
**Global Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Minorities in Lifelong Learning and Constituent Adult Education**

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**Abstract:** Sexual and gender minorities as learners ought to be a focus of a critically progressive process of education. In this paper I consider our ongoing struggle for recognition and inclusion in transnational and supranational contexts. I pay particular attention to Uganda and its brazen, anti-gay agenda. I conclude with a perspective on the meaning of lifelong learning and constituent adult education, which ought to be realized by engendering social and cultural awakening and transformative learning to abet reflexive, holistic living and learning for all.

Emulating critical theory’s advocacy of ethical and just practices and postfoundational emphases on multiple subjectivities and their recognition and accommodation, lifelong learning and constituent adult education ought to engage in critical action that advances inclusive social education for sexual and gender minorities (Grace, in press). This concern for social education across differences has been central in the emergence of the modern practice of adult education. For example, Eduard Christian Lindeman is prominently remembered as a social philosopher and adult educator who advanced critically progressive educational ideals. In *The Meaning of Adult Education*, Lindeman (1926/1961), stating that “difference is the base of personal integrity” (p.36), emphasized that learners need to learn to acknowledge and value difference by developing an ontological sense of self and others “within the organic unity of particularized selves” (p. 36). As Lindeman saw it, a key goal of the process of education is to assist learners to build awareness of difference and the larger social context, with this end result: Knowing difference, which enables freedom as an achievement, replaces fearing difference, which inhibits freedom. Lindeman asserted that knowing and accommodating difference leads to creative living following the sequence of “intelligence for power, power for self-expression, and self-expression in the context of relative freedom” (p. 53). Here Lindeman stressed the importance of making interrelationships with others an intellectual concern so we can engage in conscious problem solving whereby we consider the interests of others when challenges and conflicts arise in life, learning, and work as spheres of activity. He said this provides a basis for intelligent living.

These days education for intelligent living has to include education for citizenship and foci on vulnerable populations in transnational and supranational (such as United Nations and Commonwealth of Nations) contexts. It should attend to the historical, social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of citizenship, ultimately seeing learning as encompassing educational and cultural work for social transformation (Allman, 1999; Grace, in press). Still inclusive lifelong learning and constituent adult education remain
enigmatic in many quarters. Mainstream lifelong learning is a narrow and inadequately contextualized field of study and practice that is not broadly committed to equity and justice for all learners across relationships of power (Grace, in press). As learners, sexual and gender minorities provide a poignant case in point. In this paper, I consider our ongoing struggle for recognition and inclusion in transnational and supranational contexts. I pay particular attention to Uganda and its horrific anti-gay agenda. I conclude with a perspective on the meaning of lifelong learning and constituent adult education, which ought to be reflexive processes that engender social and cultural awakening and transformative learning to abet holistic living and learning for all.

**Sexual and Gender Minorities in Transnational and Supranational Contexts**

As an inclusive social educator and activist, Robert J. Hill has long advocated for space and place for sexual and gender minorities in supranational contexts including the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In this excerpt from an extensive exchange with him (Grace, in press), Hill speaks about his experience working to advance gay rights at the CONFINTEA V Mid-term Review held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2003. CONFINTEA is the French acronym for Conférence internationale sur l’éducation des adultes, which is the International Conference for Adult Education. CONFINTEA V had been held in Hamburg, Germany in 1997. As Hill recounted to me, CONFINTEAs have been held every 12 years since 1949. In 1997, there was no mention of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. Hill used the mid-term review as an opportunity to open up a discussion on SGM (sexual and gender minority) issues to counter the omission in 1997 and to create a basis to include these issues in future CONFINTEAs.

**APG:** Could you provide more detail regarding the CONFINTEA V Mid-term Review and what happened in Bangkok? How did you participate? What was the outcome in terms of addressing SGM rights?

