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OUT in Education: A Qualitative Study Examining the Intersectionality and the Lived OUT Experiences of PreK–12 LGBTQ+ Educators

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OUT in Education:

**A Qualitative Study Examining the Intersectionality and the Lived OUT
Experiences of PreK–12 LGBTQ+ Educators**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Landon Wood

University of Northern Iowa

May 2023

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Abstract

The role of a teacher is typically stereotyped as adhering to the status quo and societal norms, but LGBTQ+ educators and their intersecting identities have the power to interrupt the norm and move toward inclusion and advocacy for all, thus allowing the concepts of critical theory and queer theory to intersect. I have titled this merger *queertical theory* to discuss how LGBTQ+ teachers and their intersecting identities/nuanced perceptions and lived experiences can enact change in the field of education. Little research or information exists regarding how LGBTQ+ educators manage, handle, or even perceive intersectionality in their profession.

This qualitative study documented intersectionality and lived experiences of LGBTQ+ educators and their nuanced perceptions of outness in the field of education via ten semistructured interviews with pre-K–12 student teachers, educators, and educational leaders who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Data and results of this phenomenological study were analyzed using Nvivo coding and dramaturgical coding. Key themes and objectives revealed participants understood the importance of LGBTQ+ representation, but the increasingly polarized political climate has caused them to participate in acts of professional covering and to utilize ambiguity rather than fully embracing and enacting *queertical theory* tenets. Participants also reported hopefulness for future LGBTQ+ educators, and cited if teacher preparation programs could ‘Queer the curriculum’ then maybe someday educators could truly be comfortably OUT in education.

KEY WORDS: LGBTQ+ issues, teacher identity, queer theory, critical theory, intersectionality, covering, queertical theory, outness,

This Study by: Landon Wood

Entitled: OUT in Education: A Qualitative Study Examining the intersectionality
and the Lived OUT Experiences of PreK–12 LGBTQ+ Educators

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Degree of Doctor of Education

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the LGBTQ+ community, especially LGBTQ+ educators who serve our educational systems with pride and professionalism day in and day out.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and give my deepest gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. David Schmid, who made this work possible. His guidance and advice carried me through all stages of this project. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Morgan Anderson, and Dr. Shelley Price-Williams, for all their expertise, feedback, encouragement, and for making this research process an enjoyable one.

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Finally, I would like to thank the LGBTQ+ community, especially the educators who participated in this study, for always leading with love and pride. You are the driving force behind this work, and you are changing lives each and every day. Thank you for always being OUT in education and showing the world that love is love.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the year 2019, a cisgender gay male teacher began teaching in a small rural school district as a Spanish teacher for levels one through four at the secondary level. The demographics of this district were overwhelmingly White, and their political affiliations tended to skew conservatively as well. Thus, the individual felt somewhat self-conscious to bring their LGBTQ+ identity in front of the aforementioned audience day in and day out. Much to their surprise, the first few weeks of school came and went without any problems, but then he received this message from a student via social media: "Just thought you should know, people tease you for being gay. Not teachers or anything other students do, they also tease me because they think I'm gay, I'm not completely, but it's HS."

The teacher felt utterly gutted. Not only had their identity as an LGBTQ+ teacher been put under scrutiny and the current hot gossip and talk of the school, by the student community, but it had also implicated a student and as a result, the student had been subjected to harassment and discrimination. The teacher had to make this situation right. Consequently, he put his own dilemmas with the situation aside to help this student cope with the repercussions of this message.

The teacher reached out to their administrator, and they discussed how to best handle this situation. They convened with the student who sent the message and facilitated a discussion about how his actions exemplified allyship. The student had reached out to help a human in need and that was important. The teacher and administrator let the student know they appreciated and valued his support and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community. Due to some of the other

content in the message, they also made a point to ask the student if there was any other way they could help him navigate his own identity; the student denied this support initially, but eventually came back to the teacher for help in establishing his LGBTQ+ identity and he was the only openly gay student in the school at the time.

At the conclusion of the reunion, the teacher's administrator asked him how he felt. He honestly felt speechless. He responded he felt fine, and he would cope, but to be honest, he never truly coped. He went home that night and cried himself to sleep. His LGBTQ+ identity, of which he was extremely proud, had caused trauma for so many. Thus, from that point forward, he concealed his LGBTQ+ identity and tried to adhere to more heteronormative standards of the profession of teaching. He covered and concealed his identity to recoup and move on. He professionally closeted himself to pass and present a more heteronormative image, thereby adhering to the traditional image of the traditional teacher.

But herein lies the problem, he was not a traditional teacher. His various identities made that apparent. His LGBTQ+ affiliation, along with other various intersecting identities, made him stand out, and he was not alone. Jenlink (2019) noted at the center of teaching is the fundamental question of who we are, duplicitously as teachers and people, and that the challenge of negotiating a sexual orientation/gender identity that intersects with a teacher identity, especially given that this intersectionality exists in an environment where the two identities have been pitted against one another.

Mikulec and Miller (2017) noted K–12 educational institutions were conservative in nature and thereby often resisted the inclusion of others. Accordingly, Carlson (2001) found in today's age "as queerness has become more open and 'out' in campus life, homophobia has had a more visible target to attack" (p. 297). Attacks have only intensified as of late. Krishnakumar and Cole (2022) reported "state lawmakers across the U.S. have introduced at least 162 bills targeting LGBTQ Americans this year . . . Most of the bills introduced this year target transgender and nonbinary people, with the emphasis being trans youth" (paras. 1–3). Many bills also aimed to restrict what teachers and educators could say about topics pertaining to LGBTQ+ identities. Krishnakumar and Cole (2022) reported in all of 2021, 16 bills targeted how schools approach LGBTQ+ topics and issues, but in the year 2022, that number jumped to over 40 bills across 18 states (paras. 18–19).

The aforementioned bills are creating environments where LGBTQ+ individuals, students, and teachers alike, will face difficulties because of their LGBTQ+ affiliation. Kitchen and Bellini (2012) recognized how difficulties were not just limited to students by reporting many educators remained closeted during their preservice and educational career, participating in what was known as covering, and felt unsupported by their administrative team if they elected to reveal their LGBTQ+ identity. To further support the rhetoric of isolation, Gorski et al. (2013) found LGBTQ+ teachers have reported feeling isolated or unsupported within their schools, and LGBTQ+ parents and guardians experienced discomfort and feelings of exclusion in interactions with the schools,

thereby limiting their involvement in the education process. Gorski et al. exhibited the importance of understanding the evolution of the LGBTQ+ community, how the community was growing, and pressuring systems to adjust and adapt to be inclusive or resist and advocate for total erasure and demonization. The following section will discern the growing number of individuals identifying as LGBTQ+.

In 2018, the Association of American Universities found, out of a sample of more than 180,000 undergraduate and graduate students, nearly 17% identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, queer, or questioning (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2021). Survey results demonstrated one in six college students was a member of the LGBTQ+ community and would be entering the workforce, including the field of education.

According to We Are Here, a study conducted by the Human Rights Campaign (Powell, 2021), data showed at least 20 million adults in the United States could be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people. Millions more could be another identity more expansive than these four terms. LGBTQ+ residents exist in every U.S. town, city, and zip code. Powell (2021) reported the community was larger than ever before. The population of the United States, in 2021, was estimated to be roughly 331 million individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), which meant roughly 6% of Americans identified as LGBTQ+.

The Washington Post reported 1 in 6 members of Gen Z identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, and as these individuals enter adulthood, the number will only continue to increase (Schmidt, 2021). McShane (2022) found the 2021 record “includes 21% of self-identifying LGBTQ Gen Zers who

have reached adulthood - which Gallup defines as those born between 1997 and 2003 - making them the generational group with the largest proportion of LGBTQ people " (para. 3). With these types of statistics, it is evident LGBTQ+ individuals will continue to enter the teaching profession and do so without any hesitation regarding visibility of their LGBTQ+ identity. McShane (2022) discussed further, stating:

The high rate of LGBTQ self-identification among Gen Zers reflects a combination of increasing cultural acceptance for LGBTQ people and the fact that Gen Zers are increasing in the national population of adults while members of older generations are dying. (para. 3)

Just because older generations are dying does not mean they will be completely eradicated from the profession of education. Thus, it is evident as society advances and GenZers enter the teaching profession, there will be a clash of cultures and preparing educators for this type of dissent is of utmost importance. Breiburd (2021) stated “developing novice Gen Z teachers’ efficacy by understanding their specific traits and expectations will create conditions that help them succeed and stay in teaching—and lead to better generational synergy” (p. 1). Breiburd (2021) also noted the urgency of promoting intergenerational awareness and indicated students would be best supported by districts and school officials who supported Gen Z educators, and their uniquely diverse identities, to become their best via synergy and promotion of mutual respect among all generations.

Therefore, it is important to examine LGBTQ+ educators' nuanced experiences in an educational environment to see how the intersection of their various identities interact with the work they do day in and day out. More importantly, examination of how intersectionality can interact with one's own perception of outness in the professional setting, both positively and negatively, must be considered because keeping the LGBTQ+ community out of education is an impossible feat and an undesirable goal.

Statement of Problem

The next section discusses the problem at hand and establishes a background examining the history of LGBTQ+ educators in schools. This section also examines the current political climate regarding LGBTQ+ themes in education and will finally conclude with presentation of the rationale for this study and accompanying research questions. Key definitions and terminology are also defined.

Problem of Practice

Lodge and Lynch (2002) discussed equality and power in schools, stating: Formal education plays a foundational role in determining the character of the political, economic and sociocultural life of any given society.

Education is the institution in which everyone participates to a greater or lesser degree. It plays a key role not only in distributing cultural heritage, but also in defining the parameters of that heritage, in excluding as well as including; it is a key player in legitimating and ordering sociocultural relations. Schools and other educational institutions are recognised

arbiters of what constitutes the culturally valuable, not only in terms of what is formally taught, but also in terms of the manner in which it is taught, to whom, when and where. (p. 1)

Robinson (2016) found “because certain institutions and relations are valued more within the dominant society, sexual minorities strategically seek advancement and acceptance within these particular institutions” (p. 1). This framework immediately creates an institution where individuals who do not adhere to predetermined values are perceived as othered or different. However, with the advent of the 21st century, there have been many efforts and initiatives to include and support individuals from marginalized identities, including the LGBTQ+ community. Kokozos and Gonzalez (2020) stated, “Recent social and political advancements for LGBTQ people coupled with a commitment to inclusive and affirming practices in K–12 institutions have contributed substantially to LGBTQ normalization” (p. 2). Advancement efforts, however well intended they may be, actually continue to adhere to the hegemonic tradition of power of the educational institution, creating a dichotomy of powerful and powerless. Kokozos and Gonzalez (2020) noted normative approaches to inclusion in school environments create and perpetuate a culture of sustaining the heteronormative and cisnormative practice of assimilating marginalized identities into the mainstream notions of normalcy. Kokozos and Gonzales also noted this process often presents the marginalized community with another test to belong, which makes them feel further ostracized, rather than improving their lives and allowing them to be truly included.

Despite many triumphs and successful legislation for inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community, the world is still overwhelmingly heteronormative. Kozik-Rosabal (2000) stated our society still relies on the assumption individuals were “inherently heterosexual” (p. 369). For U.S. schools, assumed heterosexuality is more than an assumption, it is an expectation. Melillo (2003) stated:

Exclusion from growing considerations for diversity carries not only the burden of “heterosexism” (the presumption heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality), but also inherently assumes “heteronormativity,” completely rejecting the possibility that homosexuality is worthy of any consideration whatsoever, because it is not “normal.” (p. 3)

Expectation of normalcy has even made its way into the LGBTQ+ community, and has in turn, started to create a divide and begun to spurn those who cannot pass or assimilate to larger societal norms. Robinson (2016) reported sexual minorities who can or do assimilate into heteronormative structures receive more rights and are more privileged than those who are unable to assimilate. Robinson (2016) stated, “For example, many transgender and other gender nonconforming individuals are often pushed to the periphery of LGBTQ communities for not conforming to the heteronormative gender roles in society” (p. 1).

Expectation of normalcy is also present in the classroom environment and makes for a hostile and oppressive experience for queer individuals, students, and teachers alike. Wright et al. (2019) found in 2017, a third of LGBTQ+ identifying teachers continued to indicate that school climates were hostile in

nature. They perceived the negative consequences for being out as a teacher and student to be bullying, harassment, and wrongful termination because of their outness. Due to fear of the negative consequences, many are not out.

However, given an increasing number of members of the queer community are coming out, schools are now forced to address issues of equality and safety (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). When LGBTQ+ educators conceal their identities, they may perpetuate a detriment to their own sense of self and identity and may possibly even deny students the opportunity to learn and grow from an individual whose identity is different from their own. Sanlo (1999) affirmed this notion, stating, “An opportunity for all students to learn and understand about diversity in its broadest extent is lost when lesbian, gay people, and events are not included in the curriculum” (p. 102).

Traditionally, schools have been rooted in the total erasure and eradication of the queer community, posing a problem to queer individuals in the institution. Lugg and Moten (2015) stated “queerness in public schools is viewed as contagious” (p. 2) and therefore, is an epidemic that ought to be stomped out. A view of queerness as contagious stems from the history of queer erasure and other instances of epistemic violence that are the founding tenets of educational institutions. Spivak (1988) coined the term epistemic violence and equated it to when authoritative systems inflicted harm on othered subjects via the promotion and perpetuation of dominant ideologies, which often erased and oppressed underrepresented and marginalized groups. Foucault (1990) furthered this notion and discussed how subjugated knowledge further marginalized the othered, as

they were less powerful; isolation caused various identities to be omitted from records, narratives, and ultimately, the dominant curriculum used in the mainstream educational system. Finally, Bagelman (2020) noted, “This line of thinking may lead to a better understanding of why imbalances experienced by students in education (as seen in achievement gaps) may occur” (p. 1358). The next section of this paper dives into the history of the oppressive epistemology of the educational system, to better examine and understand from where imbalances and notions of epistemic violence originated.

Background

The history of public education in this country is filled with examples of K–12 educators who were excluded from employment initially or lost their jobs when it was discovered they were lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. Lugg and Moten (2015) noted during the 1920s, because little information was known about othered sexual identities, institutions criminalized and penalized same sex erotic behavior. Many laws stemmed from the religious disposition of the nation at large because most of the nation identified as protestant Christians.

Criminalization and penalties also began to be seen in contracts and moral codes for educators. As society became more aware of sexuality, specifically homosexuality, clauses in educators’ contracts evolved to include adherence of gender norms. Lugg and Moten (2015) stated, “For those who worked in schools, they better be gender conforming, and if male, married” (p. 12). Lugg and Moten (2015) further stated during the 1920s, because of increasing awareness regarding sexuality, public schools became obligated to

ensure their constituents adhered to the norm and not present queer in any way or form, and if queer presenting, removal was obligatory.

For a while, public sentiment regarding homosexual deviants only lurked in the dark, but Kinsey et al. (1948) found “persons with homosexual histories are to be found in every age group, in every social level, in every conceivable occupation, in cities and farms, and in the most remote areas of the country” (p. 627). Kinsey et al.’s findings completely dismantled the idea homosexuality was rare or unusual and the public and political elite resolved to root out the deviants (Lugg & Moten, 2015). Witch hunts began almost immediately in the late 1950s in the military and known public LGBTQ+ bars and establishments. Hostility quickly extended to public schools and educators serving them. As Benshoff (1997) noted, in the late 1950s, police departments developed public service announcements to be shown at schools warning young boys and parents about the dangers gay men presented to adolescent males. The text equated homosexuality to contagious diseases and demonized homosexuals as pedophilic predators. Waller (1932) even went so far as to relay to the public that an educational system could be catapulted into a ruinous state just by the presence of one LGBTQ+ identifying individual.

The aforementioned sentiments launched society into a frenzy where LGBTQ+ educators became enemy number one. Lugg and Moten (2015) noted during this time, both LGBTQ+ students and educators were seen as an existential threat to “our community” (p. 18) and thus educators were required by law to sign loyalty oaths that they would uphold the U.S. Constitution and uphold

any local, and national laws. The oaths often included clauses about how “public school teachers had to be demonstrably non-queer” (Lugg & Moten, 2015, p.18).

Initiative and ideology of LGBTQ+ individuals as deviant, perverted, and a contagion on society continued well into the 1970s. In 1978, California Proposition 6 (i.e., the Briggs initiative) sought to completely bar homosexuals from the teacher profession in the state’s public schools (Biegel, 2018). With the introduction of sexuality education into educational institutions, administrators, and others who held the power (i.e., school board members, parents) used sexual education classes as a rhetoric to indoctrinate students to adhere to societal gender norms and stereotypes (Lugg & Moten, 2015), thus, perpetuating the heteronormative institution educational systems were founded on and making LGBTQ+ identities, and other various identities, designated enemies of education.

Therefore, it is evident LGBTQ+ educators have historically been a target for discrimination due to their othered and deviant nature, and, consequently, have been at risk for wrongful termination. Unfortunately, the plight is not over. In April of 2022, Anthony (2022) reported a gay substitute teacher from Ohio was fired for handing out pride bracelets to students. Anthony stated the superintendent claimed the teacher in question was in violation of the district’s policies by violating a clause pertaining to personal beliefs.

Mollenbeck (2021) reported an openly gay educator in Iowa was placed on administrative leave for displaying a pride flag on a PowerPoint presentation during an open house event and briefly discussing his bisexual identity. McNab

(2021) also reported on this instance and noted the individual came out to help establish his reputation as an ally and safe space where all individuals could come in times of need. Many students from this school expressed how having a publicly out teacher would have positively impacted their own identity journeys and were now questioning whether their school community was safe for anyone who came out, faculty and students alike. The teacher inevitably resigned and heteronormative standards prevailed at the end of the day, silencing another loud and proud LGBTQ+ voice.

Considering the realities of being out, K–12 educators are still confronted with a combination of subtle pressure and admonition that together limit their ability to be open about who they are. Machado (2014) reported on the plight of being a gay teacher and one respondent had the following to say about their LGBTQ+ identity, “There is always the fear that if you were to share this [LGBTQ+ identity], it could color how staff and administration view your performance, skew their evaluations of you, or otherwise influence whether you stay hired or not” (para. 10). Public school educators may have an emergent right to be out under the law, but in day-to-day education and, particularly in certain communities, that right may be severely curtailed (Biegel, 2018).

The pressures and fears of being out are not unique to the United States, but are also noted internationally, which makes this issue global in nature. Donnelly (2021) reported in Ireland, there were roughly 28,000 primary school teachers serving the nation of which 4,000 were uncomfortable revealing their LGBTQ+ identities in their classroom and work environment. With the current

political climate in the United States, it is apparent similar apprehension exists among LGBTQ+ educators. The following section addresses the political climate of the United States and examines the various bills and legislations being presented targeting the LGBTQ+ community, students, and teachers.

Current Political Context

As of April 2022, more than 18 states had introduced bills that targeted and discriminated against LGBTQ+ U.S. residents (ACLU, 2023). In the state of Iowa, House File 2201 was introduced on January 20, 2022. The cover page of the bill stated it was “A bill for An Act relating to sexual orientation or gender identity instruction or related materials provided by school districts to pupils” (Iowa Legislature, 2022, p. 1). House File 2201, along with the Don’t Say Gay bill out of Florida (Parental Rights in Education, 2022), another bill aimed at limiting LGBTQ+ content from being taught in K–3 schools, were only two examples of many attempts to oppress, silence, and inevitably, erase LGBTQ+ identities from the field of education. Although more states every year work to pass laws to protect LGBTQ people, state legislatures continue to advance bills targeting transgender people, limiting local protections, and allowing the use of religion to discriminate (ACLU, 2023). LGBTQ+ educators can help limit and put an end to discriminatory legislation by empowering their deficit lens and LGBTQ+ identity, thereby disempowering a dominant ideology: heteronormativity.

Rationale

Sosa-Provencio et al. (2018) delved deep into the disempowerment of dominant ideologies and stated: “We must ‘disempower dominant ideologies’ so

that we can ‘celebrate diversity and inclusion’ so that ‘students can look outside themselves for knowledge’” (p. 5). However, grounds for such inclusion, and, as some might term it, social justice, have sparked a debate in the educational community. Many argue the notion of inclusion and social justice is not actually enacted for the othered or marginalized, but rather as a permissible act of allowance.

Shriberg and Baker (2019) supported the notion of inclusion and social justice with the following definition of *procedural justice*. Shriberg and Baker noted it “relates to how decisions are made, who makes these decisions, and how people and groups of people treat one another” (p. 89). In fact, Shriberg and Baker stated perceived employs of procedural justice actually aligned more appropriately with procedural injustices because U.S. schools often aligned with elements of power and privilege and who held that power and privilege. Shriberg and Baker (2019) furthered this notion by offering an exemplar: “For example, neglecting to address homophobic bullying is a violation of procedural justice whereas creating and implementing formal policies toward schools being safe spaces for students who are LGBTQ is a positive example of procedural justice” (p. 90).

Biddanda et al. (2018) also found power disparities will invariably present themselves, and as a causation, the privileged in power (i.e., heteronormative cisgender males) may use their capacity at the top of the hierarchy of power wantonly or mistakenly as a vehicle to further marginalize and victimize underrepresented or othered communities. However, a true social justice

approach is cognizant of maltreatments and works with the marginalized community to advance rectification, via interpersonal, educational, and/or advocacy efforts, to address and ultimately change injustices that have stemmed from the heteronormative framework of policy making and power distribution.

For this dissertation, heteronormativity is the dominant ideology and LGBTQ+ individuals straying from the norm are socially unacceptable. Nelson (2008) noted educators were working in environments that promoted heteronormativity or centralized heterosexuality as the norm. The 2013 GLSEN (Kosciw et al., 2014) survey supported Nelson's (2008) discussion and reported 56% of LGBTQ+ youth experienced schools that were unwelcoming and unsafe for the majority of LGBTQ+ students [and educators]. However, if LGBTQ+ individuals center their identity and unlearn dominant ideologies in everything they do, it could cause the dominant ideology to fall, allowing a new diverse perspective to be freed from oppression. Duran and Jones (2020) supported individuals centering their identity, stating that (un)learning leads to developing a meaning-making capacity in relation to the oppressive system. Simply stated, this means that by acknowledging how external influences prompted marginalized individuals to see their identities from a dominant lens, these individuals could now expand their cognitive frames so that they did not accept the external beliefs.

Sosa-Provencio et al. (2018) believed it critical that educators' experiences were examined in the K–12 setting. Only through analysis of minority identity lenses and how they intersect can learning and growth occur.

This study connects to Sosa-Provencio et al.'s (2018) work as they gauged how the intersectionality of teacher and a member of the LGBTQ+ community may have caused some individuals to cover up their identities in the professional setting, or conversely empower and take pride in their identity, by making this intersection the center of their instruction so all stakeholders could learn and grow from their experiences.

The concepts of intersectionality, covering, and the merger of queer and critical theory (queertical theory) must be explored to better understand various experiences faced by LGBTQ+ educators and how they impact their perception of their own outness in their respected profession. If an LGBTQ+ identity is covered or hidden, suppression and concealment of identity may exacerbate feelings of exclusion and social belonging, which can in turn impact self-efficacy and lead to poor work performance (Henning et al., 2019).

Research Questions

Information discussed in the previous section leads to the purpose of this paper. The current study examined the nuanced experiences of LGBTQ+ teachers and educational leaders in public K–12 settings and asks: To what extent are educators out in education and what are their lived experiences? The dearth of research available within this field makes these questions and this study all the more valuable.

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the nuanced perceptions of LGBTQ+ educators with intersecting identities in education?

- 2) What are LGBTQ+ educators' nuanced perceptions of outness?
- 3) To what extent do LGBTQ+ educators choose or not choose to participate in the act of covering?
- 4) What are teachers' experiences with disempowering dominant ideologies? How are they or are they not interrupting heteronormative standards? And why?

Key Terms and Definitions

Covering - to downplay aspects of identity that make us different from mainstream society (Catalyst, 2014; Yoshino, 2002).

Heteronormativity - belief that heterosexuality, predicated on the gender binary, is the default, preferred, or normal mode of sexual orientation (University of Illinois, 2022, para. 5).

Intersectionality - the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1989).

LGBTQ+ - An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer with a + sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community (Human Rights Campaign, 2022).

