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Review of *Queering Education in the Deep South*

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Abstract

This is a review of Kamden K. Strunk's *Queering Education in the Deep South*. In *Queering Education in the Deep South*, Strunk provides text from several queer scholars that have conducted qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research studies to collect the experiences of queer faculty, staff and students within the secondary and postsecondary education system in the American South. This review will discuss the various sections throughout the text that make connections between sociopolitical concerns of the lived experiences of those who identify as LGBTQ or LGBTQ allies. This review also critiques parts of Strunk's work as it relates to the overall tone of *Queering Education in the Deep South*. Additionally, this review offers recommendations on parties who would benefit from reading this captivating text in an effort to acknowledge, challenge, and transform the educational policies and practice in the American South pertaining to those who identify as members of the LGBTQ community and LGBTQ allies.

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Keywords: Queering | queer | education | Deep South | American South | LGBTQ

For those with minoritized identities, secondary and postsecondary education has been not only a violent space, but a liberatory one. This is especially true for educators and students who identify as LGBTQ. In the introduction to his book, *Queering Education in the Deep South*, Kamden Strunk (2018) writes “education has been, and continues to be, a site of constant, contentious, and sometimes violent cultural conflict” (p. vii). It is within this context that Strunk, a queer scholar and Assistant Professor of Educational Research at Auburn University, situates this edited volume.

In *Queering Education in the Deep South*, Strunk has assembled chapters that provide a thoughtful consideration of what it means to *queer* education in the American South. As one of the authors notes “the verb ‘queering’ as used in the title of this volume, suggests an act of creation” (Perez, 2008, p. 147). Strunk, who counts social justice and education among his broad research focuses, creates a text that combines qualitative research methods and queer theory to produce compelling research on the lived experience of LGBTQ identified students and educators as well as those working in education who consider themselves allies. The audience of this volume is not exclusively those working in the southern United States, though those working in that geographic region may be especially interested in the insights offered by the book.

Queering Education in the Deep South gives readers an understanding of how religion impacts sociopolitical concerns within the area of the United States commonly known as the Bible Belt. Strunk's volume specifically focuses on secondary and postsecondary education and gives readers the tools to make connections between those sociopolitical concerns and the lived experiences of students, educators, and

administrators who identify as LGBTQ or LGBTQ allies and who live and work in the south. This book addresses issues in the LGBTQ literature like intersectionality and the myths of LGBTQ identity as a lifestyle or a choice.

While all of the chapters in the *Queering Education in the Deep South* engage with queer theory, the book makes use of a variety of methods. Data collection and analysis methods featured in this volume include narrative inquiry, autoethnography, oral history, and action research. A single mixed-methods study is featured in the volume. Despite a wide variety of topics and methods, authors included in this volume define terms for the reader in an approachable way that doesn't assume prior engagement with a theoretical framework or a research methodology.

This book is separated into three parts, two of which fit seamlessly together. Part One is a compilation of chapters on teaching queer studies and LGBTQ issues in secondary and postsecondary classrooms while Part Two is a compilation of chapters on queering educational policy and practice. These two chapters fit together and feature a cohesive and coherent narrative. Part Three of the book, which is a bit of an outlier, features a compilation of chapters on queering literature, libraries, and archives. While the reviewers appreciated the inclusion of libraries and archives and their contribution to the queering of education in the south, the overall tone of the section did not fit well with the content offered in the previous two sections of the book. We both agreed that this section could be expanded into its own contribution to the *Queering...in the Deep South* series that Strunk edits.

Additionally, the use of the phrase “Deep South” is pervasive throughout the volume and yet geographically contextual for each text. As people who both currently live in the south, the reviewers had a sense of what each author meant to be the geographical boundaries of the Deep South. The authors of the chapters included in the book seem to have a broad understanding of the region's geographical boundaries. Readers who are unfamiliar with the south may benefit greatly from Strunk's defining the region's geographical boundaries.

The value of Strunk's *Queering Education in the Deep South* is the foregrounding of the challenges faced by those seeking a more equitable and inclusive educational space, especially with regards to the rights of LGBTQ educators and students. In a chapter about teacher training, one of the author's writes “One of the most challenging facets of preparing teachers and teacher leaders in the Deep South is the conflict between modeling inclusive and teaching about inclusivity. That is, many of our students endorsed beliefs that are in conflict with creating classroom cultures that are welcoming to all children and families” (p. 26). While navigating the specific sociopolitical climate of the American south provides its own unique challenges, this text offers useful and actionable examples of social justice work in the classroom and in the area of educational policy that could be implemented anywhere. While there is much scholarship that makes use of queer theory as a theoretical framework as well as much scholarship related to the lived experience of LGBTQ educators and students, this volume is unique in that it positions these topics in the context of the American south.

As an edited volume, the chapters in this text may hold different levels of appeal for different populations of readers. As a whole, *Queering Education in the Deep South* can both aid in opening the door to open discussion about the challenges queer faculty, staff and students face and then offer a way forward with examples of how these challenges

might be overcome through evidence-based changes to educational policies and practice. We recommend this book to all educators who: work in secondary and postsecondary education, are members of the LGBTQ community or are LGBTQ allies, and to those who may wish to learn more about LGBTQ issues. This book offers a bridge for all parties to understand that there are critical issues that are systematically woven into the very fabric of education in a specific geographical region. As Strunk (2018) writes in the book's introduction, "It is precisely this contradictory, liberatory-and-oppressive, dominating-and-empowering system the authors of this text take up. They question how that system can be shaped for the benefit of diverse subjects, including queer students. They imagine possibilities for infusing queer issue in classrooms and beyond" (p. viii). Strunk's *Queering Education in the Deep South* is a compelling volume whose contents invite readers to imagine those possibilities alongside the authors.

Authors Notes

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