**RJH:** Justin Ellis from Namibia, the Chairperson of the Governing Board of the UNESCO Institute for Education (now called the Institute for Lifelong Learning, which is located in Hamburg, Germany), reported that the CONFINTEA V Mid-term Review brought together over three hundred representatives of UNESCO member states. This included ministers and senior-level officials, agencies of the UN system, non-governmental and civil-society organizations, and academic and research institutions from more than 90 countries (CONFINTEA V, 2003a). The review aimed to assess the accomplishments and the difficulties encountered over the first six years in executing the CONFINTEA V agenda. This was done through a series of thematic reviews, regional reviews, and plenary sessions. Participants examined recent trends and new developments in practices and policies of lifelong learning and adult education. The group also began the task of preparing for CONFINTEA VI [which took place in Belém (State of Pará), Brazil in December 2009] by proposing strategies for the advancement of future lifelong-learning programs. One significant thematic review focused on democracy. Dr. Lean Chan Heng from Malaysia chaired the session, and I was the rapporteur. As a queer activist/scholar I arrived in Bangkok with a stated agenda, which I also brought to the
Democracy Thematic Review. My goals were to expand the parameters of lifelong learning and adult education by 1) using education for citizenship and education for civil and human rights as anti-oppression tools to build knowledge, skills, resources, and capacity in human-rights advocacy based on sexual orientation and gender identity; 2) discussing language and broadening the definition of discrimination so that grounds for protection against prejudice in workplace and other sociocultural settings included sexual orientation and gender identity; 3) engaging in public pedagogy to cast members of sexual and gender minorities as persons and citizens who are not sick, criminal, or sinful, and 4) engaging in public pedagogy to draw attention to SGM human rights and any violations—social oppression, torture, arbitrary arrest, and extortion are commonplace—across governments and civil society.

After several days of formal and informal meetings, caucuses, and networking on SGM justice, both the Democracy Thematic Review and the Gender Thematic Review took up the language of SGM inclusion in lifelong learning and adult education. One of the regional reviews, largely under the leadership of Latin American women at the conference, acted similarly. The Democracy workgroup issued the following statement, “[We recommend] promoting human-centered values such as peace, human rights, solidarity and justice, [and the elimination of] discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity” (CONFINTEA V, 2003a, n. p.). This position was carried into the all-conference discussions. In the end, the Mid-term Review efforts resulted in thirty-eight recommendations. Recommendation 7 called for UNESCO member states, Civil Society Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, and others to include sexual and gender minorities in all lifelong-learning efforts; it also called for equal rights for sexual and gender minorities.

Point 7 was the ONLY controversial agenda item at the final session during the ratification of the recommendations. A government Minister and representative from Uganda objected to the language, stating that it would require the Government of Uganda to implement policies contrary to state laws where homosexuality is prohibited. Sadly, Uganda does not stand alone. Globally, over 70 countries have a complete ban on homosexuality, with sentences upon conviction ranging from imprisonment to public flogging and death. In at least 7 nations, same-sex relations are punishable by execution. Chechnya, Iran, Iraq, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen implement capital punishment for homosexuality. Same-sex relations are unsympathetically handled in Bangladesh, Egypt, Malaysia, and Pakistan; in these jurisdictions maximum jail sentences range from three to twenty years. In some countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Columbia, and Brazil, right-wing death squads target lesbians, gay men, and trans-identified people in “social cleansing” campaigns. For example, the seemingly open Brazilian sexual attitudes stop at heterosexuality. The group Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (2008) report that “gay positive groups estimate … [that] more than 2,680 gays and lesbians were murdered in Brazil between 1980 and 2006” (para. 1).

In response to the Ugandan objection, I argued that in light of CONFINTEA V’s focus on the rights of all, the erasure of language to abet SGM inclusion would constitute an act of violence and injustice by members of the Mid-term Review. I requested that the Chair not
eliminate this point, in the name of human rights and social justice. After these brief but contentious petitions to the Chair, a recess was called. During the break, with the assistance of Alan Tuckett from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in the United Kingdom, the language issue was resolved. In the end, the controversial wording of Point 7 was retained, with the parenthetical phrase *where licit*. Based on the Democracy Thematic Review recommendations, the following assembly-approved final statement was commended to the official drafting committee:

> We therefore call upon member states, bi- and multilateral agencies, non-governmental and civil-society organizations and social movements … to adopt inclusive policies and take concrete measures and provide adequate resources in support of education programs mainstreaming and catering to the learning demands of persons with disabilities as well as groups with special needs such as indigenous people, migrants and refugees, minorities (including sexual minorities, *where licit*), [and] prisoners. (CONFINTEA V, 2003b, n. p.)