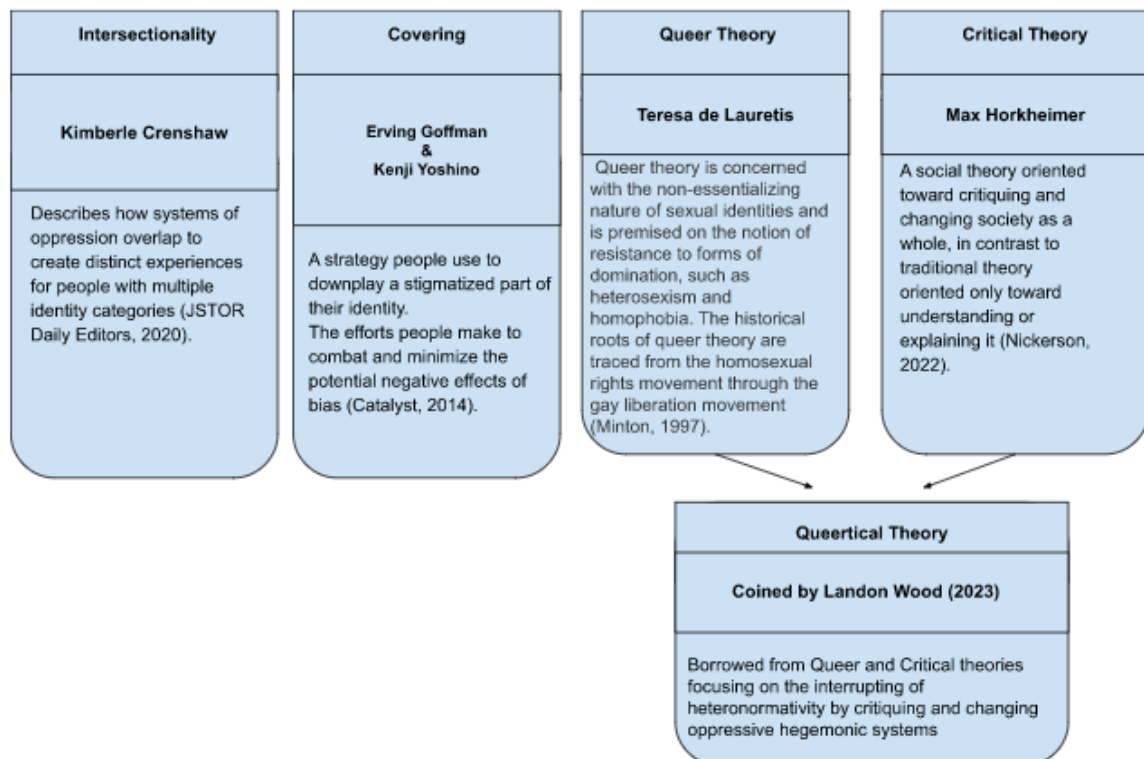
Outness - The choice to disclose gender history, sexual orientation, or gender identity on a need to know or want them to know basis (Office for Victims of Crime, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

This study will merge theories of intersectionality, covering, and a mingling of queer theory and critical theory, a term I am coining queertical theory, to determine perceptions of outness and other lived experiences of LGBTQ+ educators. However, it is important to note many other theories will intertwine within the aforementioned framework, to shape and mold the research process. Figure 1 exhibits the central theories to be utilized, offers a brief explanation of the theory, and notes key theorist(s).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Overview



Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theory and concept, first brought about by Crenshaw (1989), who defined intersectionality as a lens through which power was perceived, one where the observer could see where power comes and collides. Intersectionality entails examining the origin of power and how it collides, interacts, and intersects with various aspects of society. It is not merely tied to a race problem but can also be present when considering gender and the LGBTQ+ community (Columbia Law School, 2017).

Tefera et al. (2018) stated, “Engaging with intersectionality in research demands scholarship be oriented toward accounting for ways race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, citizenship, ability, and age, among other things, shape the structural dynamics of power and inequality in social spaces and individual identities” (p. viii). Because intersectionality was originally understood as a concept utilized to analyze experiences of women of color, many contend it is inappropriate to utilize it with other groups falling outside of its original focus area (Tefera et al., 2018). Tefera et al. stated the fact it originated to analyze marginalization of Black women should not be seen as a limitation, because it provided a deliberate framework for understanding different ways social dynamics influenced and impacted people in and across groupings.

In the institution of education, intersectionality must be enacted to allow for aspects of all identities to be holistically affirmed. Petersen (2006) noted: “We all possess socially constructed identities that influence our experiences. Some of us may even find ourselves within multiple discourses that interweave and

coincide with one another” (p. 2). Therefore, for an LGBTQ+ educator, their intersectionality exists in that they are: an educator and a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Both identities come with multifaceted constructs that help to define what it means to belong to the said identity.

Feagin and Ducey (2017) presented an alternative to intersectionality and argued many systems of institutions did not intersect, but rather, functioned in a helix-like fashion, where various features were not linear nor intersecting but rather nonlinear, interlocking, codetermining, and reproducing. Systems shape and mold the identities of individuals and thus, the various identities are tendril or helix like due to the major subsystems of sexist, classist, and racist acts of oppression coreproduced by the larger prevailing dominant system, heteronormativity. Thus, complex intersectionality and coreproductions are where an identity crisis and social inequality in a professional educational setting for LGBTQ+ individuals take root.

Moreau et al. (2019) explained how intersectionality of being Latinx and LGBTQ+ swayed engagement in the 2016 political election because one or more portions of their identity became politicized. However, Moreau et al. mentioned both identities did not become politicized in identical ways and, in fact, found LGBTQ+ Latinx respondents exhibited more political participation than non-LGBTQ+ Latinx counterparts. The question remains whether the same can be said for LGBTQ+ educators in the current political climate. It is still to be determined whether they are standing out loud and proud in their profession and embracing their intersectionality or are they adhering to the heteronormative

foundation of education by means of professional covering. This study sought to examine these questions as they related to intersectionality among LGBTQ+ educators.

Covering

The term and concept of covering comes from sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) and the concept was further expanded upon and defined by legal scholar Kenji Yoshino (2002) to describe the act of covering various portions of one's identity to conform or fit in more with the majority population. Yoshino (2002) stated: "Covering means the underlying identity is neither altered nor hidden, but is downplayed. Covering occurs when a lesbian both is, and says she is, a lesbian, but otherwise makes it easy for others to disattend her orientation" (p. 4). The concept of downplaying an identity is also known as passing.

An educator may often participate in covering or passing. When doing so, they do not exclude or delete their identity, but rather conceal it and hide it away from colleagues, students, and larger community audiences. MacCharles (2020) studied how the covering process presented itself within the sports workplace. MacCharles used the theory of covering to examine three areas of covering: (a) the application process, (b) the hiring process, and (c) experiences during full-time employment. It is interesting to note that areas one and three of the study centered on covering experiences of minority individuals and that area two centered on the perceptions hiring committees had of covering processes. MacCharles found covering involved a constant, conscious effort on the part of marginalized individuals, which could come at a steep personal cost, while also

giving them sought after rewards. Finally, marginalized individuals are beginning to see their stigmatized identities as strengths, particularly in traditionally homogeneous environments, such as sporting events that need to be more intentional about their diversity and inclusion (MacCharles, 2020).

There is a consideration of why people feel the need to cover, People and groups cover to feel included in their work environments. They frequently yearn to fit in with social norms and ultimately wish to avoid potential social stigma and inequities associated with their minoritized identity. Anderson (2012) noted an extreme lack of research existing around relationships between sports, masculinities, and homosexuality before the 1980s, but noted this could be attributed to the fact many gay athletes had not yet begun to emerge from their closets, nor did they exist openly within the industry. Athletes of the time remained hidden due to assumed homophobic discourse of the industry. Closeted athletes, paired alongside their teammates, vocalized opposition to homosexuality and societal norms regarding sexuality of the time, which led athletes to cover or pass as heterosexual or the norm.

Samuel and Glazzard (2019) found recent research demonstrated 40% of teachers identifying as LGBTQ+ did not feel included, and the same proportion had experienced harassment, discrimination, or prejudice because of their identification. Therefore, the act of covering or passing minimizes the difference between the person covering and the majority heteronormative population at large (Catalyst, 2014).

Queer Theory + Critical Theory → Queertical Theory

Queer theory is both difficult to define and pinpoint its very first use academically because it stems from many critical and cultural contexts, including feminism, poststructuralist theory, radical movements of people of color, the gay and lesbian movements, and AIDS activism. However, the key component is the idea of heteronormativity, defined as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (University of Illinois, 2022, para. 5).

Feagin and Ducey (2017) noted that since the 1960s, White [cisgender heteronormative] identities have been juxtaposed against notions of superiority and Black/Brown, and othered nonheteronormative identities have, in contrast, been viewed as inferior. Such language is evident when discussing the difference between public and private educational systems and adheres to the ideologies of neoliberalism, which in an educational setting is based on how individualism is favored over the recognition of structural inequality (Woolley, 2017). Deep seeded notions of pro-Whiteness and heteronormativity sustains a negative evaluation of marginalized and oppressed groups in institutions and perpetuates neoliberal heteronormativity in schools and institutions.

There are many elements that converge and contribute to heteronormative standards and status quo, including Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Urbinati (1998) defined hegemony using Gramsci's ideologies as “subordination of individuals and groups by which they are deprived of their individuality, power,

and self-reliance. It depicts actual conditions and incorporates a representation of an individual as a powerless being with an unpredictable future” (para. 1).

Therefore, hegemony is one of the cornerstones of heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity is not a local perspective or norm but is a worldview that promotes heterosexuality as normal and/or the preferred sexual orientation.

Heteronormativity is reinforced in society through the institutions of marriage, taxes, employment, and adoption rights, among many others, including educational institutions of all types (University of Illinois, 2022).

Pascoe (2011) argued school routines and rituals, curriculum, methodologies, rules, and other protocols and procedures inform heterosexualized processes from early childhood years all the way through secondary and even postsecondary education. Pascoe also found through school rituals, pedagogical practices, and disciplinary approaches, the school in their study set up formal and informal sexualized practices that reflected prescribed definitions of masculinity and femininity as opposite, complementary, unequal, and, ultimately, heterosexual.

Building on Pascoe’s (2011) insight, Trudell (1993) found schools often participated in informal sexuality curriculum or the way sexuality was constructed at the level of the institution through disciplinary practices, student teacher relationships, and school events. Therefore, schools have perpetuated the heteronormative concept via enactment of various routines, rituals, rules, relationships, and roles. Continuation of heteronormativity can be dangerous for students and educators alike who are nonnormatively identified.

In fact, Trudell (1993) stated in their practical steps section:

Sexuality is constructed at the level of the institution through disciplinary practices, student teacher relationships, and school events . . . these laws need to include gender expression, as alternative gender practices trigger much of the homophobic or sexually based teasing in adolescence. As of the writing of this book, twenty states have no provisions protecting gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or other non-normatively gendered students in school. (p. 120)

Thus, it is evident change is necessary to keep all constituents of educational institutions safe. Morland and Willox (2005) noted “queer theory likes to disrupt conventional parameters of embodiment” (p. 4) and furthered this point by finding “queer comes into being through the turbulent conjunction of theory and politics” (p. 5). Discussion of queer in this way brings about ideas of deconstruction.

Sullivan (2003) noted deconstruction works by chipping away at the foundation of Western metaphysics (i.e., a historically and culturally specific system of meaning-making). This process undermines the notion of polarized essences. It is important to note that deconstruction is not destruction; it does not involve the annihilation and substitution of the erroneous with the truth. More simply put, deconstruction of the hierarchized binary would not consist of eradicating the concepts all together. A deconstructive approach would highlight the instability of the binary and enable analysis of the culturally and historically ways in which the binary has developed and the effects it has produced.

Pinar (2003) stated a deconstructionist queer theory approach enabled the researcher to understand the ongoing democratization of society cannot continue without a restructuring, or deconstruction, of hegemonic, heteronormative, White male subjectivity. Pinar's (2003) findings were similar to other researchers (Bersani, 1995; Boyarin, 1997; Savran, 1998; Silverman, 1992). Therefore, to interrupt heteronormative standards, male centered hegemonic White subjectivity must be brought to a ruin (Pinar, 2003).

One way to accomplish a lessening of male centered hegemonic White subjectivity is through the central tenets of critical theory. Critical theory is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole (Crossman, 2019). It differs from traditional theory, which focuses only on understanding or explaining society. Critical theory aims to dig beneath the surface of social life and uncover assumptions that keep human beings from a full and true understanding of how the world works.

The origins of critical theory stem from the work of Horkheimer (1972) and have been framed in the practical purpose of seeking emancipating humans and to create a world which satisfies human needs and powers. Horkheimer (1972) discussed critical theory, stating:

critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation. (p. 244)

Other key figures of critical theory include Adorno, Gramsci, Benjamin, Fromm, and Marcuse, and many of the guiding tenets and principles of their work focuses on these same concepts. However, it is important to note opponents of critical theory argue that this epistemology employs an alternative metaphysical approach which promotes a particular lens or perspective, and ultimately, political ideations (Sim, 2013). Proponents of critical theory often counter with the idea that no one criticism or critique of society can be free of political ideation or perspectives or be considered as value free.

It is obvious critical theory, in principle, aims at stating what is wrong with the current oppressive social reality and identifies key actors who can change it while still providing concise normative guidance and attainable practical goals for the emancipation of society (Govender, 2020). Many critical theorists have stressed the importance of agency by individuals and organizations to truly enact revolutionary social change (Alway, 1995). However, Marcuse recognized the existence of a nonoppositional society that was one dimensional in nature. Sim (2013) quoted Marcuse, stating, “the bulk of the population can see no real reason to rebel against a system which appears to meet their material needs and provide a more than reasonable democratic sense of personal security” (p. 43). Marcuse’s quotation makes sense as the bulk of society is not a member of an othered or marginalized community, adheres to the status quo of heteronormative or hegemonic standards and thus benefits from the system, they are not squashed under the pressures of the hegemonic system, and they

flourish and relish in the privilege afforded to them as a majority member of the heteronormative institution.

Freire and Ramos's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2014) offered insight into the oppressive nature of the heteronormative institution of education at large and stated:

Revolutionary praxis must stand opposed to the praxis of the dominant elites, for they are by nature antithetical. Revolutionary praxis cannot tolerate an absurd dichotomy in which the praxis of the people is merely that of following the leaders' decisions—a dichotomy reflecting the prescriptive methods of the dominant elites. Revolutionary praxis is a unity, and the leaders cannot treat the oppressed as their possession. (p. 126)

Freire and Ramos (2014) further noted dialogic education and true agency were necessary for any revolution to truly take root and that only when one worked with the oppressed, not for the oppressed, could one be free and liberate the oppressed, stating:

We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other. (p. 133)

Therefore, merger of queer theory and critical theory will be crucial to this study. For this study, consolidation of the two theories will be known as queertical theory. Participants of this study will reflect upon how heteronormativity (i.e.,

queer theory) impacts their merging identities (i.e., intersectionality), and their perception of outness (i.e., covering) in the field of education. For educators choosing not to cover or hide their intersecting identities, they immediately interrupt heteronormativity and allow for examination of the social problem of LGBTQ+ identity in education. Furthermore, when educators engage in dialogic conversations about their identities, they can hopefully put queertical theory tenets at the forefront of the classroom and, ultimately, allow researchers a glimpse into the educator's perception of how dialogues have manifested not only their classroom, but also themselves as individuals.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Teachers' intersecting identities exist, yet there is not a substantial line of research examining the way in which teachers perceive their given identities. At the time of this study, the small amount of conducted research has largely focused on experiences of LGBTQ+ identifying in-service teachers (Connell, 2015; Jennings, 1983; Meyer et al., 2015). The purpose of this literature review is to merge theories presented in the conceptual framework and take a deeper dive into what teachers from the LGBTQ+ community experience during their tenure as an educator.

The literature summarized in this section begins with examining heteronormativity in schools and society at large. The review will then move on to discuss why LGBTQ+ educators, with their individual nuanced perceptions of outness, may feel unsafe working in prescribed heteronormative environments, and will conclude with an examination of literature regarding how the merging of key components from queer theory and critical theory can intertwine to create queertical theory, the act of interrupting heteronormativity to critique and change society.

The following sections will present information on how intersectionality can impact a teacher's perception of outness in the workplace that adheres to a broader landscape of heteronormative social structures and policies, which guide and inform school leaders. Perceptions may lead to participating in the act of covering, especially given the current political context of LGBTQ+ themes in education, or possibly the act of enacting queertical theory, where the educator

uses and affirms their identity within the classroom to disempower dominant ideologies and empower and bolster deficit lenses.

Critical Theory: Heteronormativity in Schools

McEntarfer (2016) defined heteronormativity as “the systematic process of privilege toward heterosexuals, whereby heterosexuality is considered normal and ideal” (p. 52). McEntarfer discussed heteronormativity as deeply rooted within our society. Media, film, literature, and even various societal systems of education are riddled with standards and norms of heterosexuality. In fact, the Hollywood Production Code, in effect from 1930 to 1968, and the Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters, used from 1952 to 1983, both indirectly prohibited depictions of homosexuality (Raley & Lucas, 2006). Norms and erasures demonstrate society is deeply entrenched in the idea men should be attracted to women, and vice versa, and anything straying from this norm is non idyllic (McEntarfer, 2016).

Cook (2018) examined the importance of LGBTQ+ representation on television and determined it to be twofold. First, exposure to LGBTQ+ characters through the media could affect how the general, mostly straight, population viewed the LGBT community and related public policy issues. Second, media representation could have a positive effect on members of the LGBT community, especially among adolescents. Calzo and Ward (2009) stated “the pattern of correlations presents strong evidence of mainstreaming effect of media use on [attitudes of acceptance towards homosexuality]” (p. 293). Therefore, the same notions of representation can apply to educators serving students in the

heteronormative school systems of today. Representation of their LGBTQ+ affiliation, or outness, can potentially have a large impact on students' beliefs and values toward LGBTQ+ individuals. Toledo and Maher (2021) found students were best served by a diverse teaching force; teachers from historically disenfranchised groups offered positive role models for all students and improved academic and school outcomes for all students, but especially for students who were from historically disenfranchised groups.

The problem lies in the fact schools adhere to heteronormative values and, like society, are hesitant to embrace anything straying from the status quo. In many contexts in the United States, K–12 schools are still sources of discrimination, harassment, and fear for LGBTQ+ identifying teachers and students. Schools are places that, at times, reinforce issues of sexism and heterosexism (Butler, 1990; GLSEN, 2018; Kahn & Gorski, 2016; Pinar, 2003).

Schools are profoundly founded in systematic heteronormativism. McEntarfer (2016) noted familial units were often referred to as being strictly nuclear or consisting of only moms and dads when discussing students' families. The question remains as to whether this was still the norm. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in *Troxel v. Granville*, (2000), "[t]he demographic changes of the past century make it difficult to speak of an average American family" (para. 1). However, society continues to push the narrative of the traditional American family. Joslin (2009) noted not only were many more people now living in family structures other than marriage, but there was also increasing diversity in what marital families looked like.

Despite an evolution in what was considered normal family dynamics, the norm is to continue engaging in discourse about young adolescent boys pining after girls. Even dress code procedures and school policies are based in heterosexual norms, where girls' clothing choices are regulated as they may be too distracting for their male counterparts (Edwards & Marshall, 2020). A California gym teacher reportedly told middle school parents during a presentation that "girls were not permitted to wear yoga pants or leggings, because it might cause the boys to spring an erection" (Pearlman, 2016, p. 1).

It is difficult to determine whether a school dress code or uniform policy rooted in heteronormativity could increase student achievement. Viadero (2005) cited Brunnsma's (2004) work and found uniform policies did not curb violence or behavioral problems in schools. Uniform policies did not cultivate student self-esteem and motivation. Uniform policies did not balance social status differences that often separated students, and they did not improve academic achievement. In fact, uniforms may even be associated with a small detrimental effect on achievement in reading (Brunnsma, 2004).

The problem with a standardized and hegemonic belief system is the heteronormative status quo immediately positions anyone dissenting from the norm as abnormal or not ideal (McEntarfer, 2016). Althusser (2020) noted the purpose of school was for children to learn good behavior, rules of morality, civic duty, professional conscience, and the ability to reproduce and submit to the rules of the established order of society. Therefore, in essence, Althusser found schools taught know-how and the ability to be subject to the ruling ideology.

Gramsci (as cited in Forgacs, 1988) noted “everybody is cultured” (p. 53) but noted this culture did not stem from the teacher, but from the student as they navigated their way through the educational system learning toward self-knowledge, self-mastery, and eventually, liberation from hegemonic standards.

If the ideas of Horkheimer (1972) are viewed, it must be remembered to be truly liberated, an individual must participate in an analysis of the institution at large. An individual must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation. But if institutions have been established to reproduce and to adhere to the rules (Gramsci as cited in Forgacs, 1988), then it is difficult to understand how an individual could ever truly be able to liberate themselves if they are expected to adhere to the hegemonic and heteronormative standards at large. Thus, it is evident schools are deeply rooted in heteronormative standards (McEntarfer, 2016).

Kjaran (2017) further supported McEntarfer’s (2016) notion that schools were deeply founded in systematic heteronormativism by offering the following statements regarding the categorization of individuals:

These discourses and norms then become institutionalized, interwoven into the processes and culture of institutions, such as schools, having the effects of producing docile bodies, who internalize the dominant discourse and thus act and behave accordingly. For sexual and gender minorities, the regime of heteronormativity is still strongly felt within schools, both with

respect to the official curriculum but also within the informal school culture hidden curriculum. (p. 97)

Kjaran's (2017) research further noted heteronormativity involved categorizing people into very distinctive categories of gender and sexualities. Robinson (2016) furthered Kjaran's research, and when Robinson examined heteronormativity, noted under dominant heteronormative standards, heterosexuality and homosexuality were binary opposites. Gender roles of masculine men and feminine women are naturalized, and sexual relations between complementary gender roles should be consummated in the private sphere.

Foucault (1990) stated "if sex is repressed, that is condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of deliberate transgression" (p. 6). Therefore, anyone straying from prescribed norms are viewed as abnormal or nonidyllic and are rebel citizens. Robinson (2016) described the political strategy of homonormativity as a method of claiming a stake for fundamental rights by asserting sexually minoritized individuals were just like their heterosexual counterparts, apart from their same sex attraction. Because certain institutions are valued more in society at large, sexual minorities must seek validation and acceptance to adhere to the prescribed dominant ideology or norm.

The prescribed idea of abnormality and nonidyllic norms immediately bring about risks for any student or staff member who identifies as LGBTQ+. Pressures of heteronormativity emerge as particularly salient in adolescence. Prior studies have shown middle and high school students are at risk for victimization at

school when they do not conform to norms regarding gender (Aspenlieder et al., 2009; Wyss, 2004) or sexuality (D'Augelli et al., 2006).

Because LGBTQ+ individuals stand out in a world where they are expected to fit in and conform, they become the target of hate, discrimination, harassment, and physical attacks. Nearly 24% of youth experience school victimization at least once and nearly 9% experience weekly victimization (Nansel et al., 2001). Victimization stems from the notion that heteronormative school systems often mandate the erasure and silencing of LGBTQ+ identities. Lugg and Moten (2015) stated for nearly 100 years, schools in the United States have been concerned with the removal of queer identity. Queer adults, youth, or any information that could remotely be perceived as queer have all faced eradication, erasure, and/or silence.

Lugg and Moten (2015) furthered the sentiment of stigmatization and total erasure and silence by comparing experiences of women in the workspace to that of LGBTQ+ educators and students within schools. Lugg and Moten suggested if women were not safe, they would be put at risk. Thus, using the food chain argument, Lugg and Moten posited if LGBTQ+ educators were not safe in the workplace, students occupying that same space were also at risk of erasure, eradication, and silence.

Toomey et al. (2012) noted by acknowledging the presence of gender nonconforming and LGBTQ+ students and enacting and enforcing policies and practices designed to provide a safe place for them, harassment could be lessened. In schools incorporating safe space policies and practices, students

who challenge gender and sexuality norms may experience less harassment at school. Thus, schools are important sites for understanding heteronormativity and its enactments and implications in the lives of young people. A similar idea and concept can be employed to examine the lives of LGBTQ+ affiliating educators as well.

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2018), who have a mission of making sure LGBTQ+ students can learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment, annually send out a school climate survey, which, although not based on random sampling, represents perceptions of more than 6,000 students in grades 6 through 12 (mostly LGBT-identifying) from across the country. The GLSEN survey found anti-LGBTQ language and harassment included the following five key statistics listed below:

- Nine out of 10 students that GLSEN surveyed indicated that, at school, they heard the term “that’s so gay” or a variant of it either “frequently” or “often.”
- Over 70% noted that they heard other homophobic language (e.g., faggot, dyke, homo) either “frequently” or “often” at school.
- Forty-four percent stated most of their peers used homophobic language.
- Collectively, over 80% said that they were “extremely” (25%), “pretty much” (30%), or “a little” (29%) bothered or distressed as a result of hearing words such as “gay” or “queer” used in a derogatory way.

