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**OUT AND QUEER: INDEPENDENT SCHOOL TEACHERS NAVIGATING THE  
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL**

By

Caroline C. Dunnell

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
November 21, 2017

Dissertation Chair: MaryBeth Walpole, Ph.D.



## **Dedications**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and all the unspoken love we left between us; I wish you might have lived to see this work. It is also dedicated to all of the queer educators, those who are out, and those who remain closeted, for working consistently and with patience to support all of our students, queer and non-queer alike, helping them to become the citizens our world needs and what we as teachers hope they will be.

## Acknowledgements

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I am so fortunate and grateful to have made a lasting friendship in this the program of Leslie Septor whose support has been invaluable. I have numerous colleagues, friends, and family who deserve many, many thanks for assisting me throughout this process. Among these, I wish to acknowledge Leigh Perkins, Bill Nigh, Tiffany Beer, Katie Singer, Nancy Rosenbloom, Rutgers Preparatory School, my uncle, and my father. I especially want to thank Dr. Kevin R. Merges who has been an incredible source of personal encouragement as both a friend and a mentor.

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## **Abstract**

Caroline C. Dunnell

OUT AND QUEER: INDEPENDENT SCHOOL TEACHERS NAVIGATING THE  
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL

2017-2018

Dr. MaryBeth Walpole, Ph.D.

Doctor of Education

In recent years the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer (Queer) community has experienced unprecedented acceptance in U.S. culture. Yet, education, historically slow to change (Fullan & Miles, 1992), continues in many states to promote a heteronormative culture that does not recognize nor promote equity for the queer community that exists within their schools (Barrett & Bound, 2015).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological heuristic inquiry was to explore my experience, and those of eleven other queer out independent school educators, to understand how we makes sense of, and navigate, the heteronormative, traditionally male-dominated, independent school environment. This study used in-depth interviews to develop an understanding for a specific set of teachers, queer independent school educators, of their experiences in navigating the process of revealing their identities, coming out, within their educational institutions.

This study used heuristic inquiry, as developed by Moustakas (1990), as a research framework while relying upon the conceptual identity frameworks of Cass (1984), Troiden (1988), and Jackson (2007) to explore the experience of being out and queer, the navigation of the personal and professional identities we all possess as teachers.

*Keywords:* queer, identity development, education, teaching, heteronormative

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction to the Study

In his address to the 2005 graduating class of Kenyon College, David Foster Wallace (2009) spoke the following in his opening sentences:

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?” (pp. 3-4)

This, for me, defines the culture in which I exist as a queer<sup>1</sup> educator. Schools have always been environments in which the assumption endures that everybody is heterosexual, otherwise referred to as straight, creating a heteronormative construct. This widespread hegemony pervades every corner of education. Too many within education have no idea how the heteronormative environment of schools actually undermines the strength of their institutions; they do not see the water (Wallace, 2009).

As many researchers cited in this dissertation point out, there are schools and administrators that are supportive of queer faculty, but research to date has largely been focused on the experience of the student population, and little is known or understood about those teachers who identify as something other than heterosexual (DeJean, 2007). This qualitative study illuminates the experience of a small pool of queer educators who teach in independent private schools.

The term queer has long been used historically as slang and/or, a derogatory term for homosexuals (Butler, 1993; Chase & Ressler, 2009; Lugg & Adelman, 2015), and the

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this research, the term queer will refer to LGBTQ people perceived by society to be “Other” (Memmi, 1965; Takaki, 2008) in regards to their non-heterosexual position on the sexuality spectrum (Bryan, 2012).

adoption in recent years of the word by members of the LGBTQ community serves two purposes: first as a term of empowerment; and second as an all encompassing descriptor of the LGBTQ community (Butler, 1993; Jagose, 1996). Understanding the experiences of the queer community within U.S. educational institutions will help mitigate the pervasive hegemonic environment that privileges heterosexuals, and will help diminish the prevalent homophobic culture that serves to silence queer individuals (Jennings, 2006; Machado, 2014).

## **Personal Background**

### **Childhood**

I first heard, and quickly learned, the word “faggot” when I was in elementary school. It remains a visceral memory. In the chaos of boys arguing and fighting on the bus ride home from school I developed an understanding of why I always felt different, and often separate, from everyone else I knew. While they were slinging the worst words they could imagine at one another, homophobic slurs, the definition of the word faggot used as a derogatory statement about two males engaged in something beyond platonic friendship, crystalized within me an understanding of myself. I had a crush on my English teacher, Mrs. X, and somehow I knew that even though faggot applied to males, there was something inherently wrong, according to the culture in which I existed, with my crush, and thus with me. This shame, which was immobilizing at points, brought about a sense of being both worthless and powerless, two very common responses to shame (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2011), and would frame the construct of my identity for many years to come. Needless to say I never spoke of my crush, or any future crushes I had on girls, to anyone until my junior year of high school in the early 1980’s.

## **Adolescence**

While watching the nightly news as a high school student, I learned what our country thought of the queer community. Comments were prevalent both on the news and within my school about gay men getting what they deserved with the newly discovered gay cancer, later known as AIDS. I attended high school as a day student at the boarding school where both my father and uncle taught English, and where we lived on campus. I found myself between two worlds - not quite in one or the other, which furthered my lack of connection and my silence. In the early 1980's this school was a conservative community serving a conservative, wealthy, and powerful clientele. I learned to keep to myself and to watch everything around me, while trying with all my might to be heterosexual because the world, particularly school, was not safe.

Despite this danger and shame, I possessed a need to talk about my experience, a desire to find out if I was indeed the only one who was so incredibly different. While this at first seemed impossible, I was fortunate to have an ally on the faculty of my school, the school counselor, and as we talked I slowly revealed my queer identity. He helped me to eventually understand that I was not abnormal. The shame and sense of danger to my wellbeing took years to overcome, but I at least began to understand I should not think of myself as other (Memmi, 1965).

## **Early Adulthood**

Following graduation from college in 1988 and into the 1990's, I was out to friends and my two brothers, but not out at work, to my parents, or to the elders of my family. It is important to note that the process of coming out is continual, given the overarching heteronormative culture within which we exist and the assumption that



everyone is non-queer, unless one deviates from prescribed cultural norms (Butler, 1990, 1993). Queer individuals, unless they differ from culturally accepted gendered stereotypes, continually must clarify their sexual orientation when they make new friends or professional connections. This juxtaposition of being partially out was highly uncomfortable and fear inducing, and required me to juggle two different identities that I attempted to navigate in order to keep my world together. For most of my adult life I have been a practicing visual artist and a teacher, which are aspects of the totality of my identity in addition to being queer, and I have never placed one element above another in my definition of myself; they are all just part of who I am. However, before I totally came out, the activities I engaged in outside of work and family were always weighted with the question of “what if somebody sees me?” What impact would an inopportune sighting have on my job, on my ability to gain acceptance to an art exhibition, or on my relationship with my family? These were the questions constantly nagging, festering, and impacting every aspect of my being.

### **Teaching**

My first year teaching was 1988. I had a position in a large, east coast, independent, boarding school. The school was a larger, more progressive version of the school where I grew up, and I knew there was a member of the faculty who was queer, though I did not know her personally. I did not seek her out; in fact I was scared to death. Actual teaching, the work in the classroom, seemed to be the least of my worries at this boarding school; coaching and running a dorm seemed far more challenging issues to navigate because the distance between teacher and student was much smaller and it was assumed that good teachers would forge strong connections with their students who were

on their teams and in their dorms. I, too, considered these connections important, but how could I connect if I was not honest about who I was when my students asked? How could I be honest when I assumed that I would not receive any administrative support? I left the boarding school at the end of the year; the challenge of balancing my identities was too much.

For the next sixteen years I taught in day schools, a less intimate educational environment, while suppressing my queer identity and asking my students and many of my colleagues to accept and trust me when I had not accepted or trusted the totality of my identity.

In 2006 I finished five years of teaching at my current school, School A, and eighteen years overall as an educator. In those first five years at School A, I had tentatively revealed my queer identity to a few colleagues. I noticed in my first year teaching at School A that our faculty handbook did not include any language about sexual diversity and hiring practices, which for me meant I needed to be cautious about revealing myself. Five years later the language shifted slightly in the student handbook and I noted that all students, including queer students, were protected and not discriminated against under the school's policies. Two years later the faculty handbook shifted to echo this change for the teachers and staff as well. I was well aware of these changes as the language in the various handbooks evolved. When the language of the health insurance policy changed in the late 2000's to include the word partner, I realized the school had made a significant shift in its attitude toward its queer faculty.

## **Coming Out in School**

In the fall of 2006, I realized that I was one of five queer faculty members in the upper school; I stopped trying to dodge and cover when students asked about my personal life. Up to that point I stretched the truth; when pressed, I gave my partner at the time a male name, and tried to avoid any personal questions from my students through redirection and deflection. Coincidentally, some of the more vocal members of the upper school student body began to push for a Gay - Straight Alliance (GSA) and it became obvious that my school was experiencing a cultural shift in attitude toward the queer members of the community.

My life experience in education as a member of the queer community permits me to see the advances that have occurred, particularly over the past ten years, as gains that cannot be dismissed, while simultaneously revealing that there is much more work to do within education in creating equity for all members of the school community. With the exception of the occasional homophobic rant directed at me from a distance, I have yet to experience any direct verbal or physical assaults; I consider myself very lucky. Yet, the pervasive knowledge that I am different, and perceived as different, is an element that has impacted me continually throughout my life and impacts my teaching practices.

## **Cultural Shift**

As the political situation in the U.S. began to shift, I began to realize that the school where I have taught for the past fifteen years was more accepting than most other schools where I had previously worked. My position as a private individual who taught evolved into a publicly queer educator within my educational community. As a visual arts teacher I am already considered different. The arts, though required at my school, are not

actually considered rigorously academic despite their label as an academic course. As a teacher with outsider perspective, I began to see power paradigms and cultural positions shift in a manner that created a more accepting and supportive climate for queer individuals in my school, but still the heteronormative construct prevails.