During the CONFINTEA V Mid-term Review it became apparent, once again, that views on “homosexuality” flew in the face of some religious traditions, cultures, and governments, especially in Christian and Muslim countries in Africa, the Middle East, and, to some extent, Asia. In an interesting twist, some people claimed that to promote gay rights was a form of neo-colonialism caught up in a dominating Western ideology. In the end, two questions worthy of reflection remain: Were activist educators and cultural workers, who sought equal rights for all SGM people at the mid-term review, contributing to globalization by imposing their will on purportedly less powerful nations? Or was the neo-colonialist argument a subtly homophobic manoeuvre to sideline concerns with social justice for sexual and gender minorities? Regardless of the answer, Bangkok provided us with the first real victory on the journey that began in the adult-education arena in Jamaica in 2001.

**Still Working Toward a Stonewall for All: Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Bill and Other Travesties**

Sexual and gender minorities, sometimes visible and sometimes working in subaltern spaces in transnational contexts, are demanding human and civil rights, which exist as matters of degree as religious evangelism, rightist exclusionary politics, and other factors play out in different jurisdictions globally (Grace, in press; Hill & Grace, 2009). Indeed there is sustained sociopolitical action in many quarters, honouring the spirit and intentions of the Stonewall rebellion in New York on June 28, 1969, which is often referred to as the moment that heralded a transnational gay civil rights movement. This ongoing movement is vital, as former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton remarked in a speech to diplomats at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland on International Human Rights Day, December 6, 2011. In this speech she spoke about multiple violations of queer integrity:

> It is a violation of human rights when people are beaten or killed because of their sexual orientation [or gender identity], or because they do not conform to cultural norms about how men and women should look or behave. It is a violation of human rights when governments declare it illegal to be gay, or allow those who
harm gay people to go unpunished. … [It is also a violation of human rights] when people cite religious or cultural values as a reason to violate or not to protect the human rights of LGBT citizens. (pp. 3-4)

Secretary Rodham Clinton’s remarks signify the pressing need to recognize gay rights as human and civil rights. Ongoing efforts of the Ugandan Parliament to pass the *Anti-Homosexuality Bill of 2009* provide a distressing case in point. Since Ugandan lawmaker David Bahati authored the bill, violence against gays, including the targeting and murder of gay activists, has escalated (Dixon, 2011). Sadly, the official anti-gay stance of the Anglican Church of Uganda is among factors exacerbating the danger for SGM persons. Fortunately, clergy in Uganda and Britain have contested the church’s strong opposition to homosexuality, and have spoken out against the *Anti-Homosexuality Bill of 2009*. Importantly, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams stated his opposition to the bill: “Overall, the proposed legislation is of shocking severity and I can’t see how it could be supported by any Anglican who is committed to what the Communion has said in recent decades. Apart from invoking the death penalty, it makes pastoral care impossible—it seeks to turn pastors into informers” (Sarmiento, 2011, p. 1).

Over the past few years, the bill has caused an extraordinary international reaction. To deter passage of the bill, nations including the United States and the United Kingdom have threatened to reduce foreign aid to Uganda, making gay rights a new border zone in international diplomacy (Chothia, 2011). Both former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird have been vocal in castigating the Ugandan Government for harassing and violating SGM rights (Lumu, 2013). However, the Ugandan Parliament has remained defiant in reaction to what it perceives as Western incursion into its national affairs. When the Ugandan Parliament adjourned on May 13, 2011, the controversial bill had not been passed, which left it in legislative limbo (Dixon, 2011; Kron, 2011). However, the bill, also called the *Kill the Gays Bill* (Nathan, 2013), has been reintroduced in the new parliament. On February 19, 2013, the bill targeting not only “offenders,” but also those who know, help, or defend sexual and gender minorities topped the list of “business to follow” on the Order Papers (Burroway, 2013, n. p.).

