes an abundance of lesson plans, teacher tips, strategies and key questions.

Ally development

A key component and aspiration of the LGBTQ literature class was to build LGBTQ allies. The term "ally" was introduced by Washington and Evans (1991) to refer to someone who is "a member of the 'dominant' or 'majority' group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population" (p. 195). Allies call for social justice; heterosexual allies, specifically, are viewed as powerful advocates for the LGBTQ movement. Identifying oneself as an ally is a developmental process. There are several models for ally identity development (Broido 2000; Chojnacki & Gelberg 1995; DiStefano et al. 2000; Washington & Evans 1991); however, for the understanding of ally identity development for this study, Ji's (2007) reflection "Being a heterosexual ally to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community: Reflections and development" was adopted.

Ji (2007) advises, along with other models for ally identity development, that allies must acquire knowledge about the experiences, concerns and realities of the LGBTQ community (p. 178). He reflected that being an ally is not just about accepting LGBTQ persons: "In a homophobic society, it is not enough to accept passively LGBT persons; allies need to express openly their support so everyone can be free to either say they are LGBT or that they know someone who is" (Ji 2007, p. 179). Ji (2007) believes an ally has two roles: support and advocacy (p. 182). He emphasises that "potential allies need a supportive relationship to explore questions, concerns, or anxieties about the process and to explore difficult subjects like homophobia and oppression" (Ji 2007, p. 184). In his reflection, he came up with a list of 13 reasons why it is important to be an ally (which were highlighted and discussed in the LGBTQ literature class, especially in conjunction with discussions of the book *It Gets Better* and its accompanying YouTube channel):

1. Allies can help other persons stop the oppression of LGBT persons.

2. Some non-LGBT persons may have communicated to an LGBT person that his or her sexual identity is deviant, inappropriate, or transitional. Allies, however, can embrace and value an LGBT person's sexual identity.

3. Allies can dispel the myths and misconceptions of the LGBT community that are held by the majority of society.

4. Allies can help non-LGBT persons positively resolve their biases and discomfort with LGBT persons.

5. An LGBT person might feel excluded from other parts of society if the LGBT community is the only community that accepts him or her. Allies from all parts of society can help LGBT persons feel acceptance.

6. When everyone, not just the LGBT community, accepts and includes LGBT persons, LGBT persons have an easier time accepting their identities.

7. Sometimes, the LGBT community may not express acceptance towards an LGBT person. In these cases, an LGBT person can rely on allies for safety and support.

8. Allies can provide hope to an LGBT person that non-LGBT persons will accept his or her sexual identity when the LGBT person is ready to come out" to his or her families and friends.

9. Allies can support an LGBT person if his or her own family or friends do not accept or support him or her.

10. The friends and family members of LGBT persons, who are searching for support, may need to come out to allies.

11. Persons who want to come out as allies need the support of other allies.

12. Allies can make every setting (e.g., a workplace, school, or social group) safe for LGBT persons and their family and friends to come out.

13. It is simply the right thing to do. (pp. 179-180)

LGBTQ+ ally development framework proposal

Building upon the queer literacy framework of Miller (2017), the queer critical media literacies framework of Van Leent and Mills (2018) and the reflections of Ji (2007) on his experiences with his own LGBTQ ally identity development, I propose a LGBTQ+ ally development framework for teaching. As with the queer-literacy framework of Miller (2017), it uses an LGBT*IAGCQ-inclusive curriculum to "shift norms that operationalize our lives" (p. 41) for students to "be self-determined-autonomous beings" (p. 37), but it does even more by providing a space for students to explore their

fears and anxieties related to homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity to gain knowledge about the LGBTQ community and its history, and in turn, develop these experiences into becoming an advocating ally. Allies are not born; they are trained (Ji 2007, p. 183). As with Van Leent and Mills's (2018) queer critical media literacies framework, an LGBTQ+ ally development framework aims to "support students to read genders and sexuality through the perspective of queer theory" (p. 403) with four components: recogniaing rights, reflecting dialogically, reconstructing representations and reconnecting intersectionalities; and then to take these insights and new knowledge further and put them into action.