As many researchers have revealed, the heteronormative educational world occupied by queer teachers and queer students alike is fraught with the challenges of navigating their identities daily in a world considered heterosexual, or straight, by default (Blount, 2005; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003). Heterosexuals, unlike members of the queer community, rarely have to consider what it means to tell people who they are on a daily basis; the assumption exists that everybody, unless they physically deviate by looking too feminine for men and too masculine for women from the culturally accepted norm, is assumed to be straight (DeJean, 2007).

### **Laws and Policies**

Schools as mandated by Title IX, the federal law passed in 1972 requiring schools receiving federal funding to sustain gender equity in all of their programs (Murphy, 2011), have a responsibility to provide safe learning and social conditions for all students and staff (Wright, 2010). The law itself, most noted for its requirement of parity in athletics, actually addresses ten key areas related to gender and education (NWLC, n.d.). The areas of Title IX related to sexual harassment are what are used most often in the protection of the queer community within education.

Despite the advances within the queer community around issues of marriage equality and human rights, schools remain a challenging environment for queer students and teachers to navigate. Compounding the issues of bullying, there is a policy of not

promoting homosexuality in schools or “No Promo Homo” (Barrett & Bound, 2015, p. 267), prevalent in many school districts in eight states that prevent teachers from affirming or teaching about homosexuality (Barbeault, 2014; Elkind, 2014). These policies prevent the teaching of AIDS education in curricula (GLSEN, 2014), further reducing any potential representation a queer student might discover in school in relation to their sexual identity.

In the overarching heteronormative construct of educational institutions (Lugg, 2003; Machado, 2014), there remains the almost complete lack of reflection a queer student might perceive in the faculty and staff of his or her school, which can have lasting negative effects (Castro & Sujak, 2014). The silencing of queer teachers significantly reduces any possibility of mentorship for a queer student, reducing the possibility that a queer child or adolescent might find a reflection of him or herself. Kevin Jennings (2006), the founder of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN), reflects in his memoir that his silence did not fool anybody and only served to confirm that his queerness was a source of discomfort and shame, and was not a topic for discussion.

### **Student Safety**

With the advancement of GSAs, public campaigns promoting an end to bullying (GLSEN, 2014), and celebrities adding their voices to Dan Savage’s “It gets better” website (Savage, n.d.), queer students have experienced school as a slightly safer institution in many regions of the country. Comparing the 2003 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, 2004) to the 2013 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014) reveals an approximately 9% drop (64.3% to 55.5%) of

students nationwide who feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation over that ten year period.

### **Teacher Safety**

While the percentage of queer students who feel safe is low, they have more protective rights afforded to them through Title IX, anti-bullying and state Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) laws. Teachers, however, have not found similar safety in their school environments, and in the majority of states, anti-bullying and discrimination policies that apply to students do not translate to protection for queer educators (HRC, n.d.; Wright, 2010). There is no national law regarding employment and discrimination based upon sexual orientation, and only twenty-one states and the District of Columbia currently have laws prohibiting discrimination based upon sexual orientation (HRC, n.d.). It comes as little surprise then that queer teachers in the U.S. are reluctant to come out given the overarching and persistent heteronormative construct that undermines their personal sense of safety (Bryan, 2012; Lugg, 2003; Wright, 2010).

Public school queer educators legally have a union to protect them, though given the predominant heteronormative construct, unions, particularly in those states with laws prohibiting the promotion of anything related to homosexuals (Barrett & Bound, 2015; Elkind, 2014), may not be able to fulfill their responsibility as advocates for all educators. However, unions do not exist for private school teachers. The range of educational institutions that fall within the definition of a private school is quite large, and for the purposes of defining my research, independent schools are the private institutions that will be examined in this study.

Independent schools are private institutions that are not for profit, non-discriminatory, and are financially independent of any outside organization, state, federal, or religious entity. They are governed by a board of directors or trustees, as opposed to being run by the government, a diocese, or a for-profit organization. The board of directors is responsible for setting policy, and has the freedom to define their own mission along with a head of school, who is responsible with his or her administration team, for implementing and overseeing policy (Bassett, 2004).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Qualitative research permits a rich in-depth study of phenomena, seeks to illuminate and make meaning of experience (Patton, 2015), and is the framework I have chosen to use in my exploration of the lived experiences of queer independent school educators navigating their professional identities. The range of approaches within qualitative research appropriate for such an exploration encompasses a wide range of choices, and given my relationship as a queer independent school teacher to the phenomena, I have chosen a research framework, heuristic inquiry, that seeks to develop a deep understanding of a phenomena experienced by a primary researcher (Moustakas, 1990). This aligns with my worldview that acknowledges the subjectivity of our ever changing world, the construction of knowledge through shared experiences, and my own deep interest in the process of discovery that explores our humanity. Phenomenological heuristic inquiry as a methodology is unique in that is not a framework based in literature, and as such theoretical frameworks are not incorporated as a part of the methodological undertaking (Moustakas, 1990, 1994).

There is significant debate as to whether heuristic inquiry can be defined as a phenomenological approach (Finlay, 2009), however given the relationship heuristic inquiry has to the definition of phenomenology to provide “fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomena as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p.6), I choose to adopt the mindset of those researchers who state that heuristic inquiry is a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2015) and examine the depths of the experiences that my co-researchers, as Moustakas (1990) describes the participants in heuristic research, and I share as queer independent school educators.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this qualitative heuristic study was to develop an understanding of the experiences of queer independent school educators and their decisions to come out of the closet (the term used for those queer individuals choosing to disclose their sexuality) at school and how this is navigated individually within their educational institutions. Given that the espoused goal of many independent schools, as defined by their mission statements, is to promote mindfulness and understanding of different cultures while developing a moral awareness, it would appear that the culture and community promoted by independent schools would be supportive and accepting of those individuals and encourage queer faculty to come out (Brooks School, n.d.; Choate-Rosemary Hall, n.d.; Phillips Andover Academy, n.d.). However there is very little research about the experience of queer educators in independent schools, and what exists suggests navigating one’s identity is not quite as easy as the various schools’ literature implies it might be in light of their mission statements and espoused goals.



## **Research Design**

Heuristic inquiry, specifically the six phases of heuristic understanding developed by Moustakas (1990), served as the framework for this research. Moustakas (1990) posits that this type of qualitative research is designed for a deep exploration and interpretation of experience, using oneself and other individuals who have also experienced the phenomenon under examination. Moustakas (1990) refers to these research participants as co-researchers (p.47) who also seek to illuminate the examined experience. In keeping with Moustakas' methodological approach, my experience as a queer educator was an important component of this research. "In its purest form, heuristic inquiry is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving and effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self," (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985 p. 39). My understanding of my own process of navigating the development of my identity within the construct of education guided the research. As Douglass and Moustakas (1985) state, "When utilized as a framework for research, it offers a disciplined pursuit of essential meanings connected with everyday human experiences." (p.39).

## **Significance of the Study**

Researchers have pointed to the relevance and importance of a teacher's experience and background in the development of their mastery within the craft of teaching (Goodson, 1991; Hargraves & Fullan, 1992; Pillen, Den Brok, & Beijaard, 2013) that serves to produce effective teachers. This craft of effective teaching, combined with more recent research about intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), in combination with one's personal experience in the development of a teacher identity (Friesen & Besley,

2013), reveals an area ripe for research in relation to queer educators. Developing an understanding of how out queer educators navigate their professional and personal identities may have ramifications that resonate beyond merely understanding how to best support a diverse faculty to policies that result in stronger student and teacher support, with stronger learning outcomes for students (Castro & Sujak, 2014; Machado, 2014).

### **Limitations of the Study**

My proximity to the subject area I explored as a queer educator offered an insight that a straight educational professional would be more challenged to attain. This advantage also held the potential to be a distinct disadvantage. Did my proximity prevent me from seeing the details that I might otherwise notice if I was not steeped in the injustice I perceive by keeping teachers in closets? It was critical that I remained open and receptive, as Moustakas (1990) states the primary researcher must be, as I engaged and worked with my co-researchers to construct and understand this phenomenon from more than just my perspective, in order to bring meaning to the experience of what it means to be out as an adult queer member of an independent school.

Within the realm of qualitative phenomenological research, heuristic inquiry is centered upon the experience of the primary researcher as a part of the process to develop a deep understanding of a phenomenon (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Hiles, 2001; Moustakas, 1990). The knowledge and depth of this exploration, through a growing self-awareness and self-knowledge, has the potential to disclose the truth of the phenomenon (Douglass & Moustakas, 1995; Moustakas, 1990). As I worked to illuminate the experience of queer independent school educators, I situated myself within the research and it was important, as Moustakas (1990) stated, to, “[become] one with what one is

seeking to know.” (p. 16). Thus, it was critical for me to know and understand intimately my experience of developing and navigating my personal and professional identity as a queer educator. This study is the result of the synthesis of 12 queer teachers’ experiences as we sought to make meaning of our collective understanding and practice together. As queer educators within the inherently heteronormative independent school world, we began to understand clearly how challenging our identity management has been. Unlike the 12 of us in this study, many queer teachers choose, given the lack of empowerment faced by most queer educators (Connell, 2012; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Jackson, 2009), to remain invisible.

The research my co-researchers and I conducted reflects a minute portion of the independent school world, and given the small number of co-researchers, there is little generalizability to the larger queer educational community, even within the relatively small independent schools consortium. While some researchers would consider this a limitation, Creswell (2013) and Patton (2015) remind us that this lack of generalizability has no particular relevance to the qualitative researcher given the qualitative researchers’ quest to explore, uncover, and examine issues that are not easily quantified.

## **Data**

Data was gathered from co-researchers identified through purposeful sampling, using both intensity sampling and snowball sampling methods (Maxwell, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Maxwell (1990) posits that intensity sampling is an ideal method of sampling for heuristic inquiry because of its emphasis on information-rich examples of the phenomena under investigation. The criteria for co-researchers are that individuals

must self-identify as queer and be out as teachers of at least one course in an independent school.

I conducted open-ended in-depth conversational interviews with the co-researchers that were transcribed, and checked by co-researchers for accuracy and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). I supported these interviews with analytic memos (Maxwell 2005) and a reflexive journal (Patton, 2015). I also gathered and analyzed data from faculty handbooks, school personnel policies, and school mission statements as posted on their web sites.