In an interesting juxtaposition, to mark Commonwealth Day on March 11, 2013, Queen Elizabeth II signed the *Charter of the Commonwealth* (Elgot, 2013). However, this document intended to focus on democracy and human rights is not particularly significant in advancing SGM rights and protections. Whereas the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* clearly protects sexual and gender minorities against discrimination and oppression, the Commonwealth Charter is a weak and meaningless nonbinding declaration. There is no specific mention of sexual and gender minorities. There is also no recorded rejection of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity because the homophobic majority of member states, which includes Uganda, blocked this inclusion (Elgot, 2013). In fact, 41 of the 54 Commonwealth nations still criminalize homosexuality (Elgot, 2013). While the Charter lists *mutual respect* and *inclusiveness* as core Commonwealth values, as a multinational, the British Commonwealth of Nations fails sexual and gender minorities as global citizens. Still the Charter states, “We are implacably opposed to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour,
creed, political belief or other grounds” (The Commonwealth, 2013, p. 2). While there appears to be room to include sexual orientation and gender identity in “other grounds,” 41 Commonwealth nations, by virtue of their rule of law criminalizing homosexuality, would not make room. It this dim light, we should question the social value of the British Commonwealth of Nations since it appears Uganda and the rest of the homophobic majority now rule the waves.

Concluding Perspective: The Mean of Lifelong Learning and Constituent Adult Education for Sexual and Gender Minorities

In writing the editor’s preface for the republication of Lindeman’s (1926) The Meaning of Adult Education, J. Roby Kidd (1961) characterized the social philosopher as an ambitious educator who affirmed social education as the modus operandi for transformation of a world where “injustice [had] to be fought, and the inhumane [had] to be brought to bay” (p. xiii). Lindeman believed that social education was the foundation for envisioning and building social democracy. To achieve this end, he asserted that study and action—thinking and doing—had to be in dynamic equilibrium so social education could be organic and whole. Valuing participation as the driving force for social education as an active and non-prescriptive engagement, Lindeman provided this caveat: Both democratic and nondemocratic forces have the potential to drive social action, which means we always need to analyze social action in terms of its rationale and positive or hazardous consequences. As indicated by the plight of sexual and gender minorities in Uganda and other brazen, homophobic nations, this engagement, which Lindeman described as mature learning, is requisite. By mature learning, Lindeman meant that learners ought to turn to social philosophy to examine what informs social action and to consider how particular actions impact groups of citizens and their welfare. For Lindeman, this amounted to socializing power by exposing when efficacy for one group was at the expense of disenfranchisement or disqualification of another.

In applying Lindeman’s process of education to building knowledge and awareness that abet SGM recognition and accommodation, I find a queer critical framework is useful. I have been developing it to link theorizing to pedagogical, social, and cultural practices that emphasize place, positionality, ethics, and justice. These practices are meant to be spacious, political, and open to contextual interpretation. They emphasize hope, possibility, agency, proactive response, integrity (as the nurturing and protection of identities), and community building. As I see it, queer critical theorizing seeks to sustain the emancipatory potential of critical theory and lesbian and gay theory as well as the deconstructive and transformative functions of queer theory to increase theory’s capacity to 1) interrogate the knowledge-culture-language-power nexus and 2) investigate both oppressive and enabling forces impacting the ethical and just treatment of sexual and gender minorities in lifelong learning, constituent adult education, and culture. Tensions resulting from the theoretical interactions are taken as points for complicating and deepening analyses of heteronormativity, the dominant knowledge-culture-language-power nexus, and ways to transgress adversity and transform the life, learning, and work ecologies of sexual and gender minorities. This work starts by recognizing the cumulative impact of the systems, structures, and social forces and responses that influence SGM persons and our degrees of exclusion or inclusion in lifelong learning, constituent adult
education, and culture. It supports an encompassing ecological perspective—one that positions SGM learners in relation to other learners, citizens, cultures, and life, learning, and work environments.

References