- Sixty-eight percent indicated they had been verbally harassed at school either “frequently,” “often,” or “sometimes” in the past year, and 29% indicated they had been physically harassed. (Sadowski, 2010, para. 5)

The same food chain argumentation postulated by Lugg and Moten (2015) was supported by work from Russell et al. (2001), who stated, “When teachers are perceived as supportive, students are less likely to experience school problems” (p. 124).

Queer Theory

To fully grasp the lived-out experiences of LGBTQ+ educators, an examination of queer theory is necessary. This portion of the literature review will define the theory and look at literature that explores ways in which LGBTQ+ educators perceive their LGBTQ+ identity personally and professionally and will examine the presence their identity may have in the classroom environment.

For this study, queer theory was defined as “against the normal” or “normalising” (Spargo, 1999, p. 8). Drawing on many of the key ideas offered by Foucault (1990), Spargo (1999) went on to state that “queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but rather a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender, and sexual desire” (p. 9)

The most important aspect of queer theory, as it pertains to this particular study, is the analyses of the social and political power relations of sexuality and the critiques of the sex gendered system (Spargo, 1999) because LGBTQ+

identities are juxtaposed against hegemonic cisgender heteronormative identities and systems founded in heteronormativity. Butler (2016) cited Foucault's (1990) notion of juridical systems of power, a power that aims to prevent a certain type of action through legal or social sanctions, to explain how these very powers come to produce the subjects they represent. Butler (2016) observed:

Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms—that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even “protection” of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures. (p. 3)

In the context of this study, the category of LGBTQ+ individuals, as it is produced by the juridical powers, are also restrained by the very powers that have created them. And thus, emancipation must be sought out from the creators themselves. Butler (2016) supported this notion as it related to feminism and observed women are regarded as vulnerable and therefore need protected status; therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the state or other paternal powers to provide protection. This model petitions paternal authority for protection and affirms that the inequality of power that situates women in a powerless position. Thus, it is of utmost importance the heteronormative nature of school systems is examined as it relates to the presence, or lack thereof, of educators holding LGBTQ+ affiliated identities.

Jenlink (2019) stated teachers are frequently afraid to discuss their identities in an educational setting, but it is these very identities that influence what to teach and how to go about teaching it. Therefore, for many educators with marginalized and intersecting identities the opportunities and realities of having these identities affirmed within the classroom are bleak.

Thus, merely holding an LGBTQ+ teacher identity does not impact or impede the idea of heteronormativity and is in turn not a true enactment of queer theory; there are many other variables that must be enacted to interrupt heteronormativity. Haddad (2019) found when gay teachers entered a school building with years of identity development in tow, their experiences in teacher preparation, other fields of study, life experience, family upbringing, and sociocultural positionality all situated them to have unique orientations and entry points for their gay teacher identity to be fully negotiated. Therefore, an understanding everyone comes into the gay teacher identity model based on these experiences is vital.

Haddad (2019) also noted when centering LGBTQ+ themes and tenets in curriculum, leaders must be conscious of the difference between planning programming for LGBTQ+ teachers and students versus planning programming about LGBTQ+ teachers and students. Both are extremely needed in schools and put schools on the pathway to interrupting heteronormativity, but they serve different functions and must be balanced. Educators and administrators need to be much more intentional about the undermining and interruption of heteronormativity to allow for true equity and inclusion.

Queer theorists have clarified queer is not an identity, but an attitude, and people construct multiple and shifting identities throughout their lifetimes (Morris, 2000). Therefore, when one is self-identifying as queer or a member of the LGBTQ+ community, they are automatically putting the status quo prescriptions of normalcy and idyllic standards into question and challenging the binary (Jackson, 2009).

According to queer theorists, identity is both socially constructed by people's experiences: past, present, and future. Therefore, their identity is in a constant state of motion further dissenting from the heteronormative standards of gender and sexuality. Thus, the definition of the term queer is in a constant state of negotiation, embracing fluidity and the unknown (Fox, 2007).

Queer Theory and Connections to Education

The definition of queer theory, when merged with critical theory, is applicable and relevant to the field of education. The complexity of identities is evident in students being educated in K–12 classrooms and teachers leading this educational endeavor. Davis and Sumara (2000) co-opted the term *drag*, which is commonly used to reference men dressing as women to understand that teachers often perform in *teacher drag* in our professional setting. Teacher drag became a signifier for the robing and disrobing necessary to conceal an othered identity.

When someone disrobes from their teacher drag and lets their true identities shine through, students and other educators take notice. In their study of LGBTQ+ educators, Jackson (2009) discussed, in great detail, a student's

response to the educator's choice to professionally come out. The student stated the following: "You just changed my freshman year in college. I can't even wait to go and meet people I don't know now. The possibilities are totally endless. If you're gay, who knows what anybody else is" (Jackson, 2009, p. 57).

According to queer theory, the emergence of LGBTQ+ identity in the classroom has opened a zone of possibilities for all students. Edelman (1994) noted this "zone of possibilities" (p. 114) allowed for embodiment of a subject to be experienced otherwise or in a new light. The zone of possibilities allows people to open their minds to challenge the idyllic norms of society.

Intersectionality

When minds begin to open and people start noticing an educator's intersecting identities and the unique experiences and perspectives that accompany these identities, they also begin to make and form their own notions and experiences they have with the individual holding those identities. Haddad (2019) further supported this and noted an emergent theme in literature regarding LGBTQ+ educators, living a duplicitous life. Teachers put forth effort to keep their personal and professional lives separate. Efforts appear to lessen as the teachers come out in their professional settings. Through examination of teacher experiences, there is emphasis placed on relief, authenticity, and richness of the teachers, experiences with the curriculum, and experiences with their students because of revealing their LGBTQ+ identity in the educational setting.

It is important educators engaged in the coming out process, or the queering of curriculum and classrooms, challenge stereotypes the heteronormative institution has proclaimed embodies such identities (Jackson, 2009). Mattheis et al. (2021) explained “as an analytic tool, queer theory includes a focus on identifying and disrupting normative forces, and challenging associated assumptions of what is ‘normal’” (p. 7). Pedagogically, queer theory and queering of curriculum offers a way for all students to interrogate how society reinforces heteronormativity, offering “a chance to critically examine the ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed, narrated, and deployed in the creation of identities, modes of being, and community” (Alexander, 2005, p. 373).

Rosiek et al. (2017) found “teacher education curriculum that prepares students to be advocates for gender justice and LGBTQ students and families is a necessity” (p. 13). The question posed is how this can be accomplished in an effective and sustainable manner. Rosiek et al. found even in circumstances that appear to be favorable to such advocacy, heteronormative contexts of the broader culture undermine efforts rendering the queering of the curriculum invisible to stakeholders and decision makers.

Rosiek et al. (2017) offered a solution to sustaining advocacy, encouraging a queer-positive teacher preparation curriculum, a curriculum that requires a doubled practice of intervention. The first practice was advocacy for inclusion of queer content in teacher preparation programs; education about harassment, creation and support of alliance groups, support of families with same-sex parents, inclusion of LGBTQ+ history and civil rights movements in the

curriculum, and courses that pertain to supporting and advocating for LGBTQ+ students, especially those who identify as transgender, etc.

Secondly, Rosiek et al. (2017) noted the importance of addressing the silences and invisibility brought about by heteronormative standards. Rosiek et al. noted educators must be able to name patriarchal and heteronormative silences in their curriculum; the inability to do so yields professional incompetence. More importantly, female and LGBTQ+ students should not be tasked with educating their teachers, and peers about the salience of such educational contexts.

Mattheis et al. (2021) noted the act of successfully queering a curriculum must acknowledge and bring joy to the agency needed to disrupt normative standards. Furthermore, acknowledgement of resistance to queer youth and educators of color is of utmost importance; only by attending to the multiplicity of identity and the intersectionality of students and teachers can this queering process benefit not only queer youth, but the entire schooling space.

When educators are participating in queering curriculum, they are exposing students to a zone of possibilities (Jagose, 1997). Challenging stereotypes opens students to unique and unexplored identities, many of which they may have never experienced or known of before. However, some caution teachers against this practice, as Haddad (2019) stated, “This attention to the life history of the teacher is problematic when the life history of a teacher is outside of the heteronormative nature of schooling” (p. 23), especially given the prevalence of dominant ideologies in the current polarized political climate.

The aforementioned zone of possibilities is the launching pad for disempowerment of the historically dominant and institutionalized epistemologies (i.e., heteronormativity). When dominant ideologies are disempowered, true diversity and inclusion practices can begin to make ground and take a strong foothold in the interruption of heteronormativity in systematic oppressive systems. Haddad (2019) posited teacher preparation programs must become more inclusive of sexual and gender minorities and their lived experiences and found scholars have reported gender, sexuality, and queer theory all to be routinely underrepresented in teacher preparation educational curricula.

Baines et al. (2019) shared, "When LGBTQ+ content is unavailable in the educational environment, it marks the presence of overt as well as covert hostility toward queer people and their identities" (p. 4). Similarly, Bandini et al. (2017) found "several studies documented the changes, often negative, in students' development due to the various attitudes and values that are modeled to them during their [medical] training" (p. 2). This concept is termed the hidden curriculum in medical and healthcare training.

York (2015) further supported how the hidden curriculum could contribute to ongoing oppression and the perpetuation of heteronormative standards when they noted the lack of queer references in the classroom marked the space as heterostandard and a cisnormative environment that continued the oppression of unique personal stories, experiences, and intersectionality. Students' learning is impeded due to the absence of these perspectives; lack of exposure to

nonheterostandard norms is not able to enhance or facilitate learning outside of their own identity.

By explicitly centralizing LGBTQ+ people and topics, decentering of heteronormative standards has begun and the power to queer the curriculum is available. Queering the curriculum also allows educators to honor the range of sexual and gender identities that exist in the classroom and beyond. Such inclusive teaching normalizes, validates, and provides support for LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ family members who typically do not see their life histories or experiences reflected in course content (Goldberg & Allen, 2018).

Sosa-Provencio et al. (2018) delved deep into the disempowerment of dominant ideologies and stated, “We must ‘disempower dominant ideologies’ so that we can ‘celebrate diversity and inclusion’ so that ‘students can look outside themselves for knowledge’” (p. 5). Thus, Sosa-Provencio et al. believed it to be critical educators’ experiences and identities were examined in the K–12 setting. Only through analysis of various minority identities and how they intersect can growth and learning take place. Sosa-Provencio et al.’s work is relevant to this study as it could be used to gauge how the intersectionality of teacher and member of the LGBTQ+ community may cause some individuals to cover up their identities in the professional setting, or conversely empower and take pride in their identity by making the intersection the center of their instruction so all stakeholders could learn and grow from their experiences.

Jackson (2009) discovered by disempowering dominant ideologies in the classroom, students were given the ability to reinvent various identities

surrounding them. Students no longer had to see them through a monochromatic lens, but instead were able to think in technicolor, exploring definitions of identities outside of the societal conventions of today. This in turn allows students to feel safer in expressing their own identities. One participant in Jackson's (2009) work had the following to say about identity reinvention and exploration of multiple identities within the classroom:

I think that my being out makes it much more likely that a gay kid would say it. In fact, there have been several kids who have come out at my junior high school. It was really awesome that they felt comfortable enough to do that. While my being out is not responsible for all of that, I think it helps contribute to an environment where being gay is seen to be OK. (p. 65)

Burbules and Burke (1999) suggested "critical thinking and critical pedagogy can help to free learners to see the world" (p. 2). To further exemplify this notion, Jackson (2009) found during her study, participants used their own LGBTQ+ identity and otherness, the act of being pushed to the margins of society, to challenge heteronormative standards and in the process, they not only came to self-realizations about their identities, but also made queer theory concepts and learning about non static identities available to all.

The experiences and identities of LGBTQ+ teachers can be important data points to how heteronormativity is being interrupted. Burbules and Burke (1999) stated, "There is something about the preservation of such sustained differences that yields new insights, something that is lost when the tension is erased by one

perspective gaining (or claiming) dominance” (p. 18). Burbules and Burke supported the idea that if LGBTQ+ educators' experiences are examined, perhaps they can be helped to better understand and validate their intersectionality and alter their own perceptions of outness. In turn, supporting educators' experiences could help students uncover new lenses, diversify their majority lens, and empower a deficit lens lessening the existing social inequality gap.

Annamma et al. (2018) stated DisCrit values “tensions as productive sites for furthering knowledge, with the potential to transform current inequities in our education system” (p. 18). Thus, when engaging with something that is othered, knowledge is expanded, and systems of education are transformed. Annamma et al. (2018) stated, “DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on” (p. 56). Thus, as the impact of LGBTQ+ educators' identities on heteronormativity is examined, a better understanding of how the various experiences with identity intersectionality can impact the standard heteronormative systems of education will occur.

LGBTQ+ identity in an educational setting is constantly contending with the heteronormative dominant society. Jenlink (2019) noted “integrating their role as an educator is often impelled and impeded by several factors, including community atmosphere, school culture, family status, and a heteronormative view of who should and who should not be a teacher” (p. 1). Thus, it is important this study examines the notions of intersectionality and how identity can cause

educators to participate in the act of covering or erasing their LGBTQ+ identity professionally to adhere to the hegemonic norm. The following section will address the concept of covering and professional closeting as a coping mechanism and assimilatory reaction to mask their divergence from the heteronormative standards on which educational institutions are founded.

Covering: Professional Closeting

Many individuals in the educational world do not hold the same views regarding educators' outness in the classroom or the centering of their various identities that have been presented in this paper, nor do they encourage revealing or focusing on LGBTQ+ identities and curriculum within the classroom context. Tobin (1997) stated, "children and homosexuals have come to occupy the same space" (p. 227), and "there are many confusions about homosexuality, pedophilia, and child abuse" (p. 232).

There are many dissenting voices regarding the place LGBTQ+ identity has within the world of education. Many believe it has no constitutional right to be present within an educational setting. In 2005, nearly 45% of the U.S. population believed LGBTQ+ individuals should not be hired as educators, but in 2019, that margin shifted from 45% dissenting to a mere 19% of U.S. residents believing that gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals should not be hired as educators (Cox, 2021). Teachers and other opposing groups have consistently expressed a "belief that sexuality is not the concern of teachers or of schools" (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2002, p. 121). Currently, dissenting opinions are playing out via the state of Florida's Parental Rights in Education Bill (2022), more commonly known as

the Don't Say Gay Bill. The bill will prohibit K–3 lesson plans that discuss sexual orientation or gender identity. Student-led discussions in the classroom that address the topics, however, are allowed. Whether the bill will have a silencing effect on students and teachers in fourth grade and above is still unknown (Brugal, 2022). The bill's purpose, according to the text, is to "reinforce the fundamental right of parents to make decisions regarding the upbringing and control of their children" (Parental Rights in Education Act, 2022, para. 1).

Furthermore, House File 802 in the state of Iowa prohibits the teaching of divisive concepts and targets ideas of systematic racism and sexism, how they have shaped the way the country is built, and how institutions function (Hytrek, 2022). The purpose of this bill is leading many to view their LGBTQ+ identity as taboo and at risk of being erased. Thus, legislative bills may undo decades of LGBTQ+ activism and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility work. Consequently, legislative bills may also cause once previously out educators to participate in the act of professional covering and closeting.

People and groups cover because they believe they must do so to feel included at work. To fit in with prevailing social norms and to avoid potential stigma, people minimize differences with their coworkers (Catalyst, 2014). Catalyst (2014) found 83% of individuals practiced covering and found covering was somewhat or extremely detrimental to their sense of self. It is important to note Catalyst also found some forms of covering were benign and justifiable but covering was a major contributing factor to the individual's sense of contribution and commitment to an institution. Scharrón-Del Río (2020) presented an

anecdote where mentors and other colleagues urged them to conceal or cover their intersecting identity during interview processes because the coming out process could “potentially work against them” (p. 8). However, Scharrón-Del Río later noted the claims made, mainly by White men with conservative worldviews, were largely unfounded.

Historically, LGBTQ communities have been maligned through stereotyping by linking homosexuality with promiscuity, mental illness, disease, child pedophilia, and hypersexuality (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013). Because of overwhelming homophobia, heteronormativity, and harassment, many LGBTQ teachers remain closeted (i.e., professionally), depriving pupils of exposure to sexual diversity in the school (Sands, 2009). If this type of rhetoric continues, many LGBTQ+ educators reenter the closet in their professional setting or leave education all together. Morgan (2022) reported:

An openly gay state legislator is warning that Florida’s ‘Don’t Say Gay’ legislation could force teachers out of the classroom rather than expose LGBTQ school children to possible abuse at the hands of unsympathetic parents. Already countless teachers across the state have already said that they will leave the profession, amidst a teacher shortage altogether, due to this. (paras. 1–2)

The invisibility and exclusion felt by LGBTQIA+ people with multiple marginalizations can effectively make them feel as if they are not considered part of the community (Scharrón-Del Río, 2020). Lavietes (2022) covered this topic and reported the following response from a teacher regarding the legislation:

The law would erase me as an LGBTQ teacher, she said. Nobody would be able to know, which then puts me in the closet, and I'm there seven hours a day, if not more, five days a week. I wouldn't be able to be who I am. (para. 13)

The act of covering and professional closeting discussed in this paper can be detrimental to the overall culture and climate of, not only the classroom space in question, but ultimately the act can ripple outwards and impact the culture and climate of the entire school community. Beach (2020) stated "Our classroom was a home built on kindness, helping both students and me, and it celebrated intersecting identities" (p. 1). Beach (2020) very strongly believed and supported the connections and celebrations of individuality and intersectionality lent themselves to a stronger sense of community and a more powerful school culture and climate, which allowed all students to have a home at school.

Conclusion

If work continues to "deepen understanding of power, privilege, equity, and [social] inequity; including policies and reifying practices" (Sosa-Provencio et al., 2018, p. 6), a better education system will occur for students. Continued learning and growth regarding intersectionality, identities, and perceptions of oneself and others will interrupt the troublesome singular notions of identity represented by the heteronormative idyllic status quo.

Jackson's (2009) work concluded with the following statement about teachers revealing, embracing, and celebrating their LGBTQ+ outness in their classroom setting:

The more open they were about their sexual identities in the workplace, the more they could query and queer the status quo and thus provide students with tools to query and queer their own identities. Heterosexual teachers can take this approach as well, but for the teachers in this study, their queerness constituted their path—or one of their many paths—to becoming queer pedagogues. The learning opportunities this path can offer speaks to the need to create an atmosphere in which teachers can feel safe being lesbian—or gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, or questioning. (p. 68)

Therefore, by truly being out in education, educators can bring what was once a minority and deficit lens to the surface to interrupt hegemonic standards, allowing the abnormal or nonidyllic to be centered, valued, celebrated, and above all else, seen, uncovered, professionally uncloseted, and truly out in education.

Chapter 3: Design of the Study

The following section details the methodological design employed in this study. The first section discusses the research tradition utilized, in this case phenomenology, and exhibits why this tradition was chosen for this study. Subsequent sections include participants and sampling methods, data collection tools, and, ultimately, data analysis procedures and presentation modes. I also included a positionality statement within this section to inform the reader of my personal statement and background.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach adhering to the phenomenology genre. Quay (2016) noted phenomenology was relevant to educational research as it gave access, or a starting point, to a way of experiencing, which was often overlooked in education. Creswell (2007) stated, “phenomenological studies describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 75).

By following Creswell’s (2007) procedures for conducting phenomenological research, I determined a phenomenological approach to best suit the needs of this study as it aimed to discover the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ educators and their perceptions of outness in their field of work. The use of a phenomenological tradition was crucial as readings could support learning the experienced phenomenon, but if the reading remained detached from the actual phenomenological area being studied, then “the phenomenological starting point is never achieved” (Quay, 2016, p. 486).

Furthermore, Heidegger (1968), one of the key scholars of phenomenological research, stated the following:

Neither phenomenology nor swimming can be learnt in a purely vicarious way. We shall never learn what “is called” swimming . . . or what it “calls for,” by reading a treatise on swimming. Only the leap into the river tells us what is called swimming. (p. 21)

Therefore, this study focused on the lived experiences of educators, because without the experiences, the narratives directly from the participants, the phenomenon of being out as an educator cannot be understood. Through narratives and lived experiences, as Quay (2016) and Heidegger (1968) suggested, the phenomenon being examined and different perspectives it offered could be explored. The varieties of ways in which educators experienced and navigated their careers as LGBTQ+ individuals could be understood. Once narratives and lived experiences were heard, they were able to be analyzed and implications for future research determined, which resulted in creating a new starting point or experience for phenomenological research (Quay, 2016).

The current study focused on Moustakas' (1994) methodology for conducting phenomenological research; that is, focusing on the descriptions of participants' lived experiences rather than my interpretations of the experiences (Creswell, 2007). The focus on participants' lived experiences is crucial to adhere to the proper traditions of phenomenological research, as outlined by Heidegger (1968) and Quay (2016). Interpretations offered by me that deviated from the examined experience were invalid, and thus, Moustakas's (1994) methodology

for conducting phenomenological research ensured accuracy and unbiased results.

Sample and Population

This study used a purposive sampling approach to find participants. To find these participants, I reached out to several LGBTQ+ affiliated organizations via social media platforms. The sheer size of Facebook's and other social media platforms' population implied even underrepresented populations were relatively large (Kosinski et al., 2015). The solicitation of participants yielded 10 LGBTQ+ identifying educators across the state of Iowa who held either a teaching/educational leadership or were in a preteaching position.

Inclusion Criteria

This study required two students in a teacher preparation program who had participated in at least two field placement experiences, two 1st year certified educators, two certified educators with at least 4 years of teaching experience, two certified educators with 5 or more years of teaching experience and two educational leaders (i.e., administrators, school board members) who held licensure or were approved by their governing body. All participants needed to have held licensure or approved by their governing body. However, students in a teacher preparation program were exempt from licensure requirements.

Exclusion Criteria

Due to the nature of this study, participants who identified as heterosexual were not selected to participate. Noncertified staff members were also excluded from participating in the research.

Procedures

An initial Qualtrics survey was sent out to prospective participants to collect information and verify inclusion. The Qualtrics survey collected pertinent background information, additional contact information, and other demographic information and served as a tool for collecting the informed consent forms required by the IRB.

The first page of the survey featured a short video from me explaining the importance of the study, and the informed consent form was explained to prospective participants. The introductory video helped to bridge the gap between cold online research and allowed participants to put a face to the study. The script for the video can be found in Appendix A. Inclusion of the introductory video is of utmost importance, especially given the personal gender/sexual identity focus of the study. Sonne et al. (2013) found the use of video assisted informed consent improved comprehension of the consent process. Sonne et al. found most participants (78.7%) preferred a video-assisted format compared to paper (12.9%) and nearly all (96.7%) reported the videos improved their understanding of the procedures described in the consent document. Therefore, this study followed a similar protocol while collecting prospective participant background data. After the video, participants completed the rest of the Qualtrics form. Figure 2 outlines the information to be collected from participants prior to the interviews.

Figure 2*Qualtrics Prospective Participant Survey Questionnaire*

| Contact information | Demographic information | Professional information | Informed consent form | Other information |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Preferred first and last name | LGBTQ+ affiliation: This will consist of two open-ended questions to allow participants to self-identify in a manner which best matches their preferred identity (i.e., What is your gender identity? What is your sexual orientation?) | Title | See Appendix B for text to be presented | The survey will also include a comments section where participants can offer other information that they believe may be necessary for them to participate in the study. |
| Preferred pronouns | | Current workplace | | |
| Email | | Years of experience | | |
| Phone number | | Outness in profession: Scale of 0 - 100 | | |
| Preferred contact method and best time to contact | | 0 being not out at all and 100 being completely out. | | |
| | Ethnicity/race | | | |

In-depth interviews were completed using digital technology (i.e., Skype or Zoom) or other internet-based communication platforms. Only audio recordings were collected during the interview process. Interviews were conducted using a semistructured model and audio recordings were taken at the time of the interviews, transcribed by hand, and used for later data analysis. Due to the fact I was the primary data collection tool, I was aware all information would be filtered through my theoretical lens and framework. Thus, to maintain validity and trustworthiness, member checks and thick descriptions were implemented during the analysis stage of the research process.

The member check process allowed participants the opportunity to review transcripts of the interviews to offer suggestions, clarification, and critical reflection, which ensured I honestly reported the collected information. Additionally, thick, rich descriptions were used for the purpose of transferability. Merriam (1998) explained thick, rich descriptions “provide enough description that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (p. 211).