Analytic memos are write-ups or short analyses that are kept by the researcher throughout the research process. Typically they are written before and after data collection to create a record of the researcher's experience and are important repositories of reflection and understanding developed during both the collection and analysis of data; "they are ways of getting ideas down on paper (or in a computer), and of using this writing as a way to facilitate reflections and analytic insight" (Maxwell, 2005, p.12).

A reflexive journal, kept by the researcher, documents reflection on the entire process of research, a process that is meant to "direct us to a particular kind of reflection grounded in the in-depth, experiential, and interpersonal nature of qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2015, p. 70). The reflexive journal permitted me to examine all aspects of my research more thoughtfully and allow connections not immediately obvious to slowly develop through the process of introspective writing. "Reflexivity encompasses reflection – indeed, mandates reflection – but it means to take the reflexive process deeper and make it more systematic than is usually implied by the term reflection" (Patton, 2015, p. 70).

## **Research Questions**

Research was guided by the following questions:

1. What does it mean to a queer educator to be out in his or her independent school institution?
2. What do the various school policies and attitudes of the administration and colleagues mean to queer teachers as they navigate their professional identities?
3. What are the various strategies that queer teachers employ in determining when and to whom to come out to in school?
4. What experiences from a queer teacher's own educational past help shape his or her professional identity?

## **Conclusion**

In the following chapters I present a literature review, my methodological approach to the study, the findings of the study, and finally the implications of my study. A list of definitions relevant to this study, as related to the queer community, culture, and identity, can be found in Appendix A. In chapter two, the literature review provides a view of relevant previous research as it pertains to the hegemonic heteronormative culture that continues to exist within education today, the legal actions for queer educators that have evolved over the past 60 years, and the construct of queer teacher identities. Following the literature review, I articulate in chapter three my methodological approach to this qualitative phenomenological heuristic inquiry that my co-researchers and I undertook. In the fourth chapter, I introduce my co-researchers, and examine my synthesis of the findings of this study thematically. Finally, in chapter five I present the

implications of this research in relation to policy, practice, future research, and leadership for both teachers and administrators.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The experience of queer students in U.S. schools is a phenomenon that has been well researched over the past fifteen years, with a concentration on public school institutions that began with the first National School Climate Survey in 2001 (Kosciw & Cullen, 2002). While more challenging to find, studies focused upon the experiences of queer educators within the U.S. education system exist (Stader & Graca, 2007), though again, the majority of research is concentrated on public schools. Examination of queer issues relative to private school institutions, and independent schools in particular, is rare and difficult to locate, with only a brief passage or chapter dedicated to such schools in journal articles or books.

My review of current literature addressing elementary and secondary education, queer students, and queer teachers discusses three topic areas: first, the historical construct of same sex love among teachers, including the legal actions advocating for queer rights in the late 20th century (Blount, 2000; Harbeck, 1992; Lipkin, 1999); second, the navigation of the heteronormative educational environment by the queer community (Bryan, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2014; Kosse & Wright, 2005; Lugg, 2003) and third, the examination of queer teacher identity and the implications of tacit, if not blatant, unspoken cultural norms that create homophobia within the educational workplace for queer teachers and administrators (Machado, 2014; Markow & Fein, 2005; McKenna-Buchanan, Munz, & Rudnick, 2015). While I identify these three topics separately for discussion, they often overlap and interweave, revealing a more complete depiction of the queer community, particularly how queer educators navigate daily life in heteronormative

environments, and negotiate the continual process of coming out. I expect to uncover a clearer depiction of independent school educators' lived experiences in my research through the synthesis of the observations and experiences that my co-researchers and I share.

## **Historical Context**

### **Pre-20th Century**

Examining the history of U.S. education through a queer lens reveals a culture that is heteronormative and largely opposed to the inclusion of anyone outside of these heterosexual norms (Lugg, 2003; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001). U. S. education has preserved heterosexuality in the construct of defined gender roles throughout history (Evans, 2002).

In the late 18th and throughout the 19th centuries, women provided the bulk of the educational workforce. Career opportunities were limited and teaching was one field in which women were welcome because there were many to choose from and they were inexpensive compared to men (Blount, 2000, 2005; D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012). Women, freed from the constraints of marriage, often chose to live together, frequently because of financial necessity and, at other times, because of affection (Blount, 2000; Lugg, 2003). Societal assumptions in this time period expected that unmarried women were non-sexual and therefore pure (Lugg, 2003), two important qualities originating from our country's Puritan background (D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012). As such, women residing together during this time period did little to arouse concern within education or society as a whole (Blount, 2000; Cavanagh, 2006; Lugg, 2003).



In these early days of development in the U.S., men were afforded significantly more freedom in terms of job opportunities, and many young men took to teaching as a precursor to becoming doctors and lawyers (Blount, 2005). These male teachers were often transient and tended not to remain within one school for very long (Blount, 2005). It is, perhaps, just this atmosphere that permitted those men outside of the heteronormative construct to successfully exist at a time when marriage determined social acceptance within pre-20th century American culture (Cavanagh, 2006).

Even in the 19th century era, there was a fear of school workers who violated the cultural norms of conventional sexuality, though, as noted, women were often overlooked, and single men, unless they were particularly egregious in transgressing propriety, were not considered threatening (Blount, 1996, 2005). Historically, fear of non-heterosexual behavior has permeated education, and those teachers who did not conform to the societal heteronormative construct were seen as deviants, which by definition included any educators who appeared or acted outside of the acceptable social parameters (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Blount, 2010; Lugg, 2003). In order to maintain their teaching positions within that heteronormative construct, queer individuals have always been required to conform to societal gender norms, and if they did not there were serious consequences including the loss of employment and social ostracism (Blount, 2000; Lugg, 2003).

As the U.S. moved toward the 20th century and a free education for all children became law, attitudes toward the social acceptability of teachers evolved. Educational culture moved away from the pure, non-threatening depiction of single women and the normality of unmarried men building their resumes through teaching (Cavanagh, 2006;

Harbeck, 1997), and began to move toward the more socially accepted norm of married men and women in schools. Only by marrying could the notion of deviance that had come to be associated with single men and women in the teaching force be dispelled (Blount, 2000; Lugg, 2003).

### **20th and 21st Centuries**

By the 20th century, men were no longer encouraged to teach as this was seen as unmanly and beneath them, or, as tacitly implied, deviant (Lugg, 2003). As education expanded after the turn of the 20th century and public education became ubiquitous, a larger teaching force was required, and this group needed leaders. This unit of teachers requiring leadership was composed of a “captive pool of talented female applicants” (Hess, 2009, p.451) who had few other viable professional opportunities (Hess, 2009). With so many schools in need of supervision as a result of mandatory education, doors opened and men were encouraged to become administrators and to teach in high schools, as well as become coaches (Blount, 1996), while elementary teaching remained women’s work. As Blount (2005) observes, school work has been deeply divided, “women teach and men administer” (p.181). In the early 20th century, real men ran businesses, and did not work within the softer vocations such as elementary and middle school teaching (Blount, 2000). However, teaching at the high school level and administering were perceived as the masculine equivalent within the educational institution to running a business (Lugg, 2003). Those men who taught and remained single regardless of what grade level they taught, in contrast to early 19th century norms, came to be viewed with suspicion of deviance (Blount, 2000, 2005; Lugg, 2003).

Encouraging men to run schools further strengthened the heteronormative culture prevalent in education (Blount, 2005). With men joining the teaching force as education expanded in the early 20th century, the prevalent U.S. culture that rewarded men for successful careers and families was the same culture that in schools had necessitated a heteronormative environment for the education of impressionable young minds (Blount, 1996). Soon, unmarried women were also viewed with suspicion, which was in contrast to the image of the pure, non-sexual beings that existed in previous decades (Blount, 2005).

**20th Century civil rights.** As the fight for civil rights developed following World War II, gay rights activists took their cues from African American civil rights activists and began to fight for equal rights and protections. The Mattachine Society for gay men was founded in 1950 and the Daughters of Bilitis for lesbians followed in 1955 (Marcus, 2002), both of which advocated fitting in with society without inciting anger by passing, or by subjugating one's sexuality and pretending to be heterosexual. Younger activists, angered by the slow pace of the movement and resentful of the older generation's passive approach, rejected this tactic in the 1960's and began to mount more vocal and visible protests (Blount, 2005; D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012). Queer teachers, taking their cues from the younger queer activists, began to push back against the conservative heteronormative structure of education by building legal defenses to their job terminations, many of which were upheld in courts nationwide (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008).

**Legal actions.** In the late 20th century however, the U.S. saw a surge first in protests and then in lawsuits aimed at protecting the queer community and promoting the

rights of queer educators. The protest that erupted on June 28, 1969 at the Stonewall Inn, a New York City gathering point and gay bar frequently raided by police (Blount, 2005; D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012; Eckes & McCarthy, 2008; Lugg, 2003), became a turning point historically, building upon the efforts of the Mattachine Society and resistance to police raids in San Francisco during the 1950's and 1960's. The uprising lasted for several days and attracted large numbers of protestors that the national news media could not ignore. This act of civil disobedience is often credited with launching the modern civil rights movement for the queer community (D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012; Marcus, 2002).

Eckes and McCarthy (2008) identified three distinct stages of legal activity initiated by queer teachers beginning in the 1960's moving through to the present day. The first stage, First Generation Activity, began in the 1960's, extended into the middle 1970's, and was marked by the 1969 uprising at the Stonewall Inn (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008; Lugg, 2003). In this first phase, there were few successful lawsuits by queer teachers against their schools or their school districts. One notable exception was a California case, *Morrison v. Board of Education* (SCOCAL, 1969), in which the Supreme Court of California found in favor of a teacher. The court agreed that Marc Morrison's case was not reasonable cause for termination and dismissed the case on the grounds that his sexual orientation had no bearing on his ability to carry out the demands of his certification credentials (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008; "The Supreme Court of California 1969-1970: Administrative Law--I.pdf," 1971). This case proved to be pivotal in developing momentum toward equal rights for queer educators, and it propelled the legal

activity as described by Eckes and McCarthy (2008) into what they define as Second Generation Activity.