With an LGBTQ+ ally development framework students are encouraged to help stop the oppression of LGBTQ people in the world, dispel myths and misconceptions about the LGBTQ community and provide support, hope and advocacy to all. Within an LGBTQ+ ally development framework, how to be an ally is specifically taught. Not all LGBTQ+-identifying students consider themselves allies. If students already identify as an ally, there is much more to learn about being a determined and thoughtful ally. Not only did students taught within this framework report learning about denial, repression and identity, but they described moving from insight to actual action. I believe an LGBTQ+ ally development framework could be adopted in any course that addresses LGBTQ topics. One only needs to take the lesson further – from awareness to teaching students how to be an ally. This framework is put forward tentatively, as it was my personal teaching framework for a new LGBTQ literature course at a private university in Ecuador. This emerging understanding my own LGBTQ+ ally development framework ultimately became the organising structure for the findings of this study.

Methods

Participants

This study took place at a private liberal-arts university in Ecuador in the fall semester of 2018. It was the first time an LGBTQ literature course had been offered at the university. Twenty-eight students enrolled in the course, 22 whom identified as heterosexual/straight. This is significant and "shines a light on the relevance a queer-themed curriculum holds for large numbers of students beyond the smaller number of students who identify as LGBTQ themselves" (Helmer 2016, p. 38). There were 23 female students and five male students with an average age of 21 years old. One female student was in transition from male to female. The 28 students all came from various majors, including medicine, law, engineering, international relations, psychology and graphic design, among others, which is a solid representation of the various majors of the student population. Twenty-six of the students were native Spanish speakers, while two of the students were native English speakers studying abroad for one semester from the United States. This study was approved by the ethics committee of the university and all students voluntarily signed an informed consent form to participate in the study. The student names used in this study are pseudonyms I randomly selected.

Procedures

An LGBTQ literature course opens itself up for pushing boundaries of curriculum and pedagogical practices (Helmer 2016), especially in more socially conservative countries. I developed an LBGTQ+ ally development framework for teaching while choosing materials and activities for the course. With the goal of building allies by the end of the course, I carefully selected texts that would not only educate but build empathy, as well having literary merit. After reviewing approximately 25 books, I chose *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin, *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg and *It Gets Better* by Dan Savage and Terry Miller. The course also

included documentaries, a film project, a poetry project, podcasts and Internet resources that added a critical layer to the students' learning experiences. The film and poetry projects included group presentations where students selected an LGBTQ+ film to discuss and present to the class, as well as an LBGTQ+ poet and their poetry to address in class.

From the first class, I began to structure a safe space for the students. Ground rules for class discussion were thoroughly discussed and then practiced in small-group discussions concerning homophobia. Students were able to write down anonymously any questions they had. Questions such as "Is homosexuality illegal in Ecuador?", "What is the meaning of queer?", "What does transgender mean?", "What inspired you to open this course and what are your motivations to teach these topics?" and "Do you have advice for someone who wants to change their gender with no family support?" served as a starting point for the course.

Research design and data analysis

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research method. The aim of phenomenological research is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it (Creswell 1998; Giorgi 1985; Moustakas 1994). This study attempted to examine the students' meaning-making processes and achieve an in-depth understanding of their experiences in the course. The data collected was from written reflections and essays, as well as an anonymous open-ended questionnaire, followed by 12 voluntary in-depth interviews. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes to one hour each until saturation was reached. Seidman (1991) pointed out, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). The questions that comprised the questionnaire and the interviews were open-ended questions, such as "Why did you take the LGBTQ literature class?", "What has been your experience of taking the course?", "What do you feel you learned by taking the course?" and "Would you consider yourself a LGBTQ ally? If yes, in what ways? If yes, did you consider yourself a LGBTQ ally before taking the LGBTQ literature class?" The interviews were transcribed and coded in a search for emerging themes and broader meanings. The written reflections and essays and the open-ended questionnaire were also coded multiple times with content analyses to identify central themes. Descriptive codes were applied and categorised under major headings along with subcategories, using coding strategies as described by Saldaña (2009).