Data Collection Tools and Protocol

To collect data, this study encompassed the use of semistructured interviews. Tools for collecting the data gathered during interview sessions can be found in the appendices. See Appendix B for the informed consent statement; see Appendix C for interview protocol and the interview outline. I began with a short introduction reminding participants of the study’s purpose. I let participants know their responses were confidential and findings from the research would possibly be published and presented at professional conferences or in the form of a theatrical representation or graphic novel. I then reminded participants they were able to withdraw from the study at any time and asked them if they would like to proceed. Based upon their responses, I either proceeded or ended the interview and thanked the participant for their time and consideration. This process lasted roughly 5 minutes.

In the instance of confirmation of participation, I then moved on to cover topic 1, identity. I started out with a leading question and followed up with probing questions, based on the participant’s response. Topic 1 lasted roughly 10

minutes. I then moved on to Topic 2, perception of outness. I started out with a leading question and followed up with probing questions based on the participant's response. Topic 2 lasted roughly 20 minutes. I then moved on to Topic 3, queer theory perceptions and enactments. Once again, I began with a lead in question and followed up with probing questions based on the participant's response. Topic 3 lasted roughly 15 minutes.

Next, I asked participants to know those were all the questions I had for them, and then asked if they have any other thoughts about their experiences as an LGBTQ+ educator. Finally, I asked them to write an optional and confidential handwritten letter penned to future LGBTQ+ educators offering advice; [none of the participants wrote the optional letter]. This took approximately 5 minutes. Finally, I thanked participants for their time and contributions, thereby ending the interview session.

Data Analysis and Presentation Modes

After data had been collected, the coding process began. After two rounds of coding, I conducted a member check. After interpretation with participants, the study concluded. I reported the findings by means of a thick description. I originally intended to write an ethno dramatic write-up and wanted to transform the data into a dramatic representation for an audience; however, this was put off due to time constraints. In the future, I would like to adapt the findings from this study into an ethno dramatic write up and possibly even a graphic novel representation.

For the first round of coding, I used open NVivo coding. According to Saldaña and Omasta (2018), coding is a method used to synthesize and condense data into the participant's own language as a symbol system for qualitative data analysis. This method was effective because it required me to scrutinize data in a meticulous manner that kept the exact words of participants at the center of the coding process. Saldaña and Omasta noted it could, in theory, make coding easier, because participants have already supplied some of the codes. After the initial open NVivo coding process, I then completed a second round of coding. The subsequent round of coding used dramaturgical coding traditions. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) noted "dramaturgical coding applies the basic conventions of dramatic character analysis onto naturalistic social interaction or a participant's stories [Nvivo coding] contained in an interview" (p. 219). Dramaturgical coding provided insight into the core drives of human beings. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) explained there were six facets to dramaturgical coding. See Table 1 for the facets of dramaturgical coding.

Table 1*Six Facets of Dramaturgical Coding*

| Facet of dramaturgical coding | Explanation |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1) OBJ: → <i>Objective</i> | Participant-actor objectives, motives in the form of action verbs. |
| 2) CON: → <i>Conflicts</i> | Conflicts or obstacles confronted by the participant-actor which prevent him or her from achieving his or her [their] objectives. |
| 3) TAC → <i>Tactics</i> | Participant-actor tactics or strategies to deal with conflicts or obstacles and to achieve his or her objectives. |
| 4) ATT → <i>Attitudes</i> | Participant-actor attitudes toward the setting, others, and the conflict. |
| 5) EMO → <i>Emotions</i> | Emotions experienced by the participant-actor. |
| 6) SUB → <i>Subtexts</i> | Subtexts, the participant-actor's unspoken thoughts or impression management, usually in the form of gerunds. |

Note. Adapted from Saldaña, 2016, pp. 145–146; emphasis in original.

It is important to note dramaturgical coding is particularly relevant for case studies, ethnographies, narrative inquiry, dramatic writing, and even autoethnography for deeply introspective writers (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). However, analysis of particular facets were beneficial for me to determine the true and authentic analysis of participants' lived experiences in this particular setting. Furthermore, I aspired to culminate and condense the data and findings gathered from the coding and thick descriptions to produce and create an ethno dramatic representation of the findings. As noted earlier, this did not happen; however, it is something that I would like to produce in the future. I have also entertained the notion of commissioning a graphic novel representation of the

findings for future educators and preservice students and programs to utilize. Therefore, it can be argued this particular coding tradition served these end goals effectively.

I originally noted, if necessary, I would participate in a tertiary thematic coding process, but because the study employed member checks, it was not a necessary step and a third round of coding was not conducted. Member checks (Chase, 2017) represented how the researcher and participants worked together to develop interpretations of interview data and to collaborate on a final narrative.

In summation, the coding process, paired with member checks, helped the study to compose a thick descriptive write up of key learnings and findings gleaned. The thick description can eventually be used to develop ethnodrama resources, and, ultimately, a graphic novel representation of the study's conclusions. Accessible resources would truly allow all to understand the perceptions and lived out experiences of LGBTQ+ educators OUT in education.

Researcher's Positionality

The phenomenon to be studied is that of lived nuanced experiences of practicing teachers and their perception of outness in the field of education. I am a former openly gay cisgender male teacher who has unique lived experiences being an out and proud educator. I also have a personal connection to this topic because I grew up in a small rural community where diversity was sparse. As a gay individual growing up, I never saw any LGBTQ+ representation in the classroom or the community at large. The lack of representation and persistent discriminatory actions and practices of my classmates, home school district, and

community led me to stay in the closet until I moved away from the community. It was only when I was in a more progressive locale and presented with LGBTQ+ representations that I fostered the courage to finally come out. I am now a former openly gay educator who promotes diversity and inclusion in all my educational practices.

I am aware my positionality and own experiences needed to be somewhat separated from this study to yield valid results. However, I knew eliminating it entirely would be an impossible task as my intertwining identities would not allow me to forget who I was in this study. I have spent countless hours engaging with the LGBTQ+ community prior to this study, and in fact, as a member of the community, I have even participated in several LGBTQ+ related professional development events. Accordingly, I used Moustakas' (1994) transcendental or psychological approach to a phenomenological study to focus less on my own interpretations and experiences, and rather, hone in on the lived experiences of the study's participants (Creswell, 2007).

Conclusion

The results of this study will help current and future educators to better understand what LGBTQ+ teachers face while serving institutions as educators. The collected and coded data will help reveal trends in the profession and will inform educators about experiences that LGBTQ+ individuals navigate throughout their career. Moustakas' transcendental approach was employed to eliminate bias and member checks ensured accuracy. The results were presented to the public by means of a thick description write up. The

amalgamation of the narratives, aligned with the theoretical framework of this study, allowed greater insight into what it was truly like to be OUT in education.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the nuanced lived experiences of out educators in the field of education. During the interview process, key questions were asked to examine and understand how educators perceived their outness, personally and professionally, and detailed their lived experiences navigating the educational system as an educator in the profession. Topics covered included perception of outness, presentation of outness, and feelings regarding enactments of Queertical Theory tenets.

Participants

For this study, 10 educators from five subgroups met the inclusion criteria outlined in the methodology section and were selected to participate in a semistructured interview conducted via videoconferencing technology. Participants also participated in a member check following research analysis to mitigate any researcher bias (Chase, 2017).

This section briefly breaks down the participants into their subgroups and describes the personal characteristics of the participants, including presentation of their pronouns, gender identity, sexual orientation, and a brief description of their role as an educator and the demographics of the institution they currently serve. The study will talk about the racial and ethnic make ups of the institutions that the participants currently serve or have served, but there was not a diverse representation of racial/ethnic backgrounds in the participant pool, so it was excluded from this section of the study. Additionally, most of the participants also

mentioned a religious affiliation or lack thereof during their interviews, but this data was not intentionally collected and, therefore, will also be excluded from this section.

Due to confidentiality and for the safety of the participants, they are assigned pseudonyms from the acronym used to refer to the LGBTQIA2S+ community and are referred to as such throughout the presentation of findings and the discussion, implications, and future research section of this study. Table 2 summarizes the various identities and demographics of the participants who participated in this study.

Table 2*Participant Identities and Demographics*

| Participant | Subgroup | Gender identity | Pronouns | Sexual orientation | Marital Status | Outness | School setting |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------|----------------|
| Mr. L | Student teacher | Trans male | he/him/his | Queer | Single | 100% | Suburb |
| Ms. G | Student teacher | Cis female | she/her/hers | Lesbian | Single | 80% | Suburb |
| Mr. B | First year educator | Cis male | he/him/his | Gay | Married w/ child | 100% | Metro |
| Mx. T | First year educator | Trans female | she/her/hers they/them/theirs | Asexual Lesbian | Married | 70% | Metro |
| Mr. Q | Novice educator (2–3 yrs) | Cis male | he/him/his | Gay | Single | 50% | Rural |
| Mrs. I | Novice educator (2–3 years) | Cis female | she/her/hers | Lesbian | Married | 100% | Suburb |
| Mr. A | Veteran educator (5+ years) | Cis male | he/him/his | Gay | Married | 100% | Suburb |
| Ms. 2 | Veteran educator (5+ years) | Cis female | she/her/hers | Lesbian/Bi sexual | Single | 75% | Metro |
| Mr. S | Education Leader | Cis male | he/him/his | Gay | Married w/child | 100% | Metro/ Suburb |
| Mrs. + (plus) | Education Leader | Cis female | she/her/hers | Lesbian | Married w/ child | 85% | Suburb |

Participant Subgroup 1: Student Teachers

The student teacher subgroup consisted of two individuals who, at the time of the study, were participating in a student teacher preparation program at an accredited public institution in the state where the study was conducted. Both

participants were enrolled in the program and were receiving their training via field placement experiences in local community settings.

Mr. L. The first of the two participants was Mr. L. Mr. L identifies as a transgender male and uses he/him/his pronouns. He identifies as queer regarding his sexual orientation. He is not married or dating anyone. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out all in the field of education to colleagues, students, administrators, and families and 100 indicates an openly out status, Mr. L indicated he was 100% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Mr. L was attending an institution where the students were predominantly White, adhered to Christian values, and were overwhelmingly heteronormative regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. The area is classified as suburban geographically. He has done student teaching field placements in the same local area, but those schools reported more racial and ethnic diversity; however, regarding heteronormativity, these institutions continued to adhere to the status quo.

Ms. G. The second participant in this subgroup was Ms. G. Ms. G identifies as a cisgender female and uses the pronouns she/her/hers. She also identifies as a lesbian regarding her sexual orientation. Additionally, Ms. G identifies as a neurodiverse human being with a diagnosis of ADHD. She is not married or dating anyone. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out all in the field of education to colleagues, students, administrators, and families and 100 indicates an openly out status, Ms. G indicated she was 80% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Ms. G was attending an institution that was predominantly White and was located in a suburban location that adhered to mainly conservative beliefs and heteronormative standards. She was participating in a student teaching field experience where 55% of the student population was White/Caucasian, 18% were Black, 18% were Hispanic, 3% were Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 5% identified as having two or more races. This institution was in a metropolitan area where there was a mix of liberal and conservative views, but the majority of the population adhered to heteronormative standards.

Participant Subgroup 2: First-Year Educators

The first-year educator subgroup consisted of two individuals who were participating in their first year of teaching or who had completed one year of teaching but may have left the profession. Following is a description of each member of the first-year educator subgroup.

Mr. B. The first participant in this subgroup was Mr. B. Mr. B identifies as a cisgender man and uses the pronouns he/him/his. Regarding his sexual orientation, Mr. B identifies as a gay man. He is married to a gay man and has started the process of adopting a child. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out all in the field of education to colleagues, students, administrators, and families and 100 indicates an openly out status, Mr. B indicated he was 100% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Mr. B was teaching middle school in a metropolitan setting. Thirty percent of the student population identified as

White/Caucasian, 25% were African American/Black, 30% Hispanic, 15% Asian/Pacific Islander, and about 10% identified as two or more races. There was a wide range of socioeconomic statuses and languages spoken at home; however, a majority of the population identified as heterosexual or heteronormative.

Mx. T. The second participant in this subgroup was Mx. T. Mx. T identifies as a transgender woman and uses the pronouns she/her/hers and they/them/theirs. Regarding their sexual orientation, Mx. T identifies as a gay-asexual lesbian. They are married to their female partner. They also identify as a person on the spectrum of autism and someone who practiced the faith of Judaism. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out all in the field of education to colleagues, students, administrators, and families and 100 indicates an openly out status, Mx. T indicated they were 70% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Mx. T was not working in the field of education but had 1 year of experience as a school counselor. They worked in a metropolitan area with a diverse population of students, and a wide array of socioeconomic status. They indicated the district would be considered a majority minority population. However, regarding sexual orientation, the majority of school community members adhered to heteronormative societal standards.

Participant Subgroup 3: Novice Educators (2-3 years of experience)

The novice educator subgroup consisted of two individuals who had completed or were completing their 2nd or 3rd year of experience as an

educator. Following is a description of each member of the novice educator subgroup.

Mr. Q. The first participant in this subgroup was Mr. Q. Mr. Q identifies as a cisgender man and uses the pronouns he/him/his. Regarding his sexual orientation, Mr. Q identifies as a gay man. He is not married or dating anyone. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out all in the field of education (to colleagues, students, administrators, and families) and 100 indicates an openly out status, Mr. Q indicated he was 50% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Mr. Q was teaching in a rural middle school. He described the school demographics as “very White/Caucasian and conservative with a small Latino community and very few African American students.” He also noted religion was highly prominent in the community and cited there were nine different churches in the small rural town and as such, beliefs and practices were very traditional, conservative, and adhered to heterosexual norms.

Mrs. I. The second participant in this subgroup was Mrs. I. Mrs. I identifies as a cisgender woman and uses she/her/hers pronouns. Regarding her sexual orientation, Mrs. I does not prefer labels but identifies more as a lesbian. She is married to her female partner. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out all in the field of education (to colleagues, students, administrators, and families) and 100 indicates an openly out status, Mrs. I indicated she was 100% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Mrs. I was teaching in a lower elementary school in a suburban setting. She reported the district was predominantly White, with a

wide range of socioeconomic status, but many tended to be more affluent. Most of the population was heteronormative regarding gender identity and sexual orientation; however, there were a few LGBTQ+ parents and other school community members.

Participant Subgroup 4: Veteran Educators (5 + Years of experience)

The veteran educator subgroup consisted of two individuals who had completed 5 or more years as an educator. They may or may not have been active in the classroom but had at least 5 years of experience in the classroom setting.

Mr. A. The first participant in this subgroup was Mr. A. Mr. A identifies as a cisgender man and uses he/him/his pronouns. Regarding his sexual orientation, Mr. A identifies as a gay man. He is married to his male partner. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out all in the field of education (to colleagues, students, administrators, and families) and 100 indicates an openly out status, Mr. A indicated he was 100% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Mr. A was serving a suburban district as an instructional coach but had over 10+ years of experience in elementary classrooms. He had worked in multiple buildings, but overall reported the school population was made up of mainly White/Caucasian individuals, with some other ethnicities/racial groups making up small percentages of the school population. The socioeconomic status was, by and large, middle class, but some buildings tended to sway more toward upper class/ affluent families. Mr. A indicated families tended to hold more conservative or republican views regarding political

beliefs, and as such, adhered to heteronormative standards, gender roles, and sexual orientations.

Ms. 2. The second participant in this group was Ms. 2. Ms. 2 identifies as a cisgender woman and uses she/her/hers pronouns. Regarding her sexual orientation, she identifies as a queer or bisexual, but sometimes defaults to lesbian. She is not married or dating anyone and refers to herself as perpetually single. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out all in the field of education (to colleagues, students, administrators, and families) and 100 indicates an openly out status, Ms. 2 indicated she was 75% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Ms. 2 was teaching at the elementary level in a more metropolitan school district. She reported the majority of the school population identified as African American/Black, with the next largest group being White/Caucasian individuals. There were also small percentages of Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and those who identified as having two or more races. Regarding socioeconomic status, Ms. 2 indicated most of the families were lower-income families and single parent households. Nonetheless, the area still adhered to heteronormative standards regarding gender identity and sexual orientation.

Participant Subgroup 5: Educational Leaders

The educational leader subgroup consisted of two individuals who held leadership positions in the institutions they served or institutions in the local community. This could include, but was not limited to, school administrators (i.e.,

principal, assistant principal) school board member, parent teacher association member, union leader, or other position.

Mr. S. The first participant in this subgroup was Mr. S. Mr. S identifies as a cisgender man and uses the pronouns he/him/his. He also identifies as a gay man regarding his sexual orientation, is married to his male partner, and has children with him. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out at all in the field of education (to colleagues, students, administrators, and families) and 100 indicates an openly out status, Mr. S indicated he was 100% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Mr. S was working in an urban school district as an elementary special education teacher and served as a school board member for a suburban district near the district where he taught. The school district where he worked was a majority minority school with the larger population being African Americans/Black. However, the district where Mr. S served as a school board member was predominantly White. Socioeconomic statuses ranged from very low to more affluent, and most households adhered to heteronormative standards in regard to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Mrs. +(plus). The second participant in this subgroup was Mrs. + (plus). Mrs. + (plus) identifies as a cisgender woman and uses the pronouns she/her/hers. Regarding her sexual orientation, Mrs. +(plus) identifies as a gay lesbian. She had been married to a female partner, was not married at the time of the study, but did have children with her previous partner. On a scale of 0–100, where 0 is not out at all in the field of education (to colleagues, students,

administrators, and families) and 100 indicates an openly out status, Mrs. + (plus) indicated she was 85% out as an educator.

At the time of the study, Mrs. + (plus) was serving as the principal for an elementary school in a suburban area. The school population was predominantly White with about 10% of the population being African American/Black, Bosnian, or two or more mixed races. The majority of the school population identified as cisgender heteronormative individuals in regard to sexual orientation and gender identity; however, Mrs. + (plus) noted an increase in LGBTQ+ families and faculty and staff since her tenure as a leader began.

Findings

Findings of this study involved information obtained through interviews facilitated by videoconferencing. After in vivo and Dramaturgical coding took place, data analysis and descriptions were cointerpreted with participants to eliminate any researcher bias (Chase, 2017).

Interviews were conducted at the participant's convenience. Each interview ranged anywhere from 30–60 minutes in length. To understand how participants perceived their outness in the field of education and to allow them to detail their lived experiences, a semistructured interview protocol was used to facilitate the interviews. The interview questions gave participants an open-ended prompt with a precise purpose of gathering information that pertained to each research question (see Appendix C).

The findings of this study were directly related to the three research questions and were analyzed through the conceptual framework of the study (see Figure 1). The research questions were as follows:

- 1) What are the nuanced perceptions of LGBTQ+ educators with intersecting identities in education?
- 2) What are LGBTQ+ educators' nuanced perceptions of outness?
- 3) To what extent do LGBTQ+ educators choose or not choose to participate in the act of covering?
- 4) What are teachers' experiences with disempowering dominant ideologies? How are they or are they not interrupting heteronormative standards?

The following section summarizes the findings for each research question.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, What are the nuanced perceptions of LGBTQ+ educators with intersecting identities in education? While searching to answer this question, the following themes emerged: (a) The Importance of LGBTQ+ Representation, and (b) Polarization of the Individual and Educator.

The Importance of LGBTQ+ Representation

Nine of the 10 participants who took part in this study cited reasons as to why LGBTQ+ representation and intersectionality was not only important for schools but also particularly important for students and families who may identify as LGBTQ+. Table 3 includes the codes and quotes noted during the first round of in vivo coding as they pertained to the theme of The Importance of LGBTQ+

Representation. In Table 3, the presence of the code in the quote has been italicized and bolded for emphasis.

Table 3

Codes and Quotes for the Theme of the Importance of LGBTQ+ Representation

| Code | Representative quotes |
|-------------------------|---|
| Not alone | <p>“With the rise of social media, like TikTok, you realize how many queer LGBTQ+ educators there are out there . . . you realize I am <i>not alone</i>.” – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> <p>“It makes me want to push forward because it is still important that kids know that there are openly LGBTQ+ educators out there, that we do exist as adults. That they are <i>not alone</i>.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>“There is a comfort in knowing that you’re not alone in the field of education. There’s a comfort in knowing . . . I’m not the only transgender teacher on the face of the planet. There are others like me and I am <i>not alone</i>.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> |
| Visibility Existence | <p>“It makes me want to push forward because it is still important that kids know that there are openly LGBTQ+ educators out there, that we do <i>exist</i> as adults. That they are not alone.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>“Also, thinking back to how much it would have been helpful for me when I was a child had I known [an adult who was a representation of the LGBTQ+ community], I would have been more <i>visible</i> early on. I want kiddos to know an adult to have a role model.– Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> |
| Pride Lucky | <p>“They just haven’t been open to that [LGBTQ+ educator], so I feel <i>lucky</i> to get to be that person to let them know that it is a normal thing.” – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>“There was a high school student who identities as a homosexual male [on a panel] and he started crying and said he had never once had a gay teacher and never once had someone he could look up to. . . . After the session got done, I went up to him and said, ‘just so you know, there are gay teachers out there, and I’m one of them. and I hope you feel comfortable here and know how <i>proud</i> of you I am for saying you’re gay. I am <i>proud</i> of you for being here.’ He hugged me and started crying and said you do not know how much this means to me. It was such a cool moment.” – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> |

(table continues)

| Code | Representative quotes |
|----------------------|--|
| Normalcy | <p>"I feel like it's important for others that are coming in, whether they're staff students or even like future student teachers to know that . . . it's not a big deal having that around you...it's normal" – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>"They just haven't been open to that [LGBTQ+ educator], so I feel lucky to get to be that person to let them know that it is a normal thing." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>"I just remember back Susie Orman said, 'Get out of the closet because people need to know that you're just a normal human being.'" – Mrs. +(plus), Educational Leader</p> |
| Meaningful important | <p>"After reading that [a book showing LGBTQ+ representation in the form of gender expression] I did have a few kids like come up to me about it and they're like oh, I really liked that book and it meant a lot to me." – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>"When I talk about how my room is a safe space and I'm a safe person, it means something different [for LGBTQ+ students] it resonates more deeply." – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> <p>"Something I thought about a lot is I don't think that the queerness or transness made it harder to be there for any other kiddos, but I do think it mattered a whole lot for some of them." – Mx. T, First-year Educator</p> |
| Like me | <p>"I feel like there's maybe this little glimmer of Oh! This guy's like me too and not in a creepy way or anything, just like this is a queer person." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> <p>"There is a comfort in knowing that you're not alone in the field of education. There's a comfort in knowing . . . I'm not the only transgender teacher on the face of the planet. There are others like me and I am not alone." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> |

Dramaturgical coding analysis, which examined participants' objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, emotions, and any subtexts as they related to the phenomenon being studied, indicated eight participants noted one of their main objectives for being an educator was the desire to be an out educator who could serve as a representative or role model for LGBTQ+ youth, LGBTQ+ faculty, and, in some cases, even the community at large. However, there was one participant who did not cite the need to have their intersections of being an LGBTQ+

individual and an educator cross. Mr. Q, a novice educator in a rural community, noted their teacher identity was more important than their LGBTQ+ identity and sexuality/gender did not belong in this particular classroom. They did note how sad it made them feel to stay away from this intersecting identity and noted they believed it to be very important for students to see LGBTQ+ representatives in their community. However, Mr. Q also noted how the political climate of his rural community would do anything in their power to get rid of an LGBTQ+ representative; therefore, it was not an objective that arose during dramaturgical coding.

Mr. Q also noted he had the desire to move to a more liberal community where he could finally let his two identities intersect, but at the time of the study, he was unwilling to embrace his intersectionality due to environmental and political circumstances. Thus, Mr. Q. indicated geographical location and political affiliation may have been a contributing factor to how one perceived their identity. Mr. Q had to determine whether they were a teacher who happened to be gay and never mentioned it, or a gay teacher. From the perspective of Mr. Q, longitude and latitude played an important deciding factor in determining their intersectionality.

Polarization of the Individual and Educator

Just as novice educator Mr. Q felt the intersectionality of LGBTQ+ individual and educator should not mix, the study also found other participants also noticed how the political climate was beginning to shape the rhetoric at a local, state, national and even global level. During dramaturgical coding, analysis

found every participant encountered conflicts to their objectives as an LGBTQ+ educator. The conflict that arose the most was how a teacher's educator identity and their LGBTQ+ affiliation intersectionality had become politicized and viewed as inappropriate for the profession by some groups and individuals. Table 4 includes codes and quotes that encapsulated the theme of Polarization of the Individual and Educator. In the table, the codes in the quotes have been bolded and italicized for emphasis.