In this second stage, courts began applying the 14th Amendment, with the due process and equal protection clauses, but the majority of rulings still failed to protect queer educators.

The queer civil rights movement, made visible to the entire country by the Stonewall uprising, spawned a backlash around the country as conservatives, especially those within education, became fearful of the impact queers could have on children (deLeon & Brunner, 2013).

Eckes and McCarthy (2008) postulate this fear was further enflamed by political activist Anita Bryant's 1977 homophobic campaign targeting queer educators in Florida that successfully overturned the Dade County municipal civil rights ordinance that protected queers from discrimination (D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Lugg, 1988). Bryant's campaign was significant not only for the number of teachers who lost their positions in Florida as a result of her "Save Our Children" crusade, but also for the initiatives it spawned across the U.S., most notably the 1978 Briggs Initiative in California (Lipkin, 1999; Marcus, 2002). California Proposition 6, named for the conservative legislator John Briggs, proposed to ban gays, lesbians, or anyone who supported their rights, from working in California public schools. The initiative ultimately failed when the queer community coalesced with the help of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay politician in San Francisco, to defeat the legislation (Blount, 2005; Lipkin, 1999).

These initiatives coupled with the economic downturn of the 1980's and the AIDS epidemic, helped to keep the heteronormative hegemony in education firmly in place by perpetrating fear of the queer community as espoused by conservatives in the U.S. (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008; Lugg, 1988). The ultimate failure of the Briggs' California Proposition 6 initiative and the increasing number of court rulings in favor of the queer community slowly rising, coupled with mounting evidence about the AIDS virus affecting more than just the gay community (Marcus, 2002), created the pathway for the Third Generation Activity (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008).

The Third Generation Activity, the third and final stage proposed by Eckes and McCarthy (2008), began in the late 1990s and continues to the present with the queer community gaining equal rights as a result of many decisions (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008), most notably the June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 milestone ruling in favor of marriage equality known as the Marriage Equality Act (Underwood, 2015). Momentum grows every passing year with lawsuits focusing on working conditions that theoretically will have significant positive implications for educational policies protecting queer teachers, especially in those states, still a majority, with no specific equality legislation regarding queer employment practices (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008; HRC, 2016).

The close examination of single men and women teachers has been intensified by heterosexual gender roles and norms within education (Blount, 2005), and repercussions for nonconformity remain a reality in many parts of the U.S. today where equality legislation protecting queer individuals is non-existent (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008; Elkind, 2014). The need for workplace protections is significant for the queer community, particularly queer teachers, as the country begins to witness the backlash from the

Marriage Equality Act ruling in states such as North Carolina and Georgia (Socarides, 2016). North Carolina pushed through laws that eliminated LGBQ protections and blocked transgendered individuals from access to bathrooms that correspond to their gender identity, while in Georgia, both houses of the legislature voted for legislation that would have protected opponents of same sex marriage (Socarides, 2016).

Rorrer (2006) highlights the social inequity of the hegemonic construct that undermines the work queer individuals do as teachers and administrators within the U.S. school system. The culture that defines who is acceptable as an educator has evolved over the past 30 years, yet despite this, today's educational norms still have their roots within the conservative societal mindset that hired young unmarried women in part because they were pure, non-sexual beings (Blount, 2005; Lugg, 2003). Women who conform, or appear to conform, to the heteronormative construct within education make up the largest percentage of teachers within the U.S. workforce today (HRC, 2016).

### **Heteronormative Culture in Schools**

A second category of relevant literature highlights the prevalence and effects of heteronormative culture in schools. Butler (1993) describes heteronormativity as the minoritization and stigmatization of non-heterosexual individuals, and this has long been the norm within the U.S. educational system (Butler, 1993; Capper, 1999; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Ngo, 2003). Much of the literature surrounding education and the queer community examines the impact school culture has upon public school queer youth's physical and mental safety, the fear that public school queer educators contend with, and how both students and teachers alike navigate the heteronormative and often homophobic cultures prevalent in schools (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2014; Lugg, 2003;

Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Research reveals that the cultural controversy surrounding queer issues related to school often marginalizes and silences the queer community within educational contexts (Bryan, 2012; Castro & Sujak, 2014; Ciszek, 2014; Curwood, Schliesman, & Horning, 2009; Donahue, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2014; Robinson & Espelage, 2012).

Queer students, for example, must learn to navigate not only the everyday challenges of adolescence prevalent in middle and high school, but also how to construct their own identities, often alone without role models (DeJean, 2010; King, 2004). Students perceived as non-conventional in their appearance and mannerisms are often marginalized in their schools, and the homophobic bullying they endure serves to enforce the cultural heteronormativity (Hong & Garbarino, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2014; Watson, 2012). Students at Concord Academy, an independent school in Concord, Massachusetts, are credited with creating the first Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) in 1988 (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Worthen, 2014). Since then, these groups have had the effect of creating a perception of safety for queer students, and, to a lesser extent, normalizing school (Meyer & Bayer, 2013; Toomey & Russell, 2013).

This normalization is limited by the extent to which the administration and faculty support the GSA organization. Given the fear many queer educators possess about revealing their queer identity in light of the overarching heteronormative construct inherent in education, many GSAs are guided by a straight ally (Toomey & Russell, 2013). The construct of a straight teacher leading GSAs does little to provide queer students with adult role models who exhibit the successful formation of queer identity (Cass, 1984; Castro & Sujak, 2014; DeJean, 2010; Fetner & Elafros, 2015; Fredman,



Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015; Russell, 2013), but with so few teachers willing to reveal their identity for fear of retribution, there are few alternatives (Stader & Graca, 2007). A tolerant inclusive educational environment that normalizes queer identities benefits not just queer students, but the entire school community and society as a whole by challenging the heteronormative values present in the U.S. education system (Meyer & Bayer, 2013).

Queer students are in a better position to attain personal and academic success today, as the plethora of literature focusing on queer students makes evident (Kosciw et al., 2014), and the cultural shift within the U.S. has assisted in this positive change. But as Perrotti and Westheimer (2001, p.47) note, “homophobia is the last acceptable prejudice”, and schools still need to undertake significant work to support marginalized student populations more fully.

The upsurge of attention in recent years given to the queer community as a result of the recent rulings on the Defense of Marriage Act, Marriage Equality Act (Phillip & De Vogue, 2013, June 26), and on high profile cases of suicides involving students’ sexual identities (Kosse & Wright, 2005; Murphy, 2011) has focused public attention on the struggles of the queer community and queer students in particular. Despite this attention, the environment and prevalent culture of bullying and silencing that many queer students and faculty face daily within U.S. schools remains largely overlooked institutionally and within the curriculum (Jennings, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2014; Lugg, 2003).

Federal laws demand that school officials prevent bullying and other injurious acts that undermine school culture (Barbeauld, 2014; Meyer & Bayer, 2013). This is not

to suggest that present-day queer students are completely safe, but there are havens of relative safety in some schools in the form of GSAs and straight allies among teachers (Hong & Garbarino, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2014; Mayberry, 2013; Murphy, 2011; Perrotti, 2001). These two elements taken together make it clear that today's queer student is afforded greater protections than at any time in history.

To a limited extent, advances in the rights of queer students follow the trajectory of the historical civil rights movements within the queer community, while the rights afforded to queer educators, who are expected to conform to education's hegemonic construct of heteronormative behavior, are largely ignored and non-existent (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Connell, 2010; Courtney, 2014; deLeon & Brunner, 2013). Queer teachers, given the construct of school politics, have not been empowered to express different genders or sexual orientations beyond the expected heteronormative behavior, which ultimately prevents them from providing positive role models for queer students (Connell, 2012; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Jackson, 2009; King, 2004).

Providing support for the queer student population in the form of harassment, intimidation, and bullying laws (HIB) and GSAs, while subtly reinforcing gender and sexuality norms among educators, creates a distinct disconnect between the espoused theory and purported goal of supporting students. The theory in action (Argyris & Schön, 1974) actually results in students noticing a lack of institutional support for queer adults in their schools. Students implicitly understand this indirect communication as a lack of support for the queer adults in their lives, while undermining their sense as adolescents who deserve the right to have adult role models among their teachers (Russell, Toomey, Ryan, & Diaz, 2014; Vicars, 2006).

## **Tacit Homophobia and Teacher Identity**

### **Homophobia**

Nationally, laws have been enacted to safeguard queer students, and individual states have also implemented HIB laws to protect their non-heterosexual students, with New Jersey at the forefront of these actions. However, as the 2013 National School Climate Survey: The School-Related Experiences of Our Nation's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth (Kosciw et al., 2014) and the School Climate in New Jersey report (GLSEN, 2014) suggest, schools remain far from safe both physically and emotionally for queer students, and logically it can be assumed, queer teachers.

Given the failure of government and education to protect queer students as Machado (2014) asserts, it remains true that schools continue to be inherently unsafe for queer teachers, discouraging them from revealing their true identities. As Connell (2012) observes, it is critical to consider the impact of non-discrimination policies for educators because they are the largest professional group working with students. Examining Connell's observations alongside Hong and Garabino's (2012) findings that institutional heteronormative behaviors exist in most schools, it becomes obvious that despite many statewide policies legislating equity for the queer community in education, the institution as a whole lags behind corporations in creating job safety for the queer community. The sheer number of queer teachers and administrators who feel compelled to pass, hide, or otherwise present an identity other than who they actually are suggests the heteronormative culture remains firmly entrenched in education today (Connell, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Hong & Garbarino, 2012; Lugg, 2003; Tooms, 2007). The decision to hide, avoid, or otherwise

misrepresent their sexual identity reinforces a sense of silence and marginalization within educational cultures, creating a perpetual loop of cause and effect (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013). As Bishop et al. (2010) note, “discrimination against a marginalized group of Americans... does nothing more than continue spreading hate, ignorance, and intolerance” (p.87).

The ignorance and intolerance perpetuated by the heteronormative and oftentimes homophobic culture of schools is manifested in the actions of many of our school leaders (Fraynd & Capper, 2003) as well as some of the leaders of our country as evidenced by the sentiments of the late Justice Scalia when he stated that people do not want queer teachers because they will steer children to a homosexual lifestyle (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010).