Findings and discussion

Giovanni's Room

Giovanni's Room, by James Baldwin, is a 1956 novel that centers around David, a young man from the United States who is living abroad in Paris. The novel focuses on David's internal struggle of facing his sexual orientation in a 1950s setting. The author's background and the book's themes were thoroughly discussed in class. Students wrote personal reflections regarding the novel, as well as a final essay. Common topics for the reflections and essays were: society's non-acceptance, internalised homophobia, shame and guilt, and love. However, the most frequent topics students chose to write about were the struggles of LGBTQ people, denial and repression and the idea of manhood. Student Ariana wrote:

> Giovanni's Room *has showed me Baldwin's ability to beautifully tell the story of David, a man with an inner struggle, depicting how painful it can be to want to love someone but to not allow that to yourself because of social paradigms and*

> *norms stuck in your head. The reading has shown me how far people can go in order to "be normal" while ripping themselves apart inside.*

Another student, Paula, wrote about David's struggle in the book:

> *Personally, I tried to put myself in David's position after every chapter of the book. It made me realize how our society and gender roles have made it so hard to exercise our right to be who we really are. I can only imagine the struggle that comes from not being able to express one's sexuality without the fear of being judged or abandoned by our loved ones. The kind of fear that has pushed people to the ledge of suicide for the notion of being different, when in reality we are not different. We all just love in different ways.*

The theme of denial and repression in the book was a theme that many students wrote about. One student, Emily, wrote, "His discovery [of his sexuality] became an unknown dark land for him, and the only way he knew how to fight the strangeness was denial and repression." Emily went on to discuss the repercussions of denial and repression in her essay:

> *And these were the consequences of repression: pushing people away, living a fake life, blaming others for your own mistakes, and lying to yourself. Now I understand how hurtful it must be. This is an example of how we should never guide our lives. David's misery was a consequence of his choices, of choosing denial over happiness. When he starts accepting himself, his flaws, his reality, he will be truly happy.*

Some students chose to write the theme of manhood in their essays. Monica wrote:

> *The origins of the conflicts that happen in the book can be traced back to David's toxic concept of masculinity that he was raised to believe. David yearned to be a "real man" and was so scared of not being masculine that he suppressed his homosexuality, ran away from Giovanni, breaking his heart, and almost married Hella to have a family and a safe heterosexual relationship.*

Another student, Juan, wrote his essay about manhood and had many insights to this theme:

> *Baldwin's protagonist is a prisoner of his day and age, bound to societal ideas of what it means to be a man. His paranoia and torturous self-criticism are rooted in what society and his environment told him throughout his whole life about what the role of a man was supposed to be. David struggles because he is convinced he is an outcast, excommunicated from society, and that's what he keeps telling himself. He has disrespected society's holy masculinity and thus, he believes he is unworthy of being part of it.*

Overall, students seemed to enjoy the novel. Class discussions were thoughtful and engaging. The written reflections and final essays were profound and insightful. It was the perfect first novel to begin the journey of the LGBTQ literature class.

Fun Home

The second book the class read was *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by critically acclaimed graphic memoirist and cartoonist Alison Bechdel. It is a 2006 graphic memoir that chronicles Bechdel's childhood in rural Pennsylvania, United States, and focuses on her relationship with her father. The graphic memoir addresses the themes of sexual orientation, gender roles, emotional abuse, suicide, dysfunctional family life and the role of literature in understanding life. The first class surrounding this book was spent reading opinion editorials and discussing the 2015 controversy at Duke University. The book had been required reading for Duke freshmen and some students had protested the use of the book, characterising it as pornography. Students read opinion pieces from both sides and offered their viewpoints in a class discussion that ultimately led to the examination of the role of higher education to deliver knowledge.

The students adored this book. They voted it as their favorite for the whole semester. In the students' written reflections, the common topics were self-acceptance, repression and identity. Many also wrote about how new, fresh and validating the book had been to them. Jade wrote:

> *It was an insightful novel that would compel a person of any identity to reflect on their ability to come to terms with who they are. It was a tragic demonstration on what repressing identities that are significant can do to a person.*

Student Isabel wrote:

> *It felt somehow validating to be able to read about a real-life person that went through all of this and emerged as a successful person. In this age where there is a need for representation, this book feels like a fresh insight, as it deals with the positive and negative sides of being openly gay and finding your identity. Even straight people can benefit from this book, as it offers a fresh perspective that they might not be able to obtain somewhere else.*

For a final project, students were asked to create their own comic (or other artistic interpretation) concerning a theme from the book. They produced impressive works of art with intelligent analyses of the selected theme. To celebrate the completion of the book and projects, students watched clips from the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical adaptation of *Fun Home*.