Table 4

Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Polarization of the Individual and Educator

| Code | Representative quotes |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Hostility Fear Not Safe | <p>“And I’m sure, as you’re aware, with the current <i>hostility</i> of transness, like against trans individuals in general, especially with the groomer talk. It makes it very <i>fraught</i> for some like me who is going into education.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>“The political climate does <i>not feel very safe</i> . . . my perception is there are voices that have been given power to say some really mean things. I think in the past there was probably judgment, but it was quiet . . . but now there is power [people feel] like they can have their voice and blast it all over social media.” – Mrs. + (plus), Educational Leader</p> <p>“I moved to Colorado Springs right after I graduated and just with the tragedy there [a night club shooting, November 19–20, 2022], it’s a very conservative town . . . with just my experience and the way the people around me talked about the LGBT community, I felt more <i>afraid</i> than I already was to be myself.” – Mrs. 2, Veteran Educator</p> |

(table continues)

| Code | Representative quotes |
|----------------------------|---|
| Unwanted | <p>“There is a historical [societal] pressure not to be an educator if you are LGBTQ+.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>“I was told that I had a family that did not want to be in my classroom because I was gay.” – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> <p>“We had another gay elementary ed teacher working in our building and at the time, someone came in and said you realize you have a gay teacher working in this building and we do not want this person to work with our kids.” –Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> |
| Taboo Inappropriate | <p>“It’s a subject [LGBTQ + identities and related content] that we know can be viewed as taboo or not as well talked about.” – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>“Automatically when you teach lower elementary [as an LGBTQ+ educator], there is kind of an eyebrow raised.[due to perceptions that LGBTQ+ identities are inappropriate in education]” – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> |
| Indoctrination Grooming | <p>“[In regard to a student coming out to them] - because I am a member of the community, it feels like people would take it as I’m indoctrinating them if I had this conversation with them.” – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>“[In regard to a student coming out to them] It depends on if a parent [thinks] are you indoctrinating my child?” – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> <p>“I was targeted a little by moms for liberty and there was just the run of the mill Facebook trolling. You know, I’m a pedophile. I’m a groomer.” – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> |

The above codes and quotes exemplified how various groups and beliefs regarding LGBTQ+ identities and concepts as they pertain to an educational setting have caused LGBTQ+ educators to begin questioning their intersectionality and its appropriateness in the field of education. Out educators

exist in education and will continue to exist, but as one of the participants mentioned, these “loud voices” have been given power and are causing LGBTQ+ educators to hesitate openly displaying any outwardly LGBTQ+ identity. The next section delves deeper into the examination of participants' nuanced perceptions and lived experiences of outness in the educational field.

Research Questions 2 and 3

Research Question 2 asked, What are LGBTQ+ educators' nuanced perceptions of outness? Research Question 3 asked, To what extent do LGBTQ+ educators choose or not choose to participate in the act of covering? During dramaturgical coding, 9 out of 10 educators believed LGBTQ+ representation was important for the school community, but many conflicts arose that made individuals participating in this study question to what level they could be out in the profession. Conflicts included the following: (a) political climate, (b) perspectives and opinions that LGBTQ+ educators do not belong in education, (c) heteronormative colleagues are afforded more privilege, (d) the hiring system will out trans individuals automatically, (e) education has become an undesirable field, (f) historical societal pressures that gay is not okay, (g) LGBTQ+ identity could result in termination/punitive action, (h) and the “don't rock the boat/ stir the pot mentality.” In addition to other conflicts, the previously mentioned conflict contributed to how participants perceived their outness in the field.

The following themes emerged during in vivo coding: (a) Outness Being Noticed, (b) Parental Community Impacts Perceptions of Outness, (c) Heteronormative Colleagues are Privileged, (d) Vagueness, Ambiguity, and

Avoidance: Tactics to Conceal a LGBTQ+ Identity, (e) Outness is Situational, and (f) Participants Underwent an Evolution of Outness. The next section further examines the themes by dissecting the lived experiences of participants' navigation of outness in the profession.

Outness Being Noticed

As participants navigated their daily lives, they reported stories detailing how their outness was being noticed daily, whether good, bad or otherwise. This section presents the good, the bad, and the other by examining the theme of Outness Being Noticed and the in vivo codes and quotes that arose during the analysis.

Table 5 details codes and quotes around the thoughts, perspectives, and experiences of the educators as they related to the theme of outness being noticed. Code occurrences within the quotes have been bolded and highlighted for emphasis.

Table 5*Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Outness Being Noticed*

| Code | Representative quotes |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Positive Good Thrilled | <p>"Some families sent gift cards and congratulations [when I got married] . . . 98 – 99% of my families were thrilled" – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> <p>"Sometimes it's good, like some students felt comfortable enough to share their identity with me and come out to me, which is good. I want to be a place where kids feel safe to be able to explain who they are and if they're having struggles or something like that." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"I didn't feel shamed or judged when I had to go do those kinds of things [go to the business office and file paper work]. . . . It was positive. I feel I have not been met with all the things in my brain that could have been scary. – Mrs.+(plus), Educational Leader</p> <p>"I had mostly positive responses during my campaign." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> |
| Negative Bad Unwanted | <p>"On the bad side, there were a few cases back when I was in Special ed para, there was a substitute teacher for the sped program, and I think she clocked me [saw their transness] instantly because the entire day she refused to even make eye contact with me." – Mx. T, First-year Educator</p> <p>"In my first year of teaching one of my students made a comment about 'he's a homo' or something like that. The kids in my class will throw out insults like that, like they'll call each other gay...It's just middle schoolers and they test the boundaries and see what they can get away with, and I understand that, but at the same time it can be a negative thing." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"[When she first started teaching] When the kids found out [that I was gay] that was a whole thing [context and body language indicated a negative reaction]. So, I definitely tried to keep it to myself." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> |
| Insults Slurs Microaggressions | <p>"In my first year of teaching one of my students made a comment about 'he's a homo' or something like that. The kids in my class will throw out insults like that, like they'll call each other gay..." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"Most of the negative things I have experienced come from children, and most of the time it comes from a place of anger, like when I had a student today told me 'they hate my faggotty class.'" – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> |

First, regarding the good. Several participants noted how their outness and LGBTQ+ identity impacted students, staff, and even community members in positive, good, and even beneficial ways. Mx. T, a first-year educator, noted:

I had a few out clearly trans and nonbinary students who really enjoyed talking to me. It was a sweet reaction, just how genuinely happy a lot of them were to get to see somebody who resembled them in some way or another.

Thus, Mx. T's trans identity was being noticed by students and impacted them in a way that made students empathize and connect with Mx. T.

Furthermore, Mr. B, also a first-year educator, noted, "I have had several students that have spoken to me who don't feel safe talking to a parent. They're able to recognize my identity in a positive way and understand that I am safe." Mr. B was not alone in indicating they desired to be a safe space for LGBTQ+ participants. In fact, Mr. Q, the novice educator who identified as 50% out in his professional setting, noted:

Sometimes they [students] felt comfortable enough to share their identity with me and came out to me, which is good. I want to be a place where kids feel safe to be able to be who they are if they are having struggles like that.

This was an especially huge breakthrough for Mr. Q as they noted they often hid or downplayed their LGBTQ+ identity, but despite his efforts, it was still being noticed for the better.

Veteran teachers and educational leaders also reported positive observations of their LGBTQ+ identity. Mr. A, a veteran teacher and instructional coach for a suburban district, reported when he got married, “Some families sent gift cards and congratulations and so on.” Mr. A’s quote further supported the code of positive or good observations of LGBTQ+ identities.

Mrs. +(plus) furthered this sentiment of positive engagement with colleagues and the school community and chronicled a time when she had to file medical insurance paperwork to include her spouse at the district office, “I didn’t feel shamed or judged when I had to go do those kinds of things. So, I feel I have not met with all the things in my brain that could have been scary.” In this particular instance, Mrs. +(plus) and her LGBTQ+ identity was not noticed, but in retrospect, she agreed it was for the best because it meant her colleagues and administrators viewed her sexual orientation as adhering to the norm and not something that should be noticed. Mr. S, an educational leader and elementary educator, even reported:

I had mostly positive responses during my campaign. I definitely got a lot of positive feedback from people in the community as well, especially when I was running for the school board. I got a lot of positive feedback from the different media appearances and that sort of thing.

However, moving on to the ugly, not all attention and observation of LGBTQ+ identities in the educational stratosphere had been positive. During in vivo coding, there were 12 instances of codes or quotes that indicated positive noticing of the LGBTQ+ identity, whereas 23 codes or quotes indicated negative

sentiments regarding the awareness of an LGBTQ+ identity in the educational context.

Mx. T, an openly trans female participant, shared a negative experience with a substitute paraeducator who refused to acknowledge their existence:

She clocked [recognized their trans identity] me instantly because the entire day she refused to make eye contact with me, look at me, or respond to any of my questions. She went out of her way to pretend like I didn't exist.

Mx. T also noted a time when she interviewed for a school district by saying, "I think the expressions on people [facial expressions] when I walked in the room until about 10 seconds later kind of told a couple different stories." Mx. T further went on to chronicle how they believed the observance and reaction to their transness led to rejection regarding a hiring decision. This negative/ bad code supported the overall theme of Outness Being Noticed, good, bad, and otherwise, but overwhelmingly, only bad enactments are being put on display in a more public manner.

Other educators also noted how their LGBTQ+ identity was noticed negatively by the public, generally by the parental community. Mr. B and Mr. A both noted parents opted to remove their children from their rosters because they did not want an LGBTQ+ educator. Additionally, Mr. Q, the only rural educator participant in the group, noted how the mere act of going out in public on a date led to parental and community backlash:

Last year, this was a negative way [that his LGBTQ+ identity was noticed]. I was dating a guy within the community, and we went to a sports bar within the community and one of my students saw me there, took a picture of me and that gentleman and posted it on social media and sent it through Snapchat to all their friends. The next day that student came in with a smirk on their face. I brought it up to an administrator because we [the student and he] had an argument in the hall about how they're being disrespectful. . . . The parents heard that I had pulled them out into the hall and had a talk with them about respectfulness in the classroom and they emailed me and asked whether there was an issue, I brought it up to my principal and was basically told you should handle this on your own.

For Mr. Q, and for the purpose of this study, this interaction was coded as a negative observation of an LGBTQ+ identity from the perspective of the student, who felt the need to make a man on a date with another man the punchline of a joke. Negative observations also arose from the perspective of the parents when they raised issue with the student being addressed about "outing a staff member," and from the perspective of the administration, from having the mindset of wanting to have this out of their hands and making it the duty of the educator to clear themselves of any association when the inevitable LGBTQ+ backlash arose.

Mrs. I also discussed her lived experience with a parent:

I did have this one parent that talked to me a lot of the time, and he knew I was married, but then when I said my wife, he just immediately stopped

talking to me. It was kind of nice he stopped talking to me, but it was for a really sad and bad reason.

Mrs. I also had a situation arise where a book resulted in her LGBTQ+ identity becoming intertwined into a made-up scenario where the principal had to address the situation:

She [her principal] told me that one of my students had told our janitor at breakfast that one of the books in my classroom made her uncomfortable and scared her. Then, the janitor took that and twisted it all up into a transexual, homosexual thing, like must be one of those indoctrinating stories. He took it to his boss who took it to our assistant superintendent and then that assistant superintendent told my principal who told me . . . that janitor knew that I was married to a woman, so he was like, oh there's a book that makes this child uncomfortable, It's gotta be because of this. . . . It was the farthest thing from the truth. It was just a counting book from my class library, it was about counting dots . . . I was just so angry. I did nothing wrong . . . it's just the fact that maybe now that's what the superintendent thinks of when she hears my name, it's like, oh, that the one that makes kids uncomfortable with books . . . it just makes you wonder, like if that would have happened to my two other colleagues who identify as straight; would that have been handled differently?"

Mr. S also noted how an administrator inadvertently noted their LGBTQ+ identity as inappropriate, thus classifying this interaction as a negative code:

I ordered all these books running the gamut but geared towards elementary . . . books that talk about different structures. There was a page that talks about a kid having two dads or a kid having two moms and my principal said, “I just don't know if these are appropriate for our library,” and there was nothing inappropriate, very innocuous and I looked at her and said, “Are you saying I’m not appropriate for this building?”

The instance noted by Mr. S was another representation of a negative observation of an LGBTQ+ identity in a literary setting that resulted in Mr. S feeling more othered and marginalized because of his identity.

It is important to note that Mr. S was the most publicly out representative of all participants and because of that, some of his experiences lent to his LGBTQ+ identity being noticed by the general public on a large scale. He noted during his run for the school board, he was targeted by Moms for Liberty, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to fight for the survival of America by unifying, educating, and empowering parents to defend their parental rights at all levels of government (Moms for Liberty, 2022). Mr. S noted their interaction as “Just the run of the mill Facebook trolling. You know, I’m a pedophile. I’m a groomer.”

The above statement from Mom’s for Liberty, paired with the other instances of negative in vivo codes indicated how negative perspectives and views of certain groups of individuals get pushed to the forefront and unfortunately, because their voices resonate so loudly, people take note. Given the hostile political climate regarding LGBTQ+ identities, participants’ stories

noted the parental community were those they feared most. The next section examines how participants' perceptions of the parental community impacted their own perception of outness in the profession.

Parental Community Impacts Perceptions of Outness

As noted in the findings of Research Question 1, many participants in this study not only feared the political climate surrounding LGBTQ+ educators and content in the profession, but also feared the people fueling the rhetoric that LGBTQ+ individuals and themes did not belong in an educational setting. This section delves into the various individuals that impacted participants' feelings around their outness in the profession, especially regarding how the parental community impacted their perception of outness.

During the recruitment process, a survey was sent out to collect demographic information. The full details of this survey were discussed in Table 2 of the methodology section of this study. One of the questions asked during the initial recruitment survey was the degree to which the participant perceived their outness in education. The survey question measured outness on a scale of 0–100 with 0 indicating that the individual was not out at all in the field (to staff, students, administrators, and families) and where 100 indicated the participant was openly out in the field.

Of the 10 participants included in this study, half of them indicated they were 100% out in the field. The other five participants indicated outness at 85% or below. When asked about this rating in the semistructured interview, most participants indicated they were out to colleagues, if they knew the setting to be

tolerant and accepting, but every single participant noted some sort of impact to their perception of outness due to potential backlash that could stem from the parental community.

Table 6 details the codes and quotes around the thoughts, perspectives, and experiences of the educators as they related to the theme of the Parental Community Impacts Perceptions of Outness. Codes have been bolded and italicized in the quotes section for further emphasis.

Table 6

Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Parental Community Impacts Perceptions of Outness

| Code | Representative quotes |
|---|--|
| Fear Backlash Parental Reactions | <p>"It would make me nervous and with backlash, I would be nervous of that as well [regarding sending any LGBTQ+ identifying resources home]." – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I still have that fear. You know the day that I am married or like my relationship for whatever reason would come up, like how would parents react to it?" – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> <p>I've had parents that were mad that we did yoga once a month for 30 minutes. And why were they upset about yoga? Because they don't believe in that. . . . There's some sort of movement on the SEL [Social Emotional Learning] voodoo we're doing at school. So, I have a lot of fear about the backlash from families just because of their home belief." – Mrs. +(plus), Educational Leader</p> |
| Inappropriate Biased | <p>"A lot of parents, both in this current district, probably, but then just everywhere hold the sentiment that it's inappropriate to discuss the topic of LGBTQ+ or sexuality in a classroom." – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> <p>"I still think there are some biases towards homosexuals in general in education, especially lately in the state, so I am an out educator, but I am not broadcasting it, especially in elementary education." – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> |

(table continues)

| Code | Representative quotes |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Non-accepting | "Both students were in households where the parents were very nonaccepting , so theoretically they could have signed off for me to do a zoom chat with them, but they didn't." – Mx. T, First-year Educator |
| Conservative Beliefs | "There is that need to [be quiet] because you don't want the ire focusing on you because they learn from their parents ." – Mr. L, Student Teacher |
| Different Perspectives Learned | "I live in a very conservative district, very small minded. I guess they are very afraid of things that are different than what they perceive as traditional values and being in a teaching capacity and being with middle school students [as an LGBTQ+ educator], that can be seen as something that might be a worry for some parents." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator |
| Conservative Beliefs at Home. | "I feel like it would be worse to work with older students [as an LGBTQ+ educator] because if their parents are . . . homophobic or anything, by that time they bring that to school with them ." – Mrs. I, Novice, Educator |
| | "The people I feel the most nervous around are the parents . I do not choose the parents , but I have to be around them [regardless of their perspectives and views]." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator |
| | "I've had very conservative parents [of students], you know, so I'm maybe a little guarded." – Mr. S, Educational Leader |
| Parent Awareness Power | "Even if the school district has your back, sometimes parents can find their way in. They know they have the power ." – Mr. B, First-year Educator |
| | "I didn't know what kids would take back to their parents and what their parents would then take and potentially make into an issue." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator |
| | "[During the pandemic] I know their parents were listening so I was hesitant to talk about it [LGBTQ+ identities]." – Mr. A, Veteran Educator |

Data showed even though 50% of the participant population communicated they were 100% out in the profession, parents had a large impact on swaying thoughts and perspectives on being out in the field. Even acts as minimal as displaying a photo of a same-sex partner on a desk, wearing a rainbow wristwatch, or displaying a pride flag became identifiable representations of immorality and a cause for backlash that created a rip in the fabric of even the most proud and out educator.

Heteronormative Colleagues are Privileged

The next theme was Heteronormative Colleagues are Privileged. However, the question remained whether this was something all educators faced, in addition to wondering whether hiding their personal identity, especially in regard to sexuality and gender, and centering their teacher identity was just part of the profession. NVivo coding of participants' experiences indicated it was not. Table 7 presents the codes and quotes around the thoughts, perspectives, and experiences of the educators as they related to the theme of Heteronormative Colleagues are Privileged.

Table 7*Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Heteronormative Colleagues are Privileged*

| Code | Representative quotes |
|---|--|
| Spouse Talk Wedding Talk Life Outside of School Displaying Life | <p>“Coming from a small town, you don’t want to bring your personal life into the classroom. From my experience, it seems like it is directed at LGBTQ+ educators, rather than straight people who have the giant [expletive] photograph of their wedding and their children and everything versus the few queer teachers who I have talked to who have to be incredibly quiet about their life outside of school.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>“The biggest thing I struggle with is I don’t feel I can be open about my wife. . . . “I do not feel that is something that a male to female relationship has to worry about, but in my classroom, I don’t feel comfortable doing that [displaying a picture].” – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>“I had approached my principal about what I should write in the newsletter because my counterparts were going to talk about their husbands. It wasn’t specifically stated that I shouldn’t write that I am getting married, but it also wasn’t, uh yeah, you should definitely write about getting married to [male partner’s name] and so I did not include that in my back-to-school newsletter. Didn’t have anything about him in there.” – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> <p>“I felt a bit jealous of my colleagues who could say, “here’s my wife or husband. Here’s my kids. Here’s a picture that’s all over my desk and office.” To this day, I still do not have a picture of my partner or family in my office.” – Mrs. +(plus), Educational Leader</p> |
| Pregnancy Expecting | <p>“[regarding discussing real life issues in the classroom] To me there is no difference in talking about how me and my partner are adopting a baby versus [heterosexual colleague’s name] and her husband having a baby next week, but that is something that is on the floor [legislative] and part of the discussion” – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> |
| Scrutiny Double Standards | <p>“Openly trans and LGBTQ+ educators are put under a microscope because they’re scared that they’re going to groom, when the gym teacher is sexting a senior, but because he goes to church every Sunday and has a wife, he is obviously not the problem.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>“If a straight teacher is proud that you’re queer/trans [a student] no one’s like oh they groomed them to be trans, but if [the person who talked to them] is they are like you made them trans.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>“That’s not something that a male and female relationship has to worry about, but you know in my classroom I do not feel comfortable doing that [sharing information about same sex spouse and home life].” – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> |

The following section discusses how participants in this study noted their colleagues had very different lived experiences in regard to portraying the outness of their sexual orientation preference. In vivo coding revealed participants believed the populace as a whole did not quarrel with heteronormative individuals sharing detailed information about their personal life, even if the themes were sexual in nature. Mr. L, a student teacher, noted the following about the theme of Heteronormative Colleagues are Privileged:

Openly trans and LGBTQ+ educators are put under a microscope because they're scared that they're going to groom, when the gym teacher is sexting a senior, but because he goes to church every Sunday and has a wife, he is obviously not the problem.

This perception indicated Mr. L believed because some of his colleagues were cisgender heteronormative individuals, they would not be put under such scrutiny. Thus, society had enacted a double standard, a set of rules one group must follow but other groups, typically more privileged, can cherry pick or completely ignore the rules and do as they please without fear of consequence.

Mr. L furthered the sentiment of an unlevel playing field and double-standards when it came to the expectations of educators, with the privilege in favor of heterosexual educators, when he noted, "If a straight teacher is proud that you're queer/trans [a student] no one's like oh they groomed them to be trans but if [the person who talked to them] is they are like you made them trans." Mr. L was not alone in these feelings that heteronormative colleagues were afforded a privilege.

Mrs. I, a novice educator, stated, “The biggest thing I struggle with is I don’t feel I can be open about my wife.” She noted she was hesitant to display or have conversations about a picture of her spouse and reported “I do not feel that is something that a male to female relationship has to worry about, but in my classroom, I don’t feel comfortable doing that [displaying a picture].” Again, calling back to the code of a double standard being set for the LGBTQ+ community.

Mrs. I not only feared showing a picture of her spouse but also realized she had to be very cognizant of her interactions with the parental community. She recalled a time when a parent came in on a meet the teacher night and stated the following:

I am an investigator and have a very special job. I investigated you and saw your relationship status, and I just want you to know that if anyone ever gives you a hard time, I will take it to the school board.

Although Mrs. I was thrilled at the support offered by this individual, she could not help but to think, “Would you ever say that to a straight person?” Mrs. I noted this scenario did make her “feel thankful as it was a positive one [instance of her LGBTQ+ identity being noticed], but that just doesn’t happen for male–female relationships.”

Mr. A, a veteran educator, also supported the notion that LGBTQ+ individuals were marginalized and afforded less rights than their heterosexual counterparts. Mr. A referenced a time when he approached his principal to ask a question about whether he should put in his back-to-school newsletter for a class

of second graders he would be teaching during the year that he married his male partner. Mr. A had the following to say about the situation:

I had approached my principal about what I should write in the newsletter because my counterparts were going to talk about their husbands. It wasn't specifically stated that I shouldn't write that I am getting married, but it also wasn't, uh yeah, you should definitely write about getting married to [male partner's name] and so I did not include that in my back-to-school newsletter. Didn't have anything about him in there.

Mrs. + (plus), an educational leader, echoed Mr. A's sentiments and recalled a time when they were required to write a letter introducing themselves to their staff:

Oh crap! I don't want to do that! I felt a bit jealous of my colleagues who could say, "here's my wife or husband. Here's my kids. Here's a picture that's all over my desk and office." To this day, I still do not have a picture of my partner or family in my office.

Thus, it is evident the standard for the field, according to participants in this study, was for the queer community to remain quiet, having part of their identity completely erased, but their cisgender heterosexual counterparts were free to parade their identities about the school environment. Heterosexual teachers could display images of their sexual partners without fear of accusation, fearlessly use pronouns to reference their partner, and even celebrate the conception of their offspring (i.e., a blatant reference to sexual acts).

Heterosexual educators had a privilege not afforded to LGBTQ+ educators, and that is the privilege to exist without fear of being attacked for their very existence.

Vagueness, Ambiguity, and Avoidance: Tactics to Conceal a LGBTQ+ Identity

The theme of Vagueness, Ambiguity, and Avoidance discussed how study participants study coped with fear, what caused them to hide their identity, and how they would hide their identity. In vivo coding determined even just the mere mention of a same gender partner's pronoun or presence of an LGBTQ+ pride flag in the classroom could be enough to warrant parental persecution. Therefore, many of the educators in this study considered their outness to live a life of duality in professional contexts.

Mr. L, a student teacher, noted he was often very quiet about his trans identity because of the fear and standards set by the field. He stated:

I am open, but I am also terrified of being more open . . . there is almost a need to be hidden . . . I don't want someone to look at me and go, "Are you sure you're fit to be an educator?"

The fear of being seen as unfit to be an educator arose during the dramaturgical coding process as a conflict to being an out educator. But clearly, the educators could not just succumb to the fear. They had to use tactics to navigate the various conflicts presented to them, because at the end of the day, the district hired them to do a job and that was to be present for the students. Thus, participants got creative and used ambiguity or vagueness to hint at their outness, but not outright say anything blatant that could get them in trouble.