While research reveals a shift in American culture in the past 20 years toward a more tolerant attitude regarding the queer community (Condorelli, 2014; Courtney, 2014; GLSEN, 2014; Lugg, 1988), Machado (2014) posits that despite attitudes changing, even in light of the 2015 Supreme Court rulings on marriage equality (Underwood, 2015), queer teachers still face homophobia on a level not experienced in other vocations. In 2002, research revealed the presence of both overt and subtle forms of homophobia present in education (Evans, 2002) that has continued in the more subtle form as overt hostility becomes increasingly unacceptable (HRC, n.d.). This continued level of antagonism toward queer teachers can be traced back to the years of anti-gay “crusades” (Lugg, 1988; Marcus, 2002, p.189), particularly those of the 1970’s led by Anita Bryant to remove teachers considered outside the heteronormative standard and labeled deviant, as vividly described by Blount (2005). The movement begun by Bryant has had a lasting

impact and has created a groundswell among conservative Americans, beginning in the 1970's and continuing today. Conservative politicians and leaders from the Religious Right rally their base (Lugg, 2001) by exploiting misinformation and creating fear through the unfounded and unsupported assertion that queer individuals are pedophiles and queer teachers use schools to gain access to children (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Stader & Graca, 2007).

The conservative political rhetoric demonizing queer teachers is well entrenched in our educational system despite the many gains queer citizens have made within the United States over the past decade and a half. There has been a backlash from Marriage Equality Act felt by the queer community in a number of states, Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, Texas, and Colorado among them, by local and state politicians refusing to serve or working to pass legislation discriminating against the queer community (Wolf, 2016).

Despite this backlash, schools are safer, though there remains an overarching heteronormative construct that embodies most educational institutions, and these institutions remain dangerous environments to navigate for the queer community (Denton, 2009; Evans, 2002). Blount (2005) illuminates the degree to which queer teachers contend with heteronormative, and often homophobic, environments by pointing to a significantly higher than national average of heterosexual marriage for men and women in the teaching profession. She advances that internalized homophobia in education causes queer individuals to act as heterosexual, which often results in marrying members of the opposite sex in order to avoid the stigma related to perceived deviance (Blount, 2005).

Woog (1995) spoke to hundreds of queer teachers, administrators, students, and straight allies and compiled their stories of fear and alienation, including a number who entered into sham marriages in order to pass and remain in their schools. It remains true 20 years later, as Machado (2014) observes, that teachers and administrators in many schools remain on guard and cautious about what and how much they reveal in order to retain their positions as educators, which often results in silence and invisibility (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; McGarry, 2011).

### **Identity**

Research suggests that the process of learning to teach, and the development of a professional identity is a complex challenge for all teachers to navigate (Olsen, 2010; Pillen et al., 2013). Individual teachers bring their history and cultural perspectives with them to the classroom, all of which has to be adapted to institutional construct and culture in which they work, and which impacts teaching practices (Friesen & Besley, 2013; Goodson, 1991; Pillen et al., 2013). This process of professional identity development is a challenge for all teachers as they strive to integrate their values and personal worldview with the professional demands set forth by the schools within which they work and the national understanding of what it means to teach. Pillen et al. (2013) posit there are 13 tensions (p. 88) that beginning teachers experience as they work to adopt their professional identity, and while the last one begins to address the concept of a private life, it is only in terms of how it relates to balancing work load. It appears that much of the investigations and research into teacher identity development is aligned with the heteronormative construct that exists within education; issues addressing sexuality are largely absent.

Ferfolja and Hopkins (2013) observe that there is an impact on teaching practices as a result of queer teachers being forced to pass or to hide, which, when coupled with the impact of heterosexism on teachers, creates a particularly challenging environment that makes the development of a teaching identity even more difficult. Navigating the assumed world of heterosexuality in education is always a challenge for queer educators, but it is particularly difficult for young queer teachers in the process of developing their professional educational identity.

Birden (2005) defines heterosexism as the belief that heterosexuality is inherently superior to any form of non-heterosexuality. Research reveals that queer educators encounter significant challenges when navigating their sexual identification or orientation within the heteronormative environment pervasive in education (Birden, 2005). The hegemonic heteronormative construct in schools is a structure within which queer teachers and administrators are bound, and as DeJean (2008) posits, being open about one's identity is challenging for queer educators. As Evans (2002) notes in her research of queer teachers in pre-service education programs, making sense of the construct of teaching in relationship to the self-identity as a queer individual is problematic, and navigation is fraught with challenges. Questions from students about to whom one is married or in a relationship with, what one did over the weekend, and other seemingly benign inquiries, all carry consequences dependent upon the degree of disclosure (Evans, 2002; Turner, 2010; Woog, 1995).

**Navigation.** All educators, regardless of their sexual or gender identity, are the totality of their identity and experiences, all of which have a role in the act of educating students, whether or not teachers choose to acknowledge or share their private lives. This

intersection of the public and private significantly impacts the effectiveness of teachers (DeJean, 2010; Evans, 2002; King, 2004; Turner, 2010). As King (2004) points out, individuals who choose to teach undergo careful examination concerning their appropriateness to educate by the administrators, colleagues, students, and community that comprise their schools. DeJean (2008) underscores that self-identity has a significant impact upon how educators teach and structure their classes. How teachers perceive and make sense of the personal and cultural messages they receive is all a part of how identity is constructed for educators (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Additionally, queer teachers must contend with the historic socially constructed norms in the U. S. that have perpetuated the concept that queer individuals are unsuitable as educators (Cavanagh, 2006; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Jackson, 2009; King, 2004). Navigating one's identity as a queer educator and deciding what to reveal, how much, and what not to reveal, is fraught with complex challenges for queer individuals. All teachers undergo a close examination by students and colleagues in all areas of their individual conduct and identity, which impacts queer educators as they develop an understanding of who they are as teachers.

**Identity development.** The personal examination of oneself as a teacher is far less of an issue for heterosexual educators because they are considered the norm, and there is little to navigate when one has nothing to hide and is considered normal (Connell, 2012). As Connell (2012), Eliason (1996), and Jackson (2007) all state, teacher identity development is a critical component of effective teaching, and this remains true whether a teacher is heterosexual or queer. Queer educators have an entirely different construct that they must navigate, which is the heteronormative and often-homophobic environment that exists in schools, in addition to developing the basic skills and identity as a leader



that is necessary for teaching (Jackson, 2009). Identity development for the queer community has been explored since the mid-eighties, and only recently, in the latter 2000s, has queer identity development for teachers been studied.

Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988) were leaders in the field of identity development for the queer community at large (Eliason, 1996), however the majority of both researchers' identity studies addressed only White middle-class queer individuals, and did not fully explore the scope of the queer community (Eliason, 1996). Eliason (1996) noted this was a problem inherent in developing validity in queer identity formation research that encompassed the entire queer community. She further noted that only Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988) had constructed stages within their respective research to fit their participants, rather than imposing separate, finite stages on the participants (Eliason, 1996). This is an important difference between their theories and the theories of their contemporaries that allows for a greater understanding of the adoption of a queer identity and the applicability of data (Eliason, 1996).

**Identity research.** Both Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988) tie their respective theories of identity development, or identity formation, to individual perceptions of self and to the perceptions of others and social constructs; the final stage of both theories is self-acceptance. Cass (1984) posits that the final stage for queer individuals is a placement of the self within a larger construct of self-identity, leaving to question whether the person not totally committed to queer activism is fully complete (Eliason, 1996). Troiden (1988) has a pared-down framework for identity development compared to Cass (1984), but it too has shortcomings primarily in relation to his final stage of development (Eliason, 1996).

Troiden (1988) writes, “People are not born with perceptions of themselves as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual in relation to sexual or romantic settings. Instead sexual identities are developed slowly, over a prolonged period of time.” (p. 105). He advances that identity development is not linear and that individuals can move back and forth through the various stages of identity development. Troiden (1988) further suggests that to achieve the final stage of his model, an individual who has navigated his or her homosexual identity must commit to living as a homosexual (p.110). Not coming out at work, he posits, suggests that one has not fully committed to living as a homosexual.

As Eliason (1996) suggests, similar to Troiden’s work (1988), there are inherent problems in Cass’s (1984) research, in that both researchers had a limited pool of participants, rather than a more diverse sample that embodies the variety present in the queer community. The majority of participants for both studies were White people of European descent. Eliason (1996) notes that despite these shortcomings, both researchers have validity in their work as the most extensive queer identity models of their times.

**Queer teacher identity development.** Building upon the work of Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988), Jackson (2007) developed a six-stage framework that focused on queer educators and considered more fully the context, meaning the internal and external factors of a teacher’s experience, and how it affects both a queer educator’s teacher identity and their queer personal identity, in addition to examining how these experiences impacted their professional practice. Jackson’s (2007) six-stage queer identity development includes the following:

1. Pre-Identity: before the person is aware of one’s own identity.

2. Identity Realization/Survival: awareness of one's identity along with acceptance of society's stereotypes.
3. Identity Questioning: cognitive dissonance between self and society's stereotypes leads to a questioning of society's stereotypes.
4. Identity Focus: emphasis on and pride in that particular aspect of identity.
5. Identity Integration: integrating that aspect of identity with rest of self.
6. Change Agent: empowering others to change their views about themselves and others in regards to that identity aspect. (pp. 77-78)

Navigating between the heteronormative environment of educational institutions and one's sense of self-identity, as advanced by Cass (1984), Troiden (1988), and Jackson (2007), creates a polemical construct for the queer educator who places a queer teacher's identity against a national school system that offers little protection. The marginalization and victimization of queer teachers is still prevalent in education despite various protections in place, and can elicit an internalized homophobia that manifests in the form of shame or guilt (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001). Recent statistics reveal that 16 U.S. states offer no statewide protection of employment practices for queer individuals (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). Of the remaining 34 states that do offer some protection, only half offer full protection prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). This further perpetuates the inherent heteronormative hegemony that prevents queer teachers from fully developing their identity as teachers because the educational environment remains rife with obstacles that pose real and present dangers for them (Connell, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013).