Stone Butch Blues

The third book the class read was *Stone Butch Blues*, a 1993 genderqueer narrative by activist Leslie Feinberg. The novel follows the story of Jess Goldberg, who grew up in a working-class area of upstate New York in the 1950s, came out as a butch lesbian in the 1960s and decided to pass as a man in the 1970s. This groundbreaking work tackles themes such as gender identity, gender fluidity, finding a community and violence against non-normative identities. In the students' reflections and essays about this book, many commented that it was difficult to read due to the violent rape scenes. John wrote:

> *With a work of such honesty and realism, it is as hard to write about, as it is to read it. Life is bound to be hard for outsiders, but what she goes through is inhumane and it can break just about anyone. It is not an easy read. It is neither relaxing nor gratuitous, and it shouldn't be. The book is obligated to make the reader uncomfortable; unpunished rape, abuse of power and malicious use of violence*

> *should be riveting and terrifying. After these parts of the story are read, one has to take a breath and let it all sink in.*

Another student, Cristina, wrote:

> *While reading the book I felt sad for the main character. There had been so much pain and injustice in such a short amount of time, but what concerned me even more was realizing that this is not an isolated story. Millions of people in the LGBTQ communitywere being abused, harmed, and harassed every day.*

Isabel also wrote about the difficulty in reading the book:

> *Although this book is quite harrowing and even painful to read sometimes, it is a necessary read for all queer women and even for allies, in order to appreciate how far we have come. The tone is somber, but the story it tells is captivating. This is a book that I have had to read in small bits, because it honestly becomes a bit too much sometimes, but I am glad I had the opportunity to read it.*

Some students wrote about how they saw the book as a call for action. A few wrote about how even though many societies have made great advances, there is still a long way to go. Emily connected this call to action to Ecuador:

> *In the Ecuadorian context, homosexuality was decriminalized just twenty years ago, and even today conservative people refuse to accept it. As long as some groups of our society refuse to accept the fact that these topics are real and these people are humans too, we will stay trapped in the worst way of violence possible, disregard. The moment you activate disregard towards someone, you are denying their identity, their existence.*

Despite the book being a difficult read, the students embraced it and the lessons they learned about gender identity. Monica commented that more education is needed. She said, "They should teach us this when we are kids. I have never learned about transgender people before."

It Gets Better

It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living is a book of essays that was published in 2011, after a series of suicides among LGBTQ youth. Edited by Dan Savage and Terry Miller, this book provides messages of hope to young LGBTQ youth who have experienced bullying. Students read a selection of these essays, as well as watched some of the videos from the It Gets Better project. Students were assigned to write their own "It Gets Better" letter. Many volunteered to read their letters aloud to the class and the results were heartfelt and endearing. Daniela wrote an emotional and intense letter to herself, telling herself, "I know how resilient you are, how smart and kind and generous you are." Paula wrote a letter to her son, telling him that "boys DO cry". Many students addressed their letter to the outcasts, the misfits and the LGBTQ kids of Ecuador. Carolina wrote, "The wounds that these people have caused your soul and your heart will be healed, never doubt that. Do you know why? Because it gets better." Emily advised, "I am a witness of your braveness and courage. Because in a world where home feels like a prison and school feels like torture, you defied stereotypes [and] rejection, and gave love a chance." Domenica wrote, "You have people around that care about you and love the way you are, and that's

what matters. You are unique and perfect, just the way you are." One student, Jade, addressed her letter to the black LGBTQ+ community:

> *If you don't give into the sickening feeling of being less than the bigot who makes you feel this way, now you, my dear child, are MORE than. You are MORE than their ignorance. MORE than their emptiness. You are MORE.*

Interviews and questionnaires

The first question was "Why did you take the LGBTQ literature class?" Most students reported that it sounded like an interesting class with like-minded people in a safe space. Emily commented:

> *My first impression was "How?" and "Why?" did they allow this class. I know we are a liberal arts university but I don't think we are that liberal. So I thought it was amazing. So I dropped another class and took this one. Also I have a best friend who is gay and he is my inspiration. He wasn't ready to take this class, so I took the class in his name.*

Maria said, "I always fight with my family. They do not approve of the LGBT community. I wanted to know more, more about the history, and I have learned a lot in this class." A few more students mentioned their family's disapproval in the interview and/or questionnaire. Angela said, "I took this class because my family is very Catholic and conservative and I had a lot of doubts." William, who reported that when his parents see something on television where a gay person was murdered, his parents say out loud that the person deserved it. He said he took the class because it was "different [to] all other classes that are taught at the university and it is a topic that is not taught."