Table 8 details the theme of Vagueness, Ambiguity, and Avoidance with codes and quotes pertaining to how study participants used vague statements, ambiguity, and avoidance to mask, cover, or completely erase various aspects of their LGBTQ+ identity. Codes in the quotes column of the table have been bolded and italicized for emphasis.

Table 8

Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Vagueness, Ambiguity, and Avoidance

| Code | Representative quotes |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Quiet | <p>"Right now, I am a lot <i>quieter</i> about it [his trans identity] because it's what your mentor teacher believes." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I had taught 6 years at my school before I even told my closest teammates and teammates that I was dating somebody. . . . I just kind of played by the book and kept <i>quiet</i>." – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> |
| Pronouns | <p>"I would never refer to my partner and I have had the same significant other for almost 5 years at this point, but I would never refer to him with <i>pronouns</i>." – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> <p>"If a student asks 'Are you married? Do you have a girlfriend?' I don't outright say no, I'll say no I'm not seeing anyone or something like that and vaguely use <i>pronouns</i> differently. Not being so direct with <i>pronouns</i>." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> |
| Avoid Hide/ Hidden Erase | <p>"It's easier <i>hiding</i> that you're gay than it is that you're trans, because medically my administration is going to find out because they have to do a background check. . . . I cannot really <i>hide</i> it, I just hope to be more openly out and proud of it rather than <i>hiding</i> it in a corner [like he does now out of respect for mentor teacher]." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I am open, but I am also terrified of being more open . . . there is almost a need to be <i>hidden</i> . . . I don't want someone to look at me and go, 'Are you sure you're fit to be an educator?'" – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I had a resume coach tell me that I should <i>cut all the LGBTQ+ stuff off my resume</i> . . . and I did, while crying the whole time, but I did get the interview." – Mx. T, First-year Educator</p> <p>"<i>Hiding</i> it gave me an illusion of safety." – Mrs. +(plus), Educational Leader</p> |

(table continues)

| Code | Representative quotes |
|--|---|
| Vagueness | <p>"Being incredibly vague when they bring up something that happened to me pretransition, like do not mention I was a girl." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I talk about my life in the vaguest of terms because students are smart and they pick up on a lot, and if I go too in depth, they might just figure it out and think he's transgender! I better tell my parents!" – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"If a student asks 'Are you married? Do you have a girlfriend?' I don't outright say no, I'll say no I'm not seeing anyone or something like that and vaguely use pronouns differently. Not being so direct with pronouns." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"If I am dating someone [and I refer to them in class], I would say my 'friend' instead of my boyfriend to refer to him." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"I didn't feel like I could show pictures [after her wedding] or talk to them about my spouse. Thankfully, my wife's name is [gender neutral name], so I could at least say her name, but never once showed them pictures just for fear." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> |
| Do you have a boyfriend/ girlfriend? The answer is no / No. | <p>"It's basically not mentioning that [relationship with same sex partner] and staying on topic. 'Oh, no I am not dating anybody . . . have you heard about the civil war?'" – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"If a student asks 'Are you married? Do you have a girlfriend?' I don't outright say no, I'll say no I'm not seeing anyone or something like that and vaguely use pronouns differently. Not being so direct with pronouns." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"I have been perpetually single and when the students ask 'are you married? Do you have a boyfriend?' The answer is always no, and that being said, I don't go any further into it." – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> |

Data analysis revealed although 5 of the 10 educators indicated they were out 100% in the profession, in some environments and instances, these educators felt the need to downplay their LGBTQ+ identity by distracting, intentionally using vague terminology, or avoiding the topic altogether. However, the question remained whether there was constantly the need to downplay, avoid or conceal and cover their LGBTQ+ identity. Participants' lived experiences indicated many factors influenced the use of the aforementioned tactics and

revealed outness was a situational phenomenon. The theme of Outness as a Situational Phenomenon is discussed in the next section of this study.

Outness is Situational

Dramaturgical coding indicated the most frequent tactic used by LGBTQ+ individuals in the profession was that of downplaying, covering, or the concealment of parts, if not all of their LGBTQ+ identity, but there was a caveat to when these tactics were employed. Most participants indicated the presentation of their outness was situational in nature and was gauged on the thoughts, perceptions, and most importantly, political leanings of the individuals with whom they were interacting.

During in vivo coding, data revealed participants constantly surveyed and gauged their environments and surroundings to determine whether to let their outness out in the open or to conceal, cover, and employ any tactic necessary to avoid the topic of their LGBTQ+ identity. Table 9 includes codes and quotes for the theme of Outness is Situational.

Table 9*Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Outness is Situational*

| Code | Representative quotes |
|--|--|
| Environmental Outness: Geographically Demographically | <p>"It definitely depends on the environment, there are definitely environments where I am a bit quieter about it [LGBTQ+ identity]." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I am not hiding who I am by any means. There are teachers that know I have a husband and there are teachers that are just like, yeah, he's the tech coach for the district. So, it just depends on who I am with." –Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> <p>"When I introduce myself to parents, I don't say Hey I'm Mr. S and I'm gay. Coming out is situational. I've had very conservative parents where I'm maybe a little more guarded." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> <p>"I think my whole staff knows I'm gay and my district knows I'm gay, so that has been pretty safe in that area and I would guess that families know, but I would not necessarily be out with elementary students." – Mrs. +(plus), Educational Leader</p> |
| Support Accepting Open Comfortable | <p>"While I am openly trans, there are times I do not want to completely project that because with how bad the atmosphere has gotten around trans individuals, I do not want to have to deal with that every day." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"However, it [LGBTQ+ identity] is open and haven't really talked to anyone at the schools [staff] where I felt the need to be uncomfortable coming out about it." – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I'm hesitant to be more open about it because I do not want them [parents] to not support me or feel like I might not be a good" – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I'm open about it and whenever a student has a question about it [LGBTQ+ identity] I am more than willing to speak with them and share." – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> <p>"Supportive administration is a big thing I paid close attention to before even accepting a position. Do I feel safe, seen and heard when I talk to these administrators? Yes. It's been a very safe, and supportive environment." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>"[Teammates] totally accepting and everything, but I mean they had noticed my relationship status [on Facebook] and kind of danced around it and didn't know how to comfortably bring it up." – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> |

(table continues)

| Code | Representative quotes |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Fear Nervous for Safety Worried | <p>"There is fear of I don't want anyone to get hurt because I said something [about being LGBTQ+]." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"Supportive administration is a big thing I paid close attention to before even accepting a position. Do I feel safe, seen and heard when I talk to these administrators? Yes. It's been a very safe, and supportive environment." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>"The people I always feel the most nervous around are the parents, because I don't choose those parents, but I have to be around them, I just have to be." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>"With my experience, just the way the people around me talked about the LGBTQ+ community, I felt even more afraid than I already was to be myself....How am I going to be perceived by these parents? I think I still have that fear." – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> <p>"There's been times I've heard language used from my superiors like 'how is your friend doing? [referring to wife].' I am usually forgiving and laugh it off, but it makes me feel more othered and nervous because they do not have the words for you." – Mrs.+(plus), Educational Leader</p> |
| Conservative beliefs Anti-LGBTQ+ | <p>"The majority of the kids in the classes that I have taught were relatively conservative. They do not tell you outright, but as you are walking around the class you hear what they are talking about, and when they are basically shouting 'MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN,' I will not be devolving my experience as a trans man to them." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"There were some students who were very vocally anti-queer, anti-trans, and my general tactical approach to that was to engage them as much as reasonably possible in order to disarm through normality." – Mx. T, First-year Educator</p> <p>"I feel like if I were to come out to the public in general, I think that I could possibly lose my job and I think that it would be a very bad reaction [due to conservative rural nature of the school environment]." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"When I introduce myself to parents, I don't say Hey I'm Mr. S and I'm gay. Coming out is situational. I've had very conservative parents where I'm maybe a little more guarded." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> |
| Unashamed | <p>"I do not think that I tried to cover it . . . I didn't want to communicate in any way that there was anything to be ashamed of." – Mx. T, First-year Educator</p> |
| Struggle | <p>"I struggle with not being able to be myself, but at the same time it's part of where I'm at in life right now." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> |

Dramaturgical coding of the codes and quotes in Table 9 revealed various tactics and rationale for situational outness, the first being safety. Participants indicated they did not want to lose their careers or put themselves or loved ones in jeopardy of any emotional or physical harm due to reactions to their LGBTQ+ identity. Two participants even cited a recent mass shooting that targeted the LGBTQ+ community as a reason for downplaying portions of their LGBTQ+ identity.

The second tactic was to protect their teacher identity reputation. Participants did not want to be othered or viewed as unfit and immoral representations for the student populations that they teach; thus, if these environments presented themselves, educators downplayed or covered aspects of their identity. Finally, in scenarios where the environment was known to be supportive, educators were able to let their pride flag fly high. The caveat was the knowledge and proof that school staff and administration were supportive and would have their backs. The next section dives into the theme of how Participants Underwent an Evolution of Outness while navigating how their outness fit into their professional career path trajectory.

Participants Underwent an Evolution of Outness

This section addresses how participants divulged they underwent an evolutionary process during their career as an educator. Participants noted their outness was completely hidden and something deemed “inappropriate” or a topic that was not ever discussed during their teacher preparation programs. There existed a societal standard in the minds of the participants that LGBTQ+

educators were not welcome or suited to be in the teaching profession. Table 10 includes codes and quotes that supported the theme of Participants Underwent an Evolution of Outness and specific codes are bolded and italicized in the quotes.

Table 10*Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Evolution of Outness*

| Code | Representative quotes |
|---|--|
| Discomfort Nervous at First Not Ready | <p>"[at their first school] I was just kind of nervous, but now I've got inclusive visuals, a pride flag on my desk, and just other visuals around the room . . . 2 years ago I was maybe shying away from that kind of identity, but now I feel comfortable a place where I am able to embrace it." – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> <p>"During my first leveled experiences, none of that [LGBTQ+ identity] was mentioned. Just being new to the field, I didn't feel comfortable sharing that information. . . . I definitely kept it to myself for the most part." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> |
| Closeted | <p>"I was closeted during college... "I just wasn't ready. It took me until I was 29 to come out." – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> <p>"During college I was not out.... I was even more closeted [during 1st year of teaching]. I moved to Colorado Springs . . . that's a very conservative town." – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> <p>"[During initial years] I was not fully out at all. I was very guarded professionally." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> <p>"Teacher preparation would be no outness. I was discovering my sexuality at that time and wrestling with my conservative Christian background." – Mrs.+(plus), Educational Leader</p> |
| Comfortable | <p>"2 years ago I was maybe shying away from that kind of identity, but now I feel comfortable. I am in a place where I am able to embrace it." – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> <p>"I definitely feel more comfortable talking about it or at least I sometimes will say 'Oh my wife [Name] and I did this this weekend.'" – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>"It was a combination of both my individual growth and becoming more comfortable in the situation." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> |
| Evolved Progressive Accepting | <p>"Schools in general are more open and accepting now." – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>"It definitely has evolved because as a teacher, I worked in Colorado and dated guys, I did everything people have ever tried to present as heterosexual, and then when I moved back to Iowa, I probably wouldn't have identified as much, When I went to do work on my masters, I talked to [Professors name] and he was just a really safe person to talk to and wrestle with how I identify" [it is important to note that this professor is a member of the LGBTQ+ community]. – Mrs.+(plus), Educational Leader</p> |

After analyzing the codes presented in Table 10, the dramaturgical coding for this evolution became quite obvious. Individuals who underwent an evolutionary process did so to be more visible and show students that outness was not something to be feared, but something that could be embraced and used to decenter heteronormativity, which could give the LGBTQ+ community space for representation and the ability to have a voice. Many participants gave the LGBTQ+ community space by displaying visual indicators of their sexual identity (i.e., pride flags, safe space stickers, photos of partners) and others amplified their voice by seeking out educational opportunities and LGBTQ+ mentors who can share in their experiences. It is also important to note that participants from more recent generations did not have much to say about how their outness evolved because they believed the world to be a more accepting place of various diverse identities. The next section dives deeper into the various ways in which educators were or were not enacting Queertical Theory in the profession.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked: (a) What are teachers' experiences with disempowering dominant ideologies? and (b) How are they or are they not interrupting heteronormative standards? This section examines how educators attempted to disempower heteronormativity in the classroom by means of bringing LGBTQ+ perspectives and identities to the center of a classroom lesson. Analysis of participants' lived experiences and perceptions of Queertical Theory enactment led to the following themes: (a) Enacting Queertical Theory is

Important (b) Educators are Equally Compelled and Conflicted, and finally, (c) Educators are Hopeful.

Enacting Queertical Theory is Important

Dramaturgical coding revealed participants valued their LGBTQ+ intersectionality, as noted in Research Question 1, and used LGBTQ+ themes and representation during “teachable moments,” to help students understand an LGBTQ+ identity was not something to be feared or ostracized. Participants were able to convey this message through providing students with literature and other resources full of LGBTQ+ representations and by addressing biased statements and moments in class. Table 11 includes codes and quotes related to the theme of Enacting Queertical Theory is Important. Codes in the quotes have been bolded and italicized for emphasis.

Table 11*Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Enacting Queertical Theory is Important*

| Code | Representative quotes |
|---|---|
| Support | <p>"I want to be that positive beacon of support, because it's important to know that you have at least one person in your corner." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I was able to sympathize with a student who is LGBTQ+ and then use a little authority to kind of support and be their mouthpiece and help them achieve something [in regard to a restroom situation that arose at school]." – Mr. B, First Year Educator</p> |
| Openness Welcoming | <p>"I think that a level of openness and responsiveness was really important to me and I wanted to communicate that there was not anything shameful about any part of me." – Mx. T, First-year Educator</p> <p>"I try to make my teaching in my classroom like preparation for the world, but also for them to feel welcome and that all identities are welcome..." – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> |
| Teachable Moment | <p>"We had two students who identify as nonbinary and when it was brought up, we had a teachable moment of sort of the meaning of that in kid friendly terms." – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I have had very intentional conversations with them or teachable moments [about gender preferences and norms]." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>"We have had teachable moments, of how families look different." – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> |
| General Diversity or Representation | <p>"I make it [lessons about diversity/ LGBTQ+ rights] general about accepting others' differences and I try to approach it in a way that lets students know it's ok to have your own feelings about a topic, but it's not ok to make others feel bad about the way that they are." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"I make sure my classroom library is representative because that's something I empower." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> |

(table continues)

| Code | Representative quotes |
|---|---|
| Explicit or Covert: LGBTQ+ Representation | <p>"I had a book, and <i>it doesn't right say that the character in the book is queer, but it does talk about how she doesn't want to dress feminine and she wants to dress comfortable</i>, it's called <i>Annie's Plaid Shirt</i>. That was a moment of explaining gender almost, that some people just aren't comfortable in dresses or suits and this." – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>*covert LGBTQ+ representation</p> <p>"I try to find ways of having these conversations [about LGBTQ+ Identities] with them <i>without them even knowing</i>." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator</p> <p>*covert LGBTQ+ representation</p> <p>"Towards the end of the year, we would have dance parties [online] and <i>my husband would come up behind me and dance. They loved him more than they loved me!</i>" – Mr. A, Veteran Educator</p> <p>*explicit LGBTQ+ representation</p> <p>"We have had teachable moments, of how <i>families look different</i>." – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> <p>*explicit LGBTQ+ representation</p> |
| Advocating Actions | <p>"I had to <i>send an email</i> to my advisor and the president of the education department <i>to let them know that a term is not the right term</i>. [The term being tranny or transvestite]." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I <i>answer questions</i> and <i>speak up</i> about issues pertinent to transness and queerness when relevant." – Mx. T, First-year Educator</p> <p>"Calling someone gay is not ok in my class. <i>I am going to stand up and I am going to say we don't use that word</i> [like that] or talk negatively about other people in my classroom." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator</p> <p>"My kiddo never saw representation of our family his entire elementary career and that breaks my heart, <i>so I feel like I've got to fight to do that</i>." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> |

It is important to note that although the educators referenced teaching about diversity and fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment, they did so in the vaguest of forms, because there was still the fear of the potential backlash that could arise from the parental community. Therefore, as mentioned in Research Questions 2 and 3, participants used ambiguity and avoidance to downplay/cover an LGBTQ+ topics, but still have teachable moments.

It is also significant to note that participants chose their words very wisely. Staying from the term lesson or unit regarding teaching about diversity of LGBTQ+ identities, but instead chose to talk about how these were “teachable moments” or “conversations.” Their words were an example of another employ of ambiguity to mask the teaching of content that some may have perceived as inappropriate or unwarranted in the classroom setting.

The next section explores the feelings teachers had around truly using critical theory tenets to teach a unit centering LGBTQ+ identities and content. It examines how their objectives of being an out representative and educator of diverse content that fostered an inclusive classroom environment compounded with the harsh political climate, where dissenting perspectives were seeking to dehumanize and erase LGBTQ+ identities and topics from school environments.

Educators are Equally Compelled and Conflicted

As noted in Research Question 2, educators feared the parental community and their power to speak out against LGBTQ+ themes and topics being presented, represented, and even in existence in a school community. NVivo coding revealed LGBTQ+ educators were motivated and compelled to teach diverse content with the desire to focus on LGBTQ+ identities and topics. However, they were hindered by the political climate and perspectives that LGBTQ+ identities were inappropriate or that there was some sort of woke agenda to present this type of information to students to turn them into a member of the LGBTQ+ community or to fulfill a perverted desire.

Table 12 includes codes and quotes made by participants from the theme of Educators are Compelled and Conflicted. Participants desired facilitation of lessons that were representative of all identities, especially LGBTQ+ identities, but often felt they were at odds with the political climate surrounding the topic of LGBTQ+ themes and content in education. The codes displayed in Table 12 have been bolded and italicized in the quotes column for emphasis.

Table 12

Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Being Compelled and Convicted

| Code | Representative quotes |
|--|---|
| Important Meaningful It's O.K. Motivating | <p>"but there are going to be queer students in my class whether the be in the closet or out and I do not want to see them seeing hatred towards an authority figure who is just trying to make life better or just trying to teach them here's the stonewall riot and here is why it was so <i>important.</i>" – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I know that it is something that is <i>meaningful</i> for the kids that are hearing it especially when we are talking about when I know it affects students [who identify as nonbinary] in my class. I think it <i>means</i> more, I know I am helping these kids try to get a better understanding so that other kids can feel safe and able to be around others and not be scared to be around their peers." – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>"[If laws get put into place] It's something that I'll have to think about and when we get to that road where there's a gag order, so to speak, that we can't say anything about sexuality and LGBTQ+ issues in the classroom. . . . <i>If we don't [speak about our issues] they become forgotten, and unimportant,</i> and it's our jobs as educators to remind people of those issues." – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> <p>"The political climate is hugely <i>motivating</i> on a moral philosophical social level, and hugely <i>demotivating</i>/ hindering at a practical level. I am in touch with a number of trans and queer folks, including a handful in education and just kind of trying to see what they're up to as well, but I'm trying really hard not to feel despair." – Mx. T, First-year Educator</p> <p>"I think that it is <i>very important</i> [LGBTQ+ content/ themes/ representation], but with the political climate and how conservative my community is I do not think that would ever be a possibility for a small town . . . which is sad because there are definitely kids that need that</p> |

| Code | Representative quotes |
|--|--|
| Grooming Indoctrination Other accusations | figure within the community, but if the community doesn't want that figure out there, they're going to do everything they can to try and get rid of that figure within that community." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator |
| | "If I was back in the regular ed classroom, instead of doing my coaching work, I probably would do a little more of it just because kids need to know <i>it's ok to be different</i> to know <i>it's ok to not be the same as everyone else</i> and that your family life might look different." – Mr. A, Veteran Educator |
| | "I would say [the political climate motivates] <i>more [motivates] rather than it hinders</i> . I feel like I could be doing more direct things, like I said I'll put books in my classroom library, or you know sneak in representation, but it's not that I have direct instruction or direct conversation." – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator |
| | "[fears] The people that are calling for transgender people's heads, the people that are <i>calling us groomers</i> because god forbid, we mention being queer around a child." – Mr. L, Student Teacher |
| | "My family got <i>death threats</i> [when a situation about their transness arose when they were in school] because I was a minor . . . There's a comment that sticks out in my mind and that is ' <i>its parents should be shot</i> .' " – Mr. L, Student Teacher |
| Fear of being fired Termination | "Right now, the political climate is very negative towards educators, they're really worried about us <i>indoctrinating</i> kids and so I guess to try and make it seem like we're not doing that so I try to stay more in the middle and not make anything about values." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator |
| | "I definitely want to [center LGBTQ+ themes], I just want to find ways to talk about it and get that in the kids' brains without it being <i>indoctrinating</i> ." – Mrs. I, Novice Educator |
| | "I want to try and do that [Center LGBTQ+ themes in the future]. . . . If I have time and if I will not absolutely <i>get fired</i> or called a diddler on Facebook." – Mr. L, Student Teacher |
| | "If anything, I've tried to stay away from it [centering LGBTQ+ identities, content, etc.], which is sad but to try and kind of protect myself as a teacher. <i>I don't want to worry about losing my job</i> . I'll make it more general and about accepting others differences." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator |
| | "If I have the backing of my school board, principal, and superintendent then yes [would implement LGBTQ+ centered lessons], but If I do not have those backing me, <i>I do not want to end up putting my job in jeopardy</i> ." – Mr. Q, Novice Educator |
| | "[In regard to the political climate] it makes me want to, [enact LGBTQ+ |

| Code | Representative quotes |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| | lessons/ Queertical Theory] but then it makes me more afraid to, you know, just with the shootings that are going on and how parents are taking all of these words and getting them twisted and these teachers getting fired and in trouble .”– Mrs. I, Novice Educator |
| Fear Nervous Scared Worried | <p>“I’d say the fear hinders me absolutely, even though I want to push forward, it’s just also that I want to know that someone has my back like in the form of other teachers or my administration, when I do a kind of bare bones lesson about, “Hey, here’s a queer person that existed,” that kind of fear over all hinders, but it makes me want to push forward because I think is important that kids know that there are openly LGBTQ+ educators out there, that we do exist as adults, that they’re not alone.” – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>“It makes me feel a little bit nervous that I might mess up [teaching LGBTQ+ themes].” – Ms. G, Student Teacher</p> <p>“[In regard to why they do not have direct instruction/ conversation] I think the potential backlash scares me. I don’t know how they’re going to react. I don’t know their reaction.” – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator</p> <p>“I think there’s always a little bit of fear there.” – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> |

Analysis of the in-vivo codes and quotes from Table 12 and the dramaturgical coding revealed educators had the desire to implement tenets of Queertical Theory but were hesitant to do so for various reasons that presented themselves as conflicts during dramaturgical coding. Those conflicts are as follows: (a) laws and legislation are mandating the erasure of this type of content, (b) parental and community reactions from conservative perspectives, and (c) punitive action or termination as a result of Queertical Theory enactment. Participants noted how important they believed the enactment of this type of theory to be in regard to students wellbeing, especially students who identify as LGBTQ+, but unfortunately, as many of the participants noted, “their hands are tied.” But this does not mean that they have given up all hope. The next section

discusses participants' perceptions of the future of education as it related to LGBTQ+ identities and enactments of queertheory.

Educators are Hopeful

The themes and sentiments noted by participants were harrowing. The political rhetoric surrounding LGBTQ+ identities from those who hold conservative views were reminiscent of those held by the individuals who launched and signaled for the 1920s era witch hunt of anything LGBTQ+. Nonetheless, participants noted hope for the future. Mr. B and Mx. T, both First-year educators, even went as far as to vow to continue to advocate and fight the fight for LGBTQ+ representation and presence in the educational community, regardless of impending laws and governmental mandates. Table 13 includes codes and quotes directly stated by participants that communicated theme of Educators are Hopeful. Codes from the table have been bolded and italicized within the quotes section for emphasis.