As research has uncovered, revealing one's queer identity as a teacher can be inherently dangerous in relation to one's physical well-being and job tenure (D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Lugg, 2006; Scott, 2007; Woog, 1995). In New Jersey, the state laws mandate employment protection for sexual orientation; gender identity; and marital, domestic partnership, or civil union status (NJ Office of the Attorney General, n.d.). Despite the veracity of New Jersey's laws of protection, queer New Jersey educators remain reluctant about revealing their personal identities in school, and many continue to hide. This is in part a result of the hegemonic and oftentimes homophobic culture created by Anita Bryant's campaigns in the 1970's, perpetuated by conservative politicians and educational leaders today that continue to have a lasting impact on our schools (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Lipkin, 1999; Lugg, 1998; Marcus, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

The overarching heteronormativity that encompasses the current hegemony in U.S. education prevents many queer educators from revealing their full identity within their school systems. Given that determining the actual number of queer identified people in the U.S. is challenging (Gates, 2011), the actual number of queer educators in New Jersey independent schools who are out or remain in the closet is impossible to determine. My experience with colleagues and friends involved in education suggests that many queer educators worry that schools will not support their identities and roles as teachers and administrators when parents, many of whom believe and subscribe to the conservative position that the queer community is inherently dangerous to children, exert their oftentimes significant base of power (Blount, 2000; Lugg, 2006).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The intent of this qualitative study was to reveal and illuminate the experiences of a small subset of educators who exist within the vast institution that is U.S. education by exploring the question of what it means, as a queer independent school educator, to be out within one's respective school. Moustakas (1990) notes that heuristic inquiry can create a personal transformation as well as develop new knowledge about a phenomenon when undertaken with passion, honesty, reflection, and dedication. He further notes that performed correctly, heuristic inquiry is rigorous, demanding work and not for the faint of heart (Moustakas, 1990).

Qualitative heuristic inquiry places the primary researcher directly within the methodological framework and requires that this individual has a personal experience with the phenomenon under examination (Moustakas, 1990). Additionally, qualitative research attempts to understand and illuminate the experiences of people from particular cultures and groups by studying them in their natural settings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Dissertations by Bonner Slayton (2013) and Lauren Elizabeth Gechter (2014) use heuristic inquiry effectively to illuminate the experience of their research in educational settings, providing me with a firm foundation from which to conduct my own heuristic research within education.

My experience as a queer educator who continually navigates the process of my identity at work allowed me to add to the understanding and knowledge that my co-researchers and I constructed together, which will permit our voices to be heard and our unique and challenging positions as educators understood. It is important to note that the

two processes of data collection and data analysis often take place simultaneously as one informs the other in this iterative process, and as Moustakas (1990) states, the two steps are not meant to be mutually exclusive.

The following chapter provides the background and methodology behind Moustakas' (1990) process of heuristic inquiry that I used to explore the phenomenon outlined previously. It is a process that is directed at discovery and dialog with others to reveal the underlying meanings and truths of our deeply interconnected humanity and the particular experience we share as queer independent school educators. Heuristic inquiry uncovers the nature and meaning of phenomena through deep self-reflection, exploration, and explication (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985).

### **Rationale**

Examining the issue of being a queer teacher within the heteronormative educational institution is a matter that I have managed to ignore and repress for years, and it took considerable time to accept. Why should it matter? It matters because even today, with the progress the queer community has made in gaining the same rights as heterosexual individuals of full citizenship, many teachers lack the resources, courage, and a sense that they are not alone, to come out. I, too, felt alone for much of my 30 years as a teacher, but no longer. It can be argued that this experience has been 28 years of research as I navigated my path to becoming an educator who embraces the queer part of my identity as equally important to my artistic and educational identities.

My childhood experiences with school as a student, and the atmosphere and culture I witnessed as an adult teaching at many educational institutions, were challenges that had to be acknowledged and worked through in order to find the safety I required to

come out as a queer teacher. Given the time, thought, and reflection I have invested in this area of education, it became apparent to me that I would seek to explore and understand my experience through my research. In order to create an understanding of this phenomenon, which does not lend itself to a quantitative approach, I had much to choose from within the range and variety of qualitative research frameworks. As a new teacher in the late 1980's, coming out and being visible was neither something I considered a wise option nor was it something I was prepared to undertake. Nevertheless, my identity as queer certainly impacted how I interacted with my students and colleagues, what curriculum I chose to explore within my fine arts classroom, and how I constructed my life outside of school. This narrative lends itself the phenomenological approach that is heuristic inquiry.

A qualitative researcher is concerned with process and meaning, which are the instruments for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). In choosing qualitative research, I recognize that this approach aligns with my worldview that is deeply interested in the process of discovery, while exploring the entangled ambiguity that is our humanity and the subjective reality in which we exist. Understanding the process of navigating one's identity within the construct of education is rife with ambiguity, and developing meaning of such an experience requires a qualitative framework focused on revealing the oftentimes hidden truths that a quantitative approach cannot illuminate.

Heuristic inquiry is centered upon the experience of the primary researcher as a part of the process in developing a deep understanding of the phenomenon; the knowledge and depth of this exploration, through an ever increasing self awareness and self knowledge, is revealed through its potential to disclose truth (Douglass & Moustakas,

1985; Moustakas, 1990). Additionally, heuristic inquiry requires co-researchers who, by sharing their experiences, further develop and deepen understanding as related to the phenomenon. While incorporating the experiences of my co-researchers in the process of heuristic research, who have also fully lived the phenomenon of navigating their identities at school, my co-researchers and I explored the process of navigating our professional identities as out educators in our respective schools.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Heuristic Model**

Moustakas (1990) states there are seven concepts that the primary researcher must engage with to successfully navigate the process of heuristic inquiry. This conceptual framework consists of: identifying with the focus of inquiry; self-dialogue; tacit knowing; intuition; indwelling; focusing; and internal frame of reference, which I will expand upon below. The seven concepts will permit me and my co-researchers to delve into the depth of our experiences as queer teachers and fully explore the phenomena to illuminate our understandings.

#### **Identifying With the Focus of Inquiry**

This concept requires that the primary researcher engage with the research question through an open-ended, self-directed search that necessitates situating and immersing oneself inside the research question to achieve a profound understanding of it (Moustakas, 1990). In many ways, as I suggested earlier, I have been situated and immersed within this research since I began teaching, and even perhaps earlier when I commenced my student teaching in college. Understanding my own narrative of queer identity navigation within education was a critical component to also understanding my co-researchers' experiences.



## **Self-Dialogue**

“Becoming one with what one is seeking to know” focuses the inquiry (Moustakas, 1990, p.16) and honest self-dialogue is the critical first step in the process of considering the phenomenon as related to self. This requires openness and an ability to remain receptive and attuned to the experience of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1990) posits that it is critical to allow understanding and compassion to mix and intertwine while developing an understanding of the unity of oneself. One must develop an understanding of his or her knowledge and experience before expanding the research with co-researchers. Self-disclosure encourages and promotes honesty and revelations from co-researchers that will ultimately deepen an understanding of the phenomenon through these additional voices and perspectives.

I think it is here where my training as a visual artist was an essential part of my process. Artists naturally reflect, consider, ruminate, and contemplate as they develop a work of art; it is an iterative process that requires patience and perseverance. These are two tools I think necessary to execute heuristic inquiry, as explicated by Moustakas (1990), that have served me well not only in the studio, but also in the classroom as I seek to find the best approach or method to teaching each of my individual students. It comes as little surprise to me that my artistic process once again provides an avenue to develop creative knowledge.

## **Tacit Knowing**

This simply means, as Polanyi (1962) states, that we know far more than we are able to articulate. Keeping one’s balance while riding a bicycle or understanding how one is supposed to act within a given organization such as school or religious institution are

all examples of knowing something unexplainable (Polanyi, 1962). It is not explicit knowledge, “Such knowledge is possible through a tacit capacity that allows one to sense the unity of wholeness of something from an understanding of the individual qualities or parts” (Moustakas, 1990, p.21). As Douglass and Moustakas (1985) suggest, tacit knowledge is the basic capacity of the primary researcher that allows, by working through a process of self-dialog and reflection of hunches and possible insights, heuristic inquiry to discover new truths. I argue that all queer teachers, out or in the closet, are sensitive to the tacit messages conveyed within our communities; the key to our survival is understanding what the cultural norms of our schools are.

### **Intuition**

Intuition provides a guide, by drawing upon clues, for discovering patterns and meaning that will ultimately enrich understanding. “Intuition makes immediate knowledge possible without the intervening steps of logic and reasoning” (Moustakas, 1990, p.23), thereby becoming the bridge between tacit knowledge and our ultimate development of explicit knowledge.

Again, I find a relationship between Moustakas’ (1990) framework and my work as a visual artist. A work of art begins with an idea, a guide, and all of the knowledge one possesses is used either consciously or unconsciously, and tacit knowledge, that idea of what one wants to achieve can at times be unexplainable, yet it emerges through the act of creating. I understand this process intimately.

### **Indwelling**

This concept relies upon the focus and concentration of the primary researcher, as he or she turns inward to understand the significance of the phenomenon. It is a deliberate

act to reflect deeply upon clues as they emerge from tacit knowledge and intuition. This requires a patient approach to examining and dissecting clues as “one dwells inside them and expands upon their meanings and associations until a fundamental insight is achieved” (Moustakas, 1990, p.24). Indwelling requires the primary researcher to return to the experience again and again until a full depiction of the phenomenon is possible. Similar to sitting with my process of constructing and developing a composition as an artist, indwelling requires me to listen to the process and contemplate deeply both my own experience and those of my co-researchers to understand the phenomena as completely as possible.

### **Focusing**

This process is what permits researchers to see the different facets of a phenomenon while they engage in a sustained process of reflecting on the central meaning of an experience. Through focusing, clarification of core themes and explicit themes emerge that constitute an experience (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985).