The second question was "What has been your experience of taking the LGBTQ literature class?" All responses from students were positive, and many were "sad that it's ending". Carolina reported:

> *I loved the books. This class was like a get-away. You can really connect with the characters and you can sympathize with them and understand how they perceive the world. It was interesting to put yourself in another one's shoes for awhile.*

Emily expressed, "As an ally, I have always had contact with the happy part of LGBT, like Pride. But this was the first time I have learned about the sad part, the history, even the history of Pride." Many students described the class as an amazing learning experience that helped them "grow as a person".

The third question was "What do you feel you learned by taking the LGBTQ literature class?" Most students reported learning about the history and struggles of LGBTQ people, as well as empathy, respect and how to be a better ally. Cindy said:

> *I learned more about LGBTQ history. I also learned to express myself. I was in an Emotional closet. For example, when I wrote the It Gets Better letter, I would have never dared to write it before. By before I mean the "dark times" I experienced and now I am feeling more like myself. This class gave me more confidence.*

Many students noted learning about transgender issues and "how hard their struggles can be". Maria expressed that she was shocked when learning about the struggles of transgender people:

> *Even the little things like going to the bathroom. I started looking at bathrooms differently and thinking how stupid it is that we have such divisions. I started seeing that for me going to the bathroom was a privilege. I thought everyone had the right to go to the bathroom, then I realized no, it's not that easy for some people. I feel like society is designed to make you feel uncomfortable, especially if you don't fit with the standard. It's not fair. I learned to be more conscious and to see other perspectives.*

Emily also noted that "sometimes we take our privilege for granted" and that through literature she was able to put herself in others' shoes and see from their perspectives. William disclosed that this class "allowed me to grow as a person (maybe even mature) and accept myself (whoever I might be)". He went on to comment:

> Giovanni's Room *taught me that we can never run from ourselves and that we shouldn't.* Fun Home *taught me about the unbreakable link between parents and offspring.* Stone Butch Blues *taught me to honor and respect the differences between all of us, and to express my identity because it will take to the correct path (even though it is not always the easiest). Walt Whitman's* Leaves of Grass *showed me that my likes, thoughts, beliefs, etc. are all beautiful and I should embrace myself. There is art in me if I am true with myself. The movie* Brokeback Mountain *taught me that if I reject myself, I will only find remorse and sadness down the road.*

The last question was "Would you consider yourself a LGBTQ ally? If yes, did you consider yourself a LGBTQ ally before taking the LGBTQ literature class?" Many students indicated that they were LGBTQ allies before taking the course; however, after taking the course they felt more informed, more empathetic, more open-minded, more vocal and more able "to bring awareness to the struggles that are still faced today by the community". Many students said they will no longer tolerate homophobia and "feel more capable of calling people out". Some said that before they felt "like an ally but as an outsider" or they were "an ally on the Internet". Isabel reported that after taking the class she joined the university queer group and attended some LGBTQ activities. She said, "These are things I would not have been involved with before." One student proclaimed, "I think I already considered myself an ally, but I did not know there were different types of allies. Now my goal is to become a super ally." Out of 28 students, only one student responded "no" to this question, which for me, as a teacher in Ecuador, is impressive.

Conclusion

What happened when university students in Ecuador took a class in LGBTQ literature was a truly authentic educational experience. A proposed LGBTQ ally development framework was used and students not only learned by reading LGBTQ literature, they also learned to become active, to use their voices, to embrace themselves and others and to become stronger LGBTQ allies. This research agreed with Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth (2015):

> Finally, for teachers and students, engaging with queer literature provides opportunities to exist and thrive in the realm of the queer, a space where multiple ideologies and conflicting ideologies around sexuality and gender can circulate and be considered, examined, embraced, or rejected by the reader, rendering the text more open and less settled, and the space of the classroom, as a whole, more queer. (p. 45)

Even though this course was taught in Ecuador, it could and should be taught in every country. The emerging LGBTQ+ ally development framework proposed can provide teachers everywhere with a theoretical framework that can guide them in developing curricula around LGBTQ literature that will not only work against homophobia, heteronormativity and heterosexism, but provide teachers with an ultimate goal of developing LGBTQ+ allies in their universities and communities.

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