Table 13

Codes and Quotes for the Theme of Educators are Hopeful

| Code | Representative quotes |
|---------------|---|
| Hope Happy | <p>"I know I sound founded in fear because there is a lot of fear I view going into education, but I also know there are plenty of people that are working to change that, and I hope to become one of them." – Mr. T, Student Teacher</p> <p>"The situation is fearful now, but I am hoping that in the future that myself and other trans educators can push forward into a brighter day." – Mr. L, Student Teacher</p> <p>"I thought my sexuality was something that I have to shy away from, and I am happy to say that I was wrong." – Mr. B, First-year Educator</p> |

| Code | Representative quotes |
|---|--|
| Change Shifting More open Accepting Supportive | “I do think times are shifting. I hope for the better. I hope our government gets their [expletive] together and codifies same sex marriage. I hope they can figure it out.” – Mr. A, Veteran Educator |
| | “I think I’m more sensitive or aware of diverse populations and making sure that all my kids at school and my staff members feel safe to be who they are, and our parents feel comfortable being who they are, and hopefully we are creating a better world that is safe and inclusive for all as the years go on.” – Mrs. +(plus), Educational Leader |
| | “I know I sound founded in fear because there is a lot of fear I view going into education, but I also know there are plenty of people that are working to change that, and I hope to become one of them.” – Mr. T, Student Teacher |
| | “I see little stuff around the school all the time, like someone put up sticky notes that say ‘Be gay, don’t do crime!’ and there were quite a few [post its]. . . . It’s more open and accepting now.” – Ms. G, Student Teacher |
| Advocation Action/Next step Need for More Goals | “Something that has been really cool for me to see is the amount of support within the buildings. There are posters of things everywhere. I saw one today that said trans students belong in sports or everyone is loved here and just everything you can think of. It was plastered all over the school. I just feel it’s a very supportive environment. It’s been interesting to see the difference between the schools here and in a small community. I think it all shows where were at [in regard to accepting LGBTQ+ identities].” – Ms. G, Student Teacher |
| | “I do think times are shifting . I know that there is a brand new baby teacher in one of my buildings. They are in year 3. She has a wife, and I am like, that is so awesome. I have not asked her if she talks about that with her students because she teaches even smaller kids, but I do think times are shifting . I hope for the better. I hope our government gets their [expletive] together and codifies same sex marriage. I hope they can figure it out.” – Mr. A, Veteran Educator |
| | “If nothing else, I know I have my little free teachers pay teachers page that right now is just a whole bunch of financial literacy lessons for high school, but if nothing else, I can make a whole bunch of lessons and content [LGBTQ+ topics] and stick it out there for free to try and see what it can doThis work is important because there are very well meaning, cis hetero teachers who get a lot of really basic stuff wrong . . . so I can get some stuff out there that’s trans authored or pointing towards other trans authored or different intersecting identities.” – Mx. T, First-year Educator |
| | “A goal of mine is to have more open conversations about it [LGBTQ+ representation].” – Mrs. I, Novice Educator |
| | “I think I need to advocate more...I am not the only queer teacher in my building” – Ms. 2, Veteran Educator |

| Code | Representative quotes |
|--|---|
| | <p>"I think my next action steps are to talk to the junior high because they [her children] were recently targeted in junior high because of our relationship . . . just hearing that word gay is being used all the time, like that's so gay, you're so gay . . . so my next step is to talk to the junior high on what they are doing, but I also understand that we need to do our part at the elementary level." – Mrs. +(plus), Educational Leader</p> |
| Justice Equality Collaborative Activism | <p>"I have the privilege and sense of entitlement that comes with being cisgender male and the fire for justice and equity that comes with being part of a marginalized community." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> <p>"There's the activism thing, but then the most impactful thing is going to be a kid who remembers Mr. S and all the rainbows [LGBTQ+ representation]." – Mr. S, Educational Leader</p> <p>"I need to get some reflection on all of this as well, to make sure we do it equally and collaboratively and it's not just my agenda." – Mrs. +(plus), Educational Leader</p> |

Thus, despite all the fear and the heated debate surrounding LGBTQ+ identities, educators were still hopeful, and ready to advocate. However, there were certain stipulations and conditions that existed with this hope. The NVivo codes in Table 13 revealed participants of this study believed school environment (i.e., rural, suburban, and metro), allyship, and political ideation of the surrounding community to be important. They believed all factors contributed to how high their pride flags could fly; however, for a majority of the participants, at the end of the day the flag was still there, and that visibility resonated deeply in anyone from the LGBTQ+ community or any other marginalized group.

Summary

To summarize, the current study revealed educators' main objectives, as determined by dramaturgical coding, were to act as an out representative in the educational community, but many conflicts arose that inhibited and continued to inhibit participants from being 100% out in the profession. Those conflicts were

noted as the increasing politicization of LGBTQ+ identities brought about by outness being noticed and conversely criticized by the parental community.

Dramaturgical coding of the in-vivo codes and quotes revealed that to combat criticisms, participants used ambiguity and avoidance to downplay their LGBTQ+ identity, which they reported being oppressive as they noted their heteronormative colleagues did not have to even consider adapting the same type of tactics. Thus, not needing to use ambiguity and avoidance to downplay their LGBTQ+ identity implied a privilege afforded to their heteronormative colleagues.

The study also found participants' outness was highly situational. If the individual could ensure support, allyship, and aligned political views and perspectives, they would not implement the aforementioned tactics of ambiguity or downplaying to pass as heteronormative. However, if the environment proved to be divergent from the political outlook of tolerance for LGBTQ+ and other marginalized individuals, then the pride flags went down and their heteronormative shields and passing tactics were raised.

It is important to note that LGBTQ+ participants underwent an evolutionary process while navigating their outness in the profession. Participants reported early on in their career, as early as student teaching, they felt the need to hide their sexuality or gender identity because it was “not professional,” but with time, and in the absence of hateful rhetoric and notions that LGBTQ+ educators are unfit to teach, participants noted they revealed more of their LGBTQ+ identity and felt safer to be their authentic selves.

However, when asked about implementing LGBTQ+ content and themes, educators still felt the need to use tactics of ambiguity, vagueness, or even outright avoidance. They continually advocated for the importance of LGBTQ+ representation, but the formidable and Herculean political agenda of the more conservative and religious general public caused and continued to cause great turmoil for the participants. They desired to enact tenets of Queertical Theory, they wanted to interrupt heteronormative standards, and they wanted to offer critiques for the inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities to propel education into a more accepting and inclusive future. However, the many laws, mandates, pending legislations, and amplified voices encumbered this desire. Alas, they backslid into common tactics to keep themselves and others who identify as LGBTQ+ individuals safe in the educational realm. Thus, their pride of being LGBTQ+ and desire to be a representative and teach LGBTQ+ content became incongruent due to the highly politicized media attention of anything remotely LGBTQ+ in an educational context.

Nevertheless, this study's participants noted hope for the future; they hoped their action, paired with the action of others, will help to advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ themes and tenets within education. They hoped one day their pride flags do not need to be veiled and with the help of various allies and advocates, they could someday truly be OUT representatives, role models, and educators in education.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Future Research

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences and perceptions of outness that LGBTQ+ educators have while working in the field of education. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings as it relates to the field of literature on LGBTQ+ educators in the workplace and the literature from the literature review. This section concludes with a discussion of the implications and limitations of the study, areas for future research, and concludes with a brief summary highlighting the importance of the findings and the study.

Research Question # 1

Research Question 1 asked, What are the nuanced perceptions of LGBTQ+ educators with intersecting identities in education? The findings of this study revealed LGBTQ+ educators valued their identity in the profession and often used their identity as a vessel to represent the presence of LGBTQ+ identities in the educational setting.

Calzo and Ward (2009) supported the idea that LGBTQ+ identity can be a vessel to represent LGBTQ+ presence and noted “the pattern of correlations presents strong evidence of the mainstreaming effect of media use on [attitudes of acceptance towards homosexuality]” (p. 293). Therefore, the same notions of representation can apply to educators who serve students in the heteronormative school systems of today. Representation of their LGBTQ+ affiliation, or outness, can potentially have a large impact on students’ beliefs and values toward LGBTQ+ individuals. This study found participants believed their intersectionality

of LGBTQ+ individual and educator and its visibility was important for youth, staff, faculty, and community members, both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+, alike.

However, as Jenlink (2019) noted, “integrating their role as an educator is often impelled and impeded by several factors, including community atmosphere, school culture, family status, and a heteronormative view of who should and who should not be a teacher” (p. 1). The lived experiences of participants indicated their LGBTQ+ identity had become increasingly politicized and made some participants question the proud portrayal of their intersectionality.

LGBTQ+ individuals stand out in a world where they are expected to fit into the heteronormative standards in which educational institutions are grounded, and, as such, they become the target of hate, discrimination, harassment, and physical attacks. Nearly 24% of youth experience school victimization at least once and nearly 9% experience weekly victimization (Nansel et al., 2001). As a result, certain viewpoints and perspectives are attempting to remove LGBTQ+ identities from the educational setting entirely, making it a dangerous time to be LGBTQ+ and simply exist in an educational setting, let alone educate on the topic.

Lugg and Moten (2015) stated for nearly 100 years, schools in the United States have been concerned with the removal of queer identity. Queer adults, youth, or any information that could remotely be perceived as queer have all faced eradication, erasure, and/or silence due to fear of what perversions an LGBTQ+ educator might implement upon the students in their educational setting. Waller (1932) even went so far as to relay to the public that an

educational system could be catapulted into a ruinous state just by the presence of one LGBTQ+ identifying individual. According to this study's participants, these sentiments from the 1920s–1950s were still alive and made the LGBTQ+ community unwell and afraid to verbally, physically, or in any way portray their LGBTQ+ affiliation. The question next looks at how participants reacted to this hateful rhetoric. The next section examines participants' nuanced perceptions of outness and to what extent they choose to cover or not to cover their LGBTQ+ identity in professional settings.

Research Questions # 2 and 3

Research Question 2 asked, What are LGBTQ+ educators' nuanced perceptions of outness? And, To what extent do LGBTQ+ educators choose or not choose to participate in the act of covering? It was evident, from the findings of this study, that LGBTQ+ identities were being noticed in educational classrooms, whether good, bad, and otherwise. Participants noted times when they felt comfortable sharing their LGBTQ+ identity, chronicled how representation impacted students to be their authentic self, and, conversely, noted how observation of the LGBTQ+ identity caused them to employ ambiguity, vagueness, or completely avoid and erase the topic altogether.

MacCharles (2020) found covering involved a constant, conscious effort on the part of marginalized individuals, which could come at a steep personal cost, while also giving them sought after rewards. Many participants of the current study noted their “sought after reward” was that of job permanency, and thus, they implemented various strategies and tactics to cover, conceal, and

downplay certain elements of their identity to reap the benefits. The current study's findings also indicated LGBTQ+ participants noticed the privilege afforded to their heteronormative counterparts and participated in tactics to pass as heteronormative in the professional setting, donning their teacher drag to robe and disrobe as necessary to conceal an othered identity (Davis & Sumara, 2000).

Catalyst (2014) noted the act of covering or passing minimizes the difference between the person covering and the majority heteronormative population at large. Thus, by covering their LGBTQ+ identity, many participants of the current study who participated in this tactic were made malleable, preserving their LGBTQ+ identity while still presenting as heteronormative to the general populace. Covering, as McCharles (2020) noted, comes at a steep personal cost to not only the individual, but also to all as it is depriving the school community from a "zone of possibilities" (as cited in Edelman, 1994, p. 114) to learn from perspectives and individuals whose viewpoints diverge from their own.

However, the question remained as to why individuals participated in covering. This study indicated participants chose to cover or not cover their identity based on surveillance of the political atmosphere surrounding their school and community at large. If the school and surrounding community embraced the LGBTQ+ individual, they embraced their identity and made no efforts to conceal, hide, avoid, or downplay any aspect of their queerness. However, if the political climate proved to be unsafe, individuals implemented all the previously mentioned tactics.

The amplified voices that launched participants into conceal, do not reveal mode stemmed from the parental community. Participants noted how many voices in the community made it clear that LGBTQ+ individuals were not fit to be in the field. They were called pedophiles, groomers, and accused of indoctrination. Teachers and other opposing groups have consistently expressed a “belief that sexuality is not the concern of teachers or of schools” (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2002, p. 121).

The belief system that LGBTQ+ identities should be oppressed, marginalized, and erased from education are not letting up, and as this study found, have shaped their experiences. Participants noted the negative rhetoric forced them to perceive their outness as a duality; however, in the appropriate (i.e., supportive, allied, and advocating) setting this was not the case. When anti-LGBTQ+ themes reigned supreme, LGBTQ+ educators existed, but only in their personal life. In the professional setting, they were simply just an educator, not an LGBTQ+ educator.

Haddad (2019) further supported the notion of a dual identity in education and noted an emergent theme in literature regarding LGBTQ+ educators living a duplicitous life. Teachers put forth effort to keep their personal and professional lives separate. It is important to note that efforts appeared to lessen as the teachers came out in their professional settings. Through examination of teacher experiences, there was emphasis placed on relief, authenticity, and richness of the teachers, experiences with the curriculum, and experiences with their students because of revealing their LGBTQ+ identity in the educational setting.

Teachers participating in this study revealed the same evolutionary process and noted sentiments regarding how liberating it was to live as their authentic selves as a result of revealing even the smallest portion of their identity to students, staff, and the school community.

Research Question # 4

Research Question 4 asked, (a) What are teachers' experiences with disempowering dominant ideologies?, and (b) How are they or are they not interrupting heteronormative standards? At the onset of this study, it was postulated educators who chose not to cover or hide their intersecting identities immediately interrupted heteronormativity and allowed for examination of the social problem of LGBTQ+ identity in education. Furthermore, the study hypothesized when educators engaged in dialogic conversations about their identities, they could hopefully put Queertical Theory tenets at the forefront of the classroom and ultimately, engage the school community in conversations that helped to liberate the various oppressions surrounding this marginalized identity. Freire and Ramos (2014) noted how dialogic education empowered groups of individuals to act together to harmoniously advocate for liberation for the oppressed group by stating:

We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other. (p. 133)

Thus, when educators in the current study chose to reveal their identity, they began the revolutionary process of liberation for LGBTQ+ identities from the hegemonic standards shaping the educational setting. However, the current study revealed because of the tumultuous political climate, the communion of liberation was not unanimously viewed as the common good. Educators in this study remained conflicted even when citing positive reactions of students to curriculum and teachable moments regarding alluding to LGBTQ+ identities and other themes of diversity and inclusion.

Many participants indicated the legislative efforts and conservative views of many school constituents were to blame for their hesitation to enact Queertical Theory driven lessons (i.e., lessons that interrupt the heteronormative standards). However, centering LGBTQ+ identities and ultimately forging a path for liberation in the field of education for this marginalized group was important. Although more states every year work to pass laws to protect LGBTQ people, state legislatures continue to advance bills targeting transgender people, limiting local protections, and allowing the use of religion to discriminate (ACLU, 2023). LGBTQ+ educators can help limit and put an end to discriminatory legislation by empowering their deficit lens and LGBTQ+ identity, thereby disempowering the dominant ideology of heteronormativity, but noted fear loomed overhead for any educator who steps out of line and rocks the boat. Thus, although the educators in this study desired to implement and fully enact Queertical Theory tenets, the visible hate and repercussions, outlined by the various legislative efforts to erase, admonish, and even convict LGBTQ+ identities and their allies, caused many of

the educators in this study to employ more vague tactics, putting true enactments of Queertical Theory on a temporary hold.

However, all hope is not lost; participants of this study remained hopeful. They believed in the future generations and even cited increased awareness, tolerance, and presence of LGBTQ+ representations among younger generations. McShane (2022) discussed the changing times further, stating:

The high rate of LGBTQ self-identification among Gen Zers reflects a combination of increasing cultural acceptance for LGBTQ people and the fact that Gen Zers are increasing in the national population of adults while members of older generations are dying. (para. 3)

Increasing cultural acceptance for LGBTQ+ individuals gave participants hope. Representation of the LGBTQ+ community is on the rise, but that does not mean the fight is over. Participants indicated they wanted to advocate more, they wanted to help in the liberation cause, and hoped to someday enact more Queertical Theory elements in their professional setting. Participants believed the following: If work continues to “deepen understanding of power, privilege, equity, and [social] inequity; including policies and reifying practices” (Sosa-Provencio et al., 2018, p. 6), a better education system will occur for students and ultimately the freedom for LGBTQ+ educators to truly be OUT in education.

Discussion

To summarize, this study examined participants' intersectionality, perception of outness, desire to cover or uncover their LGBTQ+ identity, and the nuanced perceptions of Queertical Theory enactment in their educational setting

to find educators are conflicted. Educators agreed with Sosa-Provencio et al.'s (2018) statements and aligned with the fact that “We must ‘disempower dominant ideologies’ so that we can ‘celebrate diversity and inclusion’ so that ‘students can look outside themselves for knowledge’” (p. 5). Participants agreed with Jackson (2009):

The more open they were about their sexual identities in the workplace, the more they could query and queer the status quo and thus provide students with tools to query and queer their own identities. Heterosexual teachers can take this approach as well. (p. 57)

Thus, it was obvious that participants’ objectives were wanting to be an out representation of the LGBTQ+ community and to empower and include not only their LGBTQ+ students, but all LGBTQ+ identities in the larger school setting. Participants understood their intersectionality of being an LGBTQ+ individual and an educator had the power to collide and interact with societal standards. Crenshaw (1989) supported the idea of an intersectionality colliding with societal standards and, even though much of Crenshaw’s work was based on the intersectionality of Black females, she noted collision is present when considering gender identity and the LGBTQ+ community. The collision of identities inspired many participants to include and embrace portions of their intersectionality in the classroom.

However, grounds for such inclusion, and, as some might term it, social justice, have sparked a debate in the educational community. Many believe LGBTQ+ topics have no constitutional right to be present in an educational

setting (Cox, 2021). In 2005, nearly 45% of the U.S. population believed LGBTQ+ individuals should not be hired as educators; however, in 2019, that margin shifted from 45% dissenting to a mere 19% of U.S. residents believing that gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals should not be hired as educators (Cox, 2021). Although the gap is narrowing, the dissent persists, and due to a polarized political climate, their voices are louder and more active than ever and are impacting LGBTQ+ educators' perception and desire to be out.

The political climate caused participants to cover their LGBTQ+ identity. Even the five participants who reported being 100% out in the profession admitted to downplaying, eliminating, or avoiding some aspect of their LGBTQ+ identity when in a professional setting. They frequently yearned to fit in with social norms and ultimately wished to avoid potential social stigmas and inequities associated with their minoritized identity. Thus, the act of covering or passing minimizes the difference between the person covering and the majority heteronormative population at large (Catalyst, 2014), which makes life supposedly easier to navigate in the professional setting. Moreau et al. (2019) furthered the notion that intersecting identities often cause turmoil in an individual and stated the intersecting identities often do not become politicized in the same manner. This explains why even the openly out participants of this study covered or concealed aspects of their identity. The intersectionality of their LGBTQ+ individual and educator identities were at odds with one another. Therefore, to adhere to the societal expectation of what a teacher is, even the most proud

participants of this study enacted covering skills in order to provide a sense of hegemonic belonging.

What covering cannot provide the participants is the privilege to be their authentic selves, and as such, covering can be detrimental to not only the individual, but the school setting as a whole. As Haddad (2019) noted, when educators came out, the richness of the experiences they shared with their students increased and allowed educators to exhibit true authenticity. Those who did enact strategies and skills to cover lived a duplicitous life and hide their intersectionality no longer becoming a LGBTQ+ educator, but just an educator, and as many of the participants of the study noted, this resulted in a life of fear and anxiety regarding being found out. Their intersectionality was placed at a conflicting intersection of pride and prejudice. And for many involved in this study, prejudice and the normative standards of society prevailed.

Those who did choose to reveal their LGBTQ+ identity exposed their students to a 'zone of possibilities' (Edelman, 1994) and helped to disempower dominant ideologies. Thus, going forward, the educators in this study noted they understood the need to engage in a revolutionary process of being out in education, even if it meant battling the heightened dissent and opposition surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. Although fear and backlash do somewhat hinder individuals and cause them to hesitate when thinking about enacting Queertical Theory tenets, the overwhelming majority of the participant's feedback desired a revolution that they had deemed necessary to interrupt

heteronormativity and allow them to be out in education. Freire and Ramos (2014) supported this idea of revolutionary action by noting:

Revolutionary praxis must stand opposed to the praxis of the dominant elites, for they are by nature antithetical. Revolutionary praxis cannot tolerate an absurd dichotomy in which the praxis of the people is merely that of following the leaders' decisions—a dichotomy reflecting the prescriptive methods of the dominant elites. Revolutionary praxis is a unity, and the leaders cannot treat the oppressed as their possession. (p. 126)

Therefore, going forward, participants of this study indicated they were hopeful for the revolution to begin, they were slowly starting the process, but this required longevity and due time. They may not see the results in their lifetime, but their efforts would contribute to a world in which “teachers could feel safe being lesbian, —or gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, or questioning” (Jackson, 2009, p. 68), resulting in educational settings where everyone can live and experience life out loud, and proud.

Conclusions

This study determined LGBTQ+ educators valued their intersectionality and understood the importance being an LGBTQ+ educator plays in the field of education, especially for LGBTQ + students and other marginalized members of the school community. Toledo and Maher (2021) found students were best served by a diverse teaching force; teachers from historically disenfranchised groups offered positive role models for all students and improved academic and

school outcomes for all students, but especially for students who were from historically disenfranchised groups.

The in vivo codes and quotes that supported having a diverse teaching force included statements such as, “I remember how it was when I finally had an LGBTQ+ professor. It was like ‘Oh! You’re like me!’” or “They just haven’t been open to that [LGBTQ+ educator], so I feel lucky to get to be that person to let them know that it is a normal thing.” The in vivo codes and quotes were important to this study because analyzing them helped to focus the study on the participants’ lived experiences, not the interpretation of the researcher. Moustakas’ (1994) methodology for conducting phenomenological research supported the need to focus on participants lived experiences, because this methodology focused on the descriptions of participants’ lived experiences rather than interpretations of the experiences (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, direct words from participants pertaining to LGBTQ+ representation supported the idea that representation and visibility is an important lived experience.

Mattheis et al. (2021) further supported the importance of representation of LGBTQ+ identities in education. They noted the act of successfully queering a curriculum must acknowledge and bring joy to the agency needed to disrupt normative standards. Furthermore, acknowledgement of resistance to queer youth and educators of color is of utmost importance; only by attending to the multiplicity of identity and the intersectionality of students and teachers can this queering process benefit not only queer youth, but the entire schooling space.

Thus, the in vivo codes and quotes presented, paired with the research of Mattheis et al., indicated queer representation has the power to inspire and transform the schooling space, benefiting those who often do not seem themselves represented. The in vivo codes and quotes were important to this study because they depicted the actual lived experiences of the individuals. Heidegger (1968), one of the key scholars of phenomenological research, stated:

Neither phenomenology nor swimming can be learnt in a purely vicarious way. We shall never learn what “is called” swimming . . . or what it “calls for,” by reading a treatise on swimming. Only the leap into the river tells us what is called swimming. (p. 21)

Similarly, an individual’s lived experiences will never be understood unless the direct source is asked to and report their lived experiences. This study did just that and used in vivo codes, quotes, dramaturgical codes, and Moustakas’s (1994) methodology for conducting phenomenological research to dive deep into the lived experiences of participants as they explained how they valued their intersectionality and representation of their LGBTQ+ identity in the profession. The aforementioned methodologies ensured there was no bias on behalf of the researcher when reporting on this phenomenon of pride in LGBTQ+ representation and visibility.

Petersen (2006) further promoted the importance of representation, especially of intersecting identities, and noted, “We all possess socially constructed identities that influence our experiences. Some of us may even find ourselves within multiple discourses that interweave and coincide with one

another” (p. 2). This study found participants valued their intersectional identity because they viewed it as a way in for LGBTQ+ youth to feel holistically affirmed and had the ability to see themselves in an authority figure. Rosiek et al. (2017) furthered the importance of holistic affirmation and noted when silences and invisibilities are named, practitioners are participating in professional competence. Thus, the mere presence of an individual with intersecting identities (i.e., an educator and LGBTQ+ identity) brings about the agency to interrupt normative standards and inspire other intersecting individuals to do the same.

Participants also indicated they were hesitant to reveal their intersectional identity as being a member of the LGBTQ+ community completely and cited the political climate surrounding LGBTQ+ identities largely influenced their hesitation. They mentioned how they often felt like they were living a duplicitous life. Haddad (2019) further supported the notion of a dual life among LGBTQ+ educators and noted LGBTQ+ educators often put forth an effort to keep their personal and professional lives separate as a protective tactic. In vivo codes and quotes supporting this included: (a) “And I’m sure, as you’re aware, with the current hostility of transness, like against trans individuals in general, especially with the groomer talk. It makes it very fraught for some like me who is going into education” and (b) “I was told that I had a family that did not want to be in my classroom because I was gay.” Once again, when the study employed Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental or psychological approach to a phenomenological study, it eliminated bias and reported the true lived

experiences of participants; including the experiences of being LGBTQ+ and unwelcome in the educational setting.