### **The Internal Frame of Reference**

“To know and understand the nature, meanings, and essences of any human experience, one depends upon an internal frame of reference of the person who has had, is having, or will have the experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p.26). In order for the primary researcher to fully understand the experience of his or her co-researchers, she or he must be aware of her or his own internal frame of reference. That is, the primary researcher must have an understanding of the knowledge she or he has gained through tacit understanding, intuition, and the observation of phenomenon, which is ultimately deepened and magnified by indwelling, focusing, and eventually, communicating with

others of similar experiences. A researcher must develop an atmosphere and attitude of empathy to promote openness and trust with her or his co-researchers in order to support and foster full expression, disclosure, and explication of experience (Moustakas, 1990).

### **Six Phases of Heuristic Research Design**

Moustakas (1990) identified six phases that guide heuristic research design. They are: initial engagement; immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis.

#### **Initial Engagement**

In this first phase of inquiry, the primary researcher identifies an interest or concern that possesses meaning and importance to him or herself. In my instance, the question of what is the experience of queer independent school educators as they navigate the process of revealing their self-identity within their institution is the phenomena I sought to explicate and illuminate. This required a willingness and ability to examine and fully enter into the questions through reflection, while looking inward for tacit awareness and knowledge, all of which clarified the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). In this phase, the primary researcher is deeply involved with the topic area and develops the question (s) that will guide his or her research. Moustakas (1990) outlined the following five characteristics of the heuristic research question:

1. It seeks to reveal more fully the essence or meaning of a phenomenon of human experience.
2. It seeks to discover the qualitative aspects, rather than quantitative dimensions of the phenomenon.

3. It engages one's total self and evokes a personal and passionate involvement and active participation in the process.
4. It does not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships.
5. It is illuminated through careful descriptions, illustrations, metaphors, poetry, dialogue, and other creative rendering rather than by measurement, rating, or scores. (p.42)

My experience as a queer educator has been an evolving immersive process of developing an understanding of what it means to be out as a queer educator, and how I have personally navigated my identity as a teacher within the construct of both my classroom and my institution. It is from this position that my curiosity about the phenomena has deepened, prompting me to explore and understand the experience I share with a number of other queer independent school educators more completely.

### **Immersion**

Moustakas (1990) posits that in this phase the primary researcher lives the question in all aspects of life, including sleep. All aspects of life connected to the question become fodder for a developing understanding during this process. As Moustakas (1990) writes, "Primary concepts for facilitating the immersion process include spontaneous self-dialogue and self-searching, pursuing intuitive clues or hunches, and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimension." (p.28).

This phase permitted me to fully examine my experience and the feelings that surround the process of coming out as a whole in relation as to who I am, rather than merely addressing events individually without thought or reflection to what the

ramifications might mean. Most teachers will report that the process of educating does not start and stop within the defined hours of school. There are hours of lesson planning, grading, and professional development that all teachers undergo. Our personal identities impact all of what we do, and for queer teachers, the curriculum we present in class may or may not reflect our identity, but we certainly impact how it is presented. The self-searching that queer teachers undertake in determining how much of their identity to reveal to students, colleagues, and administrators requires almost constant thought and reflection, and provides material that can further illuminate the phenomenon.

I have tried to be more aware of the daily interactions that require me to navigate my identity within school and keeping a journal was an important part of this process of immersing myself and reflecting deeply. Keeping a journal of these interactions permitted me to form a dialogue with myself that opens a greater range of possibilities in interpreting my experiences. This self-dialogue was a critical part of the heuristic inquiry and will help me to develop insightful questions for my co-researchers.

### **Incubation**

During this phase, the primary researcher withdraws from active consideration of the active elements of immersion and seeks instead to allow the inner tacit dimension to develop and attain its full potential (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas (1990) posits that it is through this removal of focus that understanding is best revealed, and cites the process one undergoes when trying to remember a forgotten name as an example of such activity. He writes, “No matter how hard or long one concentrates on remembering, the name does not present itself. Incubating the name while being involved with something else often brings it to awareness.” (Moustakas, 1990, p.28). This process is not deliberate and its

aim is to allow clarification and knowledge to be extended beyond the level of conscious understanding.

### **Illumination**

This is the phase in which new awareness and understanding emerges as a part of the natural flow when a researcher opens him or herself up during incubation. Moustakas (1990) asserts “The illumination as such is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question.” (p. 29). It is here that new understanding about previously hidden meanings is revealed as tacit knowledge is reflected upon (Moustakas, 1990). He further reflects that it is in this phase knowledge that which has been previously missed or misunderstood is revealed, and becomes an essential part of understanding the phenomenon and a new reality develops without conscious striving or concentration (Moustakas, 1990).

### **Explication**

This penultimate phase reveals an expanded and deepened understanding of the breakthroughs, meanings, and discoveries that emerged during the illumination phase. It is here that the primary researcher “utilizes focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self disclosure, and recognizes that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31) to construct a more complete representation of the phenomena while uncovering additional perspectives and making corrections related to the experiences of the co-researchers and primary researcher. I anticipate analyzing the data collected from interviews with co-researchers and integrating their experiences into a cohesive whole, revealing our collective experience as queer educators.

## **Creative Synthesis**

This is the final phase of the heuristic inquiry process and it is here that the researcher is fully cognizant of the major themes and qualities as revealed in the data. Meanings and details of the phenomenon are fully explicated, which produces a narrative depiction of the research (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas (1990) further notes that this synthesis may take other forms such as poetry, visual or performing arts, or some other creative undertaking.

In this synthesis, a preparatory period of deep immersion, in the form of solitude and meditation, are necessary and will allow the researcher to move beyond the first five steps to produce a complete and inclusive expression of the lived experience, a unified picture, of the primary researcher and his or her co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). It is important to note, however, that heuristic inquiry is not a linear process, rather given its dependence upon reflection, it is iterative as discoveries are aligned, or not, with previous knowledge and understandings. In this manner the totality of the experience is uncovered and revealed for its value as a part of the human experience.

## **Research Design**

Using Moustakas' (1990) method of heuristic inquiry as a framework and a guide, this section will outline and describe the research design and methodology I used in preparing, collecting, and interpreting data. They will include: co-researcher selection, data collection, and data analysis.

## **Research Questions**

Research will be guided by the following questions:

1. What does it mean to a queer educator to be out in his or her independent



school institution?

2. What do the various school policies and attitudes of the administration and colleagues mean to queer teachers as they navigate their professional identities?
3. What are the various strategies that queer teachers employ in determining when and to whom to come out to in school?
4. What experiences from a queer teacher's own educational past help shape his or her professional identity?

### **Co-Researcher Selection**

Co-researchers were identified through purposeful sampling, using both intensity sampling and snowball sampling methods (Maxwell, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Maxwell (1990) states that intensity sampling is an ideal method of sampling for heuristic inquiry because of its emphasis on information-rich examples of the phenomena under investigation. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) and Moustakas (1990) both suggest that depth of experience by examining the experience of a limited number of people is the best approach to explaining phenomenon through heuristic inquiry.

Including a large number of co-researchers in the process of inquiry prevents the ability to delve deeply into a problem (Moustakas, 1990). I limited the number of participants in my study to 11 co-researchers, and my participants are individuals who consider themselves queer independent school educators who are fully out in their educational institutions. Co-researchers must be out in order to reveal a full understanding of how queer teachers have, and continue to navigate the process of integrating their professional and personal identities as out members of their community.

My goal was to find educators in New Jersey, though ultimately I utilized my contacts at other independent schools in New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts to find suitable co-researchers.

### **Data Collection**

In order to elicit open, reflective, thoughtful observations about navigating the heteronormative environment as an educator who identifies as queer, I used open-ended questions (see Appendix B) and an in-depth informal conversational interview approach with my co-researchers, consistent with Moustakas' (1990) preference for heuristic research. Patton (2014) posits that the rigor of heuristic inquiry comes from an in-depth dialogue with one's self and with one's co-researchers. Dialogue encourages and promotes personal expression and disclosure of the researched phenomenon, and as connections through a cooperative sharing of the experiences between the researcher and co-researcher are created, significant depth will be added to the overall understanding of the phenomenon. Rubin and Rubin (2012) note that qualitative interviews often generate large quantities of data given the open ended questioning approach to the conversation. Using interviews permitted me to explore the similarities (Maxwell, 2005) between my co-researchers' experiences and illuminate the phenomena fully.

Additionally, data was also gathered and analyzed from a variety of source material that included: faculty handbooks, school personnel policies, and school mission statements that I was able collect from participants, and that are publically available information from school web sites.

## **Reflexive Journal**

I supported these interviews with a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1991). Journaling permitted me to reflect more consistently on impressions directly before and following an interview, on experiences as I navigated my day at school, and during data analysis, all of which promoted a deeper understanding of the researched experience. Additionally, a reflexive journal was especially important in examining my own bias and assumptions, in keeping with the methodological approach heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) and in maintaining as open an attitude toward my co-researchers as possible (Ortlipp, 2008). “Reflexivity encompasses reflection – indeed, mandates reflection – but it means to take the reflexive process deeper and make it more systematic than is usually implied by the term reflection” (Patton, 2015, p. 70).

## **Data Analysis**

Analysis of heuristic inquiry is a spiraling iterative process that began with a review of the transcribed conversations I had with my co-researchers. I followed Moustakas’ (1994) second method for organizing and analyzing data that he derived from a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of analysis. The four steps are:

1. Using a phenomenological approach, obtain a full description of your own experience of the phenomena
2. From the verbatim transcript of your experience complete the following steps:
  - a. Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
  - b. Record all relevant statements.

- c. List each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement. These are the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience.
- d. Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.
- e. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience. Include verbatim examples.
- f. Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structures of your experience.
- g. Construct a textural-structural description of the meaning and essences of your experiences.

3. From the verbatim transcript of the experience of each of the other co-researchers, complete the above steps, a-g.

4. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all co-researchers' meanings and essences of the experience, integrate all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122)

In addition to using the previously mentioned method of data analysis recommended by Moustakas (1994), I also created analytic memos following interviews to assist me in developing a deeper understanding of the process of analysis.

### **Analytic Memos**

Analytic memos are write-ups or short analyses that are kept by the researcher throughout the research process. Typically they are written before and after data collection to create a record of the researcher's experience and are important repositories of reflection and understanding developed during both the collection and analysis of data;

“they are ways of getting ideas down on paper (or in a computer), and of using this writing as a way to facilitate reflections and analytic insight” (Maxwell, 2005, p.12).