Participants further indicated preconceived notions that the intersectionality of LGBTQ+ individual and educator did not belong in education. One participant noted, "Automatically when you teach lower elementary [as an LGBTQ+ educator] there is kind of an eyebrow raised." Ferfolja and Hopkins (2013) supported this participant's sentiment and reported historically, LGBTQ+ communities have been maligned through stereotyping by linking homosexuality with promiscuity, mental illness, disease, child pedophilia, and hypersexuality.

Because of overwhelming homophobia, heteronormativity, and harassment, many LGBTQ teachers remain closeted or reenter the closet. Sands (2009) indicated teachers who closet deprive pupils of exposure to sexual diversity in the school. The act of reentering the closet to hide, avoid, or downplay aspects of an LGBTQ+ identity is known as covering (Yoshino, 2002) and is impacting LGBTQ+ individuals perceptions of their outness and intersectionality, causing them to live, as Haddad (2019) suggests, a duplicitous life.

When asked about their perceptions of outness and lived experiences regarding outness in the field, participants overwhelmingly indicated they covered various aspects of their identity, even if they had previously indicated being 100% out. There is still an internalized stigma surrounding their LGBTQ+ identity that they hoped to cover and conceal. Tactics used to cover included avoidance, ambiguity, and even total denial of that part of their identity.

The only openly trans female participant in the study noted they had a resume coach tell them that they should cut all the LGBTQ+ stuff off out of their resume. They did and cried the entire time but did end up getting an interview after scrubbing their LGBTQ+ identity off the record. Scharrón-Del Río (2020) presented a similar anecdote where mentors and other colleagues urged them to conceal or cover their intersecting identity during interview processes because the coming out process could “potentially work against them” (p. 8). Thus, even the most well-to-do individuals hold stigmas and unconscious bias surrounding LGBTQ+ identities.

When asked what drives their need to cover, participants answered fear and fear mongering groups of individuals. Carlson (2001) found in today’s age, “as queerness has become more open and ‘out’ in campus life, homophobia has had a more visible target to attack” (p. 297). Accordingly, participants shared numerous thoughts about the parental community and how they often evoked feelings of fear. Mr. B shared, “A lot of parents, both in this current district, probably, but then just everywhere hold the sentiment that it’s inappropriate to discuss the topic of LGBTQ+ or sexuality in a classroom.” Mr. Q explained:

I live in a very conservative district, very small minded i guess they are very afraid of things that are different than what they perceive as traditional values and being in a teaching capacity and being with middle school students [as an LGBTQ+ educator] that can be seen as something that might be a worry for some parents.

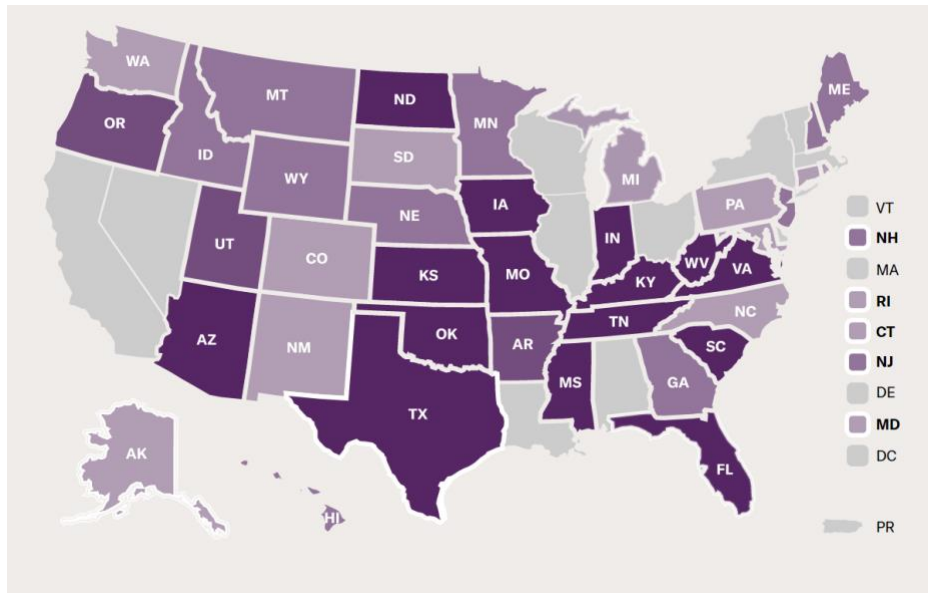
Mrs. I told of how they feared parents and shared, “The people I feel the most nervous around are the parents. I do not choose the parents, but I have to be around them [regardless of their perspectives and views]. Finally, Ms. 2 stated, “I still have that fear. You know the day that I am married or like my relationship for whatever reason would come up, like how would parents react to it?”

It is important to note, once again, this study focused on participants’ lived experiences. This is a crucial employ to adhere to the proper traditions of phenomenological research, as outlined by Heidegger (1968) and Quay (2016). Member checks also verified the analyzed results and invited participants to verify the findings (Chase, 2017). In this case, participants agreed fear of the parental community and other fear mongering groups lived experience noted by a vast majority of the participants in this study.

Research supported participants’ feelings regarding fear of prejudiced perspectives towards LGBTQ+ identities and the LGBTQ+ community in education, especially regarding research that revolved around legislation aiming to limit or erase LGBTQ+ identities from school settings. Many bills have objectives of “reinforcing the fundamental right of parents to make decisions regarding the upbringing and control of their children” (Parental Rights in Education Act, 2022, para. 1) or prohibits the teaching of divisive concepts and targets ideas of systematic racism and sexism, how they have shaped the way the country is built, and how institutions function (Hyttek, 2022). The purpose of bills of this nature is leading many to view their LGBTQ+ identity as taboo and at risk of being erased. Thus, legislative bills may undo decades of LGBTQ+

activism and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility work. Consequently, legislative bills may also cause once previously out educators to participate in the act of professional covering and closeting, impacting their perception of their intersectionality.

It is evident the many laws and bills written by legislators, along with views that LGBTQ+ individuals are immoral and inappropriate, are echoing those of the past. Anti-LGBTQ+ laws are parallel to the queer epidemic of the 1920s (Lugg & Moten, 2015). Many educators fear a return to moral clauses in contracts, which could be a grim reality. At the time of the study, The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2023) was tracking 391 anti-LGBTQ+ bills across the nation. 29 of those bills originated in the state of Iowa, targeting gender affirming health care, and schools and students who support or teach about LGBTQ+ topics. Figure 3 visualizes the states where anti-LGBTQ+ legislative efforts were active at the time of the study.

Figure 3*Anti-LGBTQ Bills in the United States*

Note. From “Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures,” 2023, by ACLU. <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights>

This study showed the harsh political climate caused participating LGBTQ+ educators to think about their intersectionality in the profession. However, questions remain as to whether LGBTQ+ educators were abandoning their affiliation with the community, their perceptions, and experiences, and if it was ok to be gay, lesbian, trans, nonbinary, or another identity.

This study revealed, given the proper environment, participants would suspend or even eliminate covering all together and embrace their LGBTQ+ intersectionality. Horkheimer (1972) noted it must be remembered to be truly liberated, an individual must participate in an analysis of the institution at large and accordingly the participants of this study took that to heart and analyzed the

larger institutions they sought to work for prior to applying or accepting employment opportunities.

Participants noted they often sought employment in environments that offered a safe space for LGBTQ+ identities. Toomey et al. (2012) noted by acknowledging the presence of gender nonconforming and LGBTQ+ individuals and enacting and enforcing policies and practices designed to provide a safe place for them, harassment could be lessened. Therefore, when individuals from this study were seeking out employment, they often looked for schools that had explicit policies of zero tolerance regarding discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community or reputation of being safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals to be out educators. This allowed several of the participants of this study to unmask their LGBTQ+ identity and find refuge from the hateful rhetoric stemming from the parental community in the safe embrace of welcoming and accepting allies. The need to advocate, support, and work for one another to create a safe environment ties Freire and Ramos (2014) who noted true agency necessary for revolution to take place (e.g., in this instance, the ability for participants to feel comfortable revealing their identity professionally) required individuals to work with the oppressed, not for the oppressed. Individuals in this study noted they found colleagues willing to work with, not for them, to support and sustain their comfort being out in the professional world.

It was not surprising to note that even in the most conducive environments, participants viewed their colleagues who identified as heterosexual as privileged due to their heteronormativity. McEntarfer (2016)

defined heteronormativity as “the systematic process of privilege toward heterosexuals, whereby heterosexuality is considered normal and ideal” (p. 52). Heterosexual educators need not worry about hiding pictures of their loved ones, did not tread cautiously around the pronouns of their spouse, nor did they have to worry about parents calling in to demand their total erasure. The same could not be said for the current study’s participants. They noted heterosexual privilege frequently and indicated how it often brought about bouts of jealousy and feelings of inadequacy, even in the most supportive of environments.

With the legislation of Iowa and the nation at the time of the study being what it was and hostility aimed at LGBTQ+ representation, content and the attempts at erasure of anything that was not White or heteronormative, the way educators perceived their ability to disempower dominant ideologies was important. How they were interrupting heteronormative standards and centering Queertical theory tenets to push LGBTQ+ content to the forefront and center it in education was another important discussion point. This study revealed due to hypervigilant outside perspectives, LGBTQ+ educators perceived their every action to be under the microscope, and thus, acted accordingly.

When asked about implementing lessons regarding LGBTQ+ themes and tenets, it was not surprising to note that individuals once again used tactics of ambiguity and concealment to teach about diversity and inclusion in more general terms. They cited pending anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, paired with parental views and perspectives, as the main demotivating factors. As of March 2023, more than 39 states had introduced bills that targeted and discriminated against

LGBTQ+ U.S. residents and the ACLU was tracking 391 bills, at the time of the study, that target LGBTQ+ youth and topics in education (ACLU, 2023), so their rationale was well supported.

What was surprising was the fact that, despite all the hateful rhetoric, participants still saw a glimmer of hope for the future. One participant noted:

I know I sound founded in fear because there is a lot of fear I view going into education, but I also know there are plenty of people that are working to change that, and I hope to become one of them.

Another echoed that sentiment and stated, “The situation is fearful now, but I am hoping that in the future that myself and other trans educators can push forward into a brighter day.” This indicated participants were hopeful. Heidegger’s (1968) approach to phenomenological research was implemented and the interviews encapsulated in vivo codes and quotes, which were analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental approach to analyzing phenomenological research to indicate that participants were indeed optimistic and was not just a bias presented from the viewpoint of the researcher.

Thus, it was evident that participants, no matter how rattled and temporarily bound they may have been by legislation and political perspectives, were willing to put themselves out there to invoke an educational revolution. Participants responses connected with Sosa-Provencio et al. (2018) and understood if work continued to “deepen understanding of power, privilege, equity, and [social] inequity; including policies and reifying practices” (p. 6), a better education system will occur for students.

In summation, participants' lived experiences, analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental approach to analyzing phenomenological research to eliminate bias, indicated they were proud to be LGBTQ+ and understood the impact their LGBTQ+ identity and intersectionality could have on the community at large. However, fear played a large role in the revelation of their LGBTQ+ identity, especially fear of various individuals attempting to limit their voices. It was noted participants may have downplayed, been intentionally vague, or concealed various aspects of their identity, but as Tobin (1997) stated, "children and homosexuals have come to occupy the same space" (p. 227), and participants of this study did not view that as a negative consequence, but rather motivation to get the word out about their various lived experiences, so that all students can grow and learn from an identity outside their own (York, 2015).

Implications

The first implication pertaining to this study was LGBTQ+ educators had the desire and objective to be out LGBTQ+ representations and actively teach and center LGBTQ+ content in the professional setting. However, they feel as if the political climate and the systems governing their work environment do not allow for Queertical Theory enactment. With the ongoing political agenda to eradicate LGBTQ+ content and identities, participants were hesitant to speak out and even physically portray indicators of their outness. The 391 anti-LGBTQ+ bills pending across the nation (ACLU, 2023), the growing book ban movement, where 41% of the proposed blacklisted books explicitly address LGBTQ+ themes (Friedman & Johnson, 2023), and the looming threats of felony convictions for

classroom violations of banned book enactment (Natanson, 2023), have left participants feeling the need to stifle their desires for social justice and inclusion.

The second implication revolves around lack of LGBTQ+ related content in teacher preparatory programs. Participants also indicated lack of knowledge surrounding how to best advocate for LGBTQ+ identities. Rosiek et al. (2017) found “teacher education curriculum that prepares students to be advocates for gender justice and LGBTQ students and families is a necessity” (p. 13). A teacher education curriculum advocating for LGBTQ rights would empower future generations of educators, LGBTQ+ identifying and nonidentifying alike, to have the ability to queer the curriculum. Queering the curriculum allows educators to honor the range of sexual and gender identities that exist in the classroom and beyond. Such inclusive teaching normalizes, validates, and provides support for LGBTQ+ students and students with LGBTQ+ family members who typically do not see their life histories or experiences reflected in course content (Goldberg & Allen, 2018).

Future Research

Going forward, it is evident teacher preparation programs need to make a more conducive effort to queer their teacher preparatory curriculum in a manner that can allow for advocacy to be sustained and not fizzled out by hateful rhetoric or legislation. Rosiek et al. (2017) offered a solution to sustaining advocacy, encouraging a queer-positive teacher preparation curriculum, a curriculum that requires a doubled practice of intervention. The first practice was advocacy for inclusion of queer content in teacher preparation programs: education about

harassment, creation and support of alliance groups, support of families with same-sex parents, inclusion of LGBTQ+ history and civil rights movements in the curriculum, and courses that pertain to supporting and advocating for LGBTQ+ students, and especially those who identify as transgender.

Secondly, Rosiek et al. (2017) noted the importance of addressing the silence and invisibility brought about by heteronormative standards. Rosiek et al. noted educators must be able to name patriarchal and heteronormative silences in their curriculum; the inability to do so yields professional incompetence. More importantly, female and LGBTQ+ students should not be tasked with educating their teachers, and peers about the salience of such educational contexts. Thus, more research needs to be conducted into the perceptions of students in teacher preparation programs surrounding their perceived abilities to meet the needs and advocate for LGBTQ+ students, themes, and content in the professional setting. Research could include qualitative analysis of the perceptions of current students in teacher preparation programs as it pertains to integrating and advocating for LGBTQ+ themes and other diverse representations in the classroom, or a pilot study comparing and contrasting perceptions of readiness for students who have and have not participated in a queered teacher preparation program.

Future research should also examine the phenomenon of being an out LGBTQ+ educator at a broader level. This study was limited to the participants of Iowa, a conservative state where the dominant ideology is overwhelmingly conservative and where the majority, 90% of participants, identified as White. Therefore, results could differ slightly given a broader geographical and

demographical context. Furthermore, only one of the educators of this study worked in a rural setting, thus exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of out educators in additional rural settings could reveal more information regarding outness as it pertains to geographical location and political climate.

Finally, although this study had a diverse make up of identities from the LGBTQ+ community, some identities were not able to be recruited. Future research should focus more on the lived experiences of all members of the LGBTQ+ community, with particular focus on those that lacked from this study, including more transgender and nonbinary representation, especially those who also hold a BIPOC identity.

Summary

This study revealed LGBTQ+ educators understand their importance in the school setting, especially regarding visibility for students who fall in the LGBTQ+ spectrum, but many times their outness is noticed. Sometimes in a positive manner, but more often than not via a negative observation from individuals with highly politicized perspectives surrounding LGBTQ+ identities. These negative examinations caused participants to employ tactics to cover their LGBTQ+ identity in an attempt to remain safe and appear as part of the norm. These tactics included use of ambiguity, avoidance, and even total erasure of an LGBTQ+ identity to blend in with their heteronormative peers.

The aforementioned tactics have manifested as a result of stories of backlash and hateful rhetoric stemming from the parental and surrounding school community. Covering and passing tactics allowed participants the ability to

adhere to the status quo, but they were not afforded the same privilege as heterosexual educators; they cannot mention their personal life or even pronouns of their spouse or partner for fear of being outed and othered. Thus, covering comes at a great cost to them, as they must live with the inner turmoil of living a duplicitous life where they can only be themselves behind closed doors. However, given a supportive school climate of advocates, allies, and supportive team members, participants reported the ability to drop covering tactics and the ability to truly live out their most authentic self within the profession. It was during this time that participants felt they had undergone an evolutionary process of outness.

Participants attributed this evolutionary process to their surrounding community and other representations of LGBTQ+ educators, whether it be in their own school environment or via online social media platforms. Participants also noted a lack of representation and education surrounding LGBTQ+ curriculum slowed down this evolutionary process. Many noted they initially did not believe they could be out in the field as it was not professional, but through their lived experiences, they learned otherwise. Thus, it is important that teacher education preparatory programs dive deep into this topic of study to determine how to alleviate this problem of practice.

Finally, for those educators who chose to have teachable moments or enact Queertical theory lessons (e.g., lessons surrounding LGBTQ+ identities and themes), they once again felt the need for and importance of this work, but feared repercussion, especially given the current political climate, where

LGBTQ+ identities are being targeted, erased from sports, books, and other school related activities. But hope is not lost, the educators of this study believed social justice would prevail. They know that the process will be a grueling one fraught with opposition and obstacles, but nevertheless, they have vowed to advocate and march onward to interrupt heteronormativity. Their pride flags may have been temporarily concealed, but the overwhelming majority of the participants of this study indicated no matter the legislation, no matter the reason, their LGBTQ+ identity will not be silenced or erased. They will live their lives OUT loud so they and future members of the LGBTQ+ community can be out in education.

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Appendix A: Qualtrics Video Script

Hello. My name is Landon Wood, and I am the researcher conducting the study entitled OUT in education: A Qualitative Study Examining the Intersectionality and the Lived OUT Experiences of PreK–12 LGBTQ+ Educators

I wanted to send you this video to extend my utmost gratitude for your willingness to participate and to explain the next steps in the process.

After you finish viewing this video you will continue through this form and fill out current contact information, and other pertinent demographics. After all of this information is confidential.

After you finish the contact information and demographic section you will be presented with an informed consent form. This form ensures that you understand the context of the study, any risks that may be associated with the study and informs you of the confidentiality and your right to withdraw from participation at any time. After signing the form there will be a section for you to leave any additional comments or questions you may have about the study.

Once the form has been completed, I will reach out to you to set up a time to conduct an interview. The interview will be conducted via video conference technology and will last approximately an hour. After the interview I will transcribe and analyze your experiences looking for common themes and elements. I will then reach out to you again to schedule yet another interview just to verify my findings and eliminate bias. This meeting should only last approximately 30 mins and will once again be conducted by video conferencing technology. I will then take my results and incorporate them into my dissertation.

Again, I want to thank you for your desire to participate. As a former openly gay educator my lived experiences have shaped and molded me into the educator that I am today. It is my desire to use the stories and experiences you share in this study to inform and transform educational training programs so that we can better serve all LGBTQ+ individuals within our profession.

Thank you again and I will be in touch with you soon to set up an interview time.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW - INFORMED CONSENT

Project title: OUT in Education: A Qualitative Study Examining the intersectionality and the Lived OUT Experiences of PreK–12 LGBTQ+ Educators.

Name of investigator: Landon Wood

Invitation to participate: You are invited to participate in an interview which is for the purpose of a terminal EdD Degree in Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs at the University of Northern Iowa.

Nature and purpose: The purpose of this study is to collect data that describes and evaluates the perceptions and lived experiences of LGBTQ+ educators and preservice teachers regarding outness in the field of education.

Explanation of Procedures: I will be conducting interviews regarding participants' lived experiences as an LGBTQ+ educator. Dates of the interviews are to be determined and will be set up with the participant to best adhere to their schedule.

Interviews and observations will be audio recorded and transcribed. Interviews and observations will focus on the participant's perceptions and lived experiences as an out educator in the field of teaching. Follow up interviews and member checks will also be conducted to assure accuracy of participants' narratives.

Privacy and Confidentiality: All identifying information from this observation and interview will be kept confidential. The information collected may be utilized for academic publications, presentations at national conferences or development of an ethno dramatic work and a graphic novel, but all names and identifying information will remain anonymous. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data transmitted electronically.

Discomforts and Risks: Risks to participants are minimal. Risks to participation are similar to those experienced in day-to-day life. Because some of the content does involve personal narratives in regard to gender and sexuality, participants should be aware that some conversations may bring up traumatic feelings.

Benefits and compensation: No direct benefits to participants are expected, but this research may generate important information about LGBTQ+ educators' lived experiences within the profession. You will receive \$0 for participation in each student component.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions:

If you have questions regarding your participation in this study or about the study in general, please contact Landon Wood at XXXXXX@uni.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX, or his faculty supervisor, Dr. David Schmid, at XXXXXX@uni.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX .

For answers to questions about the rights of research participants and the research review process at UNI, you may contact the office of the IRB Administrator at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Agreement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

Appendix C: Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

Time of interview:

Date:

Place of interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

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| <p>Introduction (5 minutes)</p> | <p>Thank you for agreeing to meet with us. I'm Landon Wood, a doctoral student from the University of Northern Iowa.</p> <p>We are speaking with LGBTQ+ educators to understand the nuanced perceptions and lived experiences of teachers regarding their outness in education.</p> <p>As a LGBTQ+ educator, we would like to talk with you about your background, perception of outness in education and lived experiences being an LGBTQ+ educator.</p> <p>We will treat your answers as confidential. We will not include your names or any other information that could identify you in any reports we write. We will destroy the notes and audiotapes after we complete our study and publish the results. The results of the report may be published for use at professional conferences and to adapt a theatrical and/or graphic novel representation of the findings.</p> <p>As a reminder you are free to withdraw from the study at any point and time. Do you wish to continue?</p> <p><Wait for response></p> <p>Do you have any questions about the study?</p> <p><address questions as needed></p> |
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| <p>Topic #1: Identity (10 minutes)</p> | <p>1. Can you walk us through your thoughts and perceptions about your identity? How do you identify? Do you hold multiple identities? How do you think they intersect? Do you believe they impact your identity?</p> <p><u>Possible Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You mentioned . . . can you tell me more about that? ● Could you please describe the physical makeup of your undergraduate institution population? Race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc. ● How would you say most students identify? Can you please describe what they may say about their group identity? ● Please describe your LGBTQ+ affiliation during your teacher preparation experience, during your first year teaching, and during subsequent years. ● Do you perceive your outness to be obvious or hidden? Explain why or why not. |
| <p>Topic #2: Perception of Outness (20 minutes)</p> | <p>2. Now think about your LGBTQ+ identity, can you describe for me how you may have or may have not covered your identity while in your classroom/professional life?</p> <p><u>Possible Probes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You mentioned . . . can you tell me more about that? ● Please describe the most important takeaways from covering/uncovering your identity. ● You mentioned feeling . . . Can you tell us more about what made you feel that way? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What were your follow up actions to feeling this way? ● Were there any times when you felt your identity was being noticed? Good, bad, or otherwise? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By whom? Why? Tell us more about this experience. ○ Did you ever feel the need to cover your LGBTQ+ identity as a professional? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How did you cover your identity? Why? How did this make you feel? |

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| <p>Topic #3: Queertical Theory Perceptions and Enactments</p> <p>(15 minutes)</p> | <p>3. Have you ever truly centered a lesson or had a discussion that engaged in centering one of your deficit identities? Which identity? Have you ever included your LGBTQ+ identity? Why or why not? What are your feelings about this?</p> <p>Possible Probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You mentioned . . . Can you tell me more about that? ● Have you had conversations with students/admin about your identity? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How did they react? What comments do they make about your LGBTQ+ outness? Please describe their feelings. ● Can you describe any emotional changes you have noted in yourself, students, admin, etc.? ● Do you continue to incorporate your LGBTQ+ identity into your classroom/professional life? Or will you consider doing so? ● Does the current political climate of today motivate you or hinder your efforts? ● Were there any times when centered your marginalized identity that led to positive or negative reactions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By whom? Why? Tell us more about this experience. ○ Did you ever feel the need to cover your LGBTQ+ identity as a professional? Or were you motivated to continue your decentering and interrupting of heteronormativity? ● Will you continue this practice or begin to enact this practice? Why or why not? |
| <p>Final thoughts (5 minutes)</p> | <p>Those were all the questions that we wanted to ask.</p> <p>Do you have any final thoughts about your experiences as an LGBTQ+ educator?</p> |
| <p>Closure (1 min)</p> | <p>Thank you for your time and willingness to contribute to this study. Your contributions will be very beneficial to this research. If you have any questions, please contact me at XXXXX@uni.edu</p> |