### **Ethics**

Prior to conducting interviews and gathering data, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Rowan University to undertake my research. I conducted interviews in person with my co-researchers and they received an informed consent document (see Appendix C) prior to our meeting. This document, as suggested by Moustakas (1994, p. 178) outlined the purpose of our research, assured them of their anonymity, and informed my co-researchers that they may withdraw from the research at any point for any reason.

To ensure confidentiality I refer to my co-researchers by pseudonyms. Transcripts of recorded interviews will be stored under a pass code on my computer, and will be deleted three years after the completion of my dissertation as outlined by IRB standards.

### **Conclusion**

There remains a scarcity of research on the experiences of queer teachers in general, and a singular dearth of the experiences of teachers in independent schools. As outlined in this literature review, the overarching heteronormativity that encompasses the current hegemony in U.S. education, dating all the way back to pre-20th century education, prevents many queer educators from revealing their full identity within their school systems. With many educational administrators in positions of leadership unwilling to emerge from the closet (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007), it is no wonder the teachers working in their schools are reluctant to reveal their identities. Using Jackson’s (2007) queer educator identity framework coupled with

Moustakas' (1990) heuristic inquiry framework, this study probed what it means for my co-researchers, as defined by Moustakas (1990), and me to be out in our respective educational institutions and how we navigated the process of revealing our identities within our communities.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Analysis**

The purpose of this qualitative heuristic inquiry is to explore my experience, and those of eleven other queer independent school educators, to understand and illuminate how we navigate our personal and professional identities within the heteronormative, traditionally male-dominated, independent school environment.

### **Findings**

Independent schools were originally founded to educate upper class, White males (Meyer, 2008; Salomone, Riordan, & Weinman, 1999), though with the introduction of Title IX most independent schools transitioned by the 1970's to a co-educational student body (Salomone et al., 1999). As independent schools, these institutions are not required, as public schools are, to conform to state and federal laws, yet most incorporate state law, especially around issues of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB), into their written policies. Of the seven schools represented by my co-researchers and me, five out of the seven began as all-male schools, and one school that began as a co-educational institution, briefly became all- male for 29 years, before returning to a co-educational student body in the late 1970's (Meyer, 2008).

In keeping with Moustakas' (1990) methodological approach to heuristic inquiry, this chapter will present the synthesized experience of all 12 of us based upon the analysis of in-depth semi-structured interviews, analytic memos, and a reflexive journal. I, too, was interviewed following my interview protocol, and will include data from this interview along with my 11 co-researchers' interview data in this section. I followed the second method recommended by Moustakas (1994) for organizing and analyzing data

derived from a modification of the four-step Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of analysis. Additional data were drawn from schools' handbooks, policies, and mission statements as posted on the schools' websites. This chapter will illuminate our collective experiences as queer educators in the current independent school world.

### **Description of the Co-Researchers**

Eleven queer educators, both female and male who range in age from mid-twenties to early sixties, and who teach a minimum of at least one class in an independent school, participated with me in this study as co-researchers. In our conversations, all eleven individuals made a point to recognize the deep roots of their institutions grounded in a White male culture (Meyer, 2008; Salomone et al., 1999), going back, for a few of the schools, over two hundred years. The years of experience, type of school, and size of the independent schools, as well as the demographic locations among my eleven co-researchers is varied (see Table 1). This section will offer a brief profile of each co-researcher.

It is important to note that each educator, including me, brings a number of facets as gendered persons with different racial constructs, financial backgrounds, and ethnic upbringings to our overall identities, creating what Crenshaw (1991) describes as intersectionality. For the clarity of purpose in this research, despite the inherent intersectionality we all possess, I will focus on the queer aspect of our identities in the analysis and synthesis of our lived experiences as queer independent school educators.

#### **Julia**

This co-researcher's role within her school is predominantly that of a college counselor, however she teaches two semester classes, one to students in the spring of



their junior year, and one to students in the fall of their senior year, both in preparation for the college application process. Julia worked in admissions in higher education prior to making the switch to her current independent, PK -12, co-educational, day school where she has worked and taught for the past 12 years. When she interviewed for her current position, Julia made a pointed decision to be out, and specifically asked about family health insurance for queer faculty and staff. Julia recognized her queer identity fairly early in high school, has been openly queer most of her adult life, and is married to her wife.

### **Laura**

As a child Laura played “school” with her younger sister, her mother was a teacher, and it seemed to her that teaching was precisely the direction she wanted to pursue from the start of her undergraduate education. Laura originally intended to pursue a Ph.D. and become a college professor, and taught undergraduate college courses in history before separating from her program. She shifted to independent schools in order to have more time with her son. Laura, who is in her 23<sup>rd</sup> year of teaching, began working at her current independent, PK -12, co-educational, day school 15 years ago as an A.P. American History teacher, and eventually transitioned to her current position as a Middle School Assistant Principal teaching sixth grade history. Laura’s identity did not organically emerge during the school interview hiring process and was not discussed, although when she toured campus some months later and signed her contract, Laura had her toddler son and female partner with her. This made a tacit statement about her identity to anyone who cared to look deep enough. Laura recognized her queer identity in college.

Table 1

*Characteristics of Co-Researchers in Order of our Conversations*

Participant	Region	Faculty/ Students	Century Founded	School Type/ Subject area	Years Teaching overall/current school
Julia	Mid-Atlantic	80/640	18 <sup>th</sup>	Day (co-ed) PK-12 Junior/Senior Seminar College Counseling	13/12
Laura	Mid-Atlantic	80/640	18 <sup>th</sup>	Day (co-ed) PK-12 Social Studies/Admin	23/15
Charles	Southern New England	130/675	20 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (co-ed) 9-12 History	5/1
Ann	Southern New England	86/513	19 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (co-ed) 9-12 History	2/2
Catherine	Southern New England	82/371	19 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (co-ed) 9-12 Math/Music	13/3
Peter	Southern New England	82/371	19 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (co-ed) 9-12 Economics/Admin	28/3
James	Central New England	79/475	19 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (co-ed) PK-9 French	5/4
Hannah	Central New England	65/351	20 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (co-ed) 9-12 English	3/3
Liz	Central New England	65/351	20 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (co-ed) 9-12 Math	15/9
George	Central New England	65/351	20 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (co-ed) 9-12 Music	9/3
Amanda	Southern New England	61/305	20 <sup>th</sup>	Boarding/Day (male) 9-12 Learning Support	7/4

## **Charles**

Charles grew up in a family with deep respect for education. Originally from Jamaica, he and his family moved to the U.S. when he was a child. Charles had a natural affinity and curiosity about all things academic and, with the assistance of a teacher invested in his studies, Charles eventually went on to study education. While he was in college, Charles cemented this passion through a program at his school that offered assistance to college students with learning disabilities. He has taught high school history for five years and has been at his current school, a co-educational, 9-12 boarding and day school for one year. Charles was completely out during the interview process for his current position, and navigated the initial interview conversations with the intent of having his partner live on campus with him.

## **Ann**

Ann states that she backed into teaching having never intended to pursue a teaching career, however as a senior in college exploring her career options, she decided to register with a teacher placement agency for independent schools and ultimately decided to take a chance with teaching high school. Ann has taught high school history for a total of three years at the same 9-12, co-educational boarding and day school where she first began teaching. She came out after the interview process at her current school. Ann became aware of her queer identity in college.

## **Catherine**

Growing up within a long familial tradition of women teachers, Catherine stated that it was not a stretch to apply her dual engineering and music degrees to the classroom to become a math teacher at her current school, a co-educational, 9-12, boarding and day

school. She has been teaching 13 years and is in her third year at her present institution. In addition to teaching math, Catherine coaches the a cappella group within the music department and gives private lessons. She did not come out during her interview process but only because she was, at that time, just beginning to realize her queer identity, which she now fully embraces.

### **Peter**

Peter described growing up in a family that expected him to pursue a high-level finance or legal avocation. He stated he was not planning on teaching, and began by undertaking a long-term substitute teaching position in an African History class while he worked as an assistant head of school. He found he enjoyed the process of teaching, and eventually took on a class of economics while continuing in his administrative role. Peter has been teaching for 28 years; he has been at his school, a co-educational, 9-12, boarding and day school, as a dean of academics and the advanced economics teacher for the past two and half years. While he was interviewing for his current job, Peter made certain that the placement agency working with him fully considered his queer identity in recommending possible schools. Peter was married for approximately 14 years to a woman, came out fully 25 years ago after his divorce, and is now married to his husband.

### **James**

James reported that he had a comfortable path to education because his mother was a teacher and he had especially supportive teachers, in particular his French teacher. He entered college as a dual science/language major and then decided, after experiencing the isolation of lab work, to focus solely on French. James currently teaches French in a co-educational, PK-9, boarding and day school in its middle school, grades four, five, and

six. He is in his fourth year of teaching and has five years of teaching in total. During the summer between his high school senior year and college freshman year James came out, and has remained out personally and professionally ever since.

### **Hannah**

Hannah stated that she had not considered education as an option during college. It was not until she was out of college and working in an unfulfilling job that she considered teaching when a former teacher called and asked if she might want to teach. Having coached hockey, Hannah thought the rewards might be greater than her communications job at the time. She now teaches English and is in her third year of teaching at a co-educational, 9-12, boarding and day school. While never in the closet, Hannah's identity was not a part of the interview process when she was hired; she told me she slowly revealed her identity during her first year at her current school by attending GSA meetings.

### **Liz**

Liz stated that she grew up in the culture of independent boarding schools; many of her family members attended various institutions, as did she. When she was in undergraduate and graduate school she planned on going into private wealth management, but found few intrinsic awards. While Liz never had any formal education classes, she had a great deal of experience coaching a variety of sports and so transitioning to teaching seemed natural. She is in her sixth year of teaching Math at her current school, a co-educational, 9-12, boarding and day school, and her ninth year overall in education. Liz stated that her identity did not come up during the interview process, but that it did

organically emerge later because she had friends on the faculty prior to accepting the position.

### **George**

George grew up in a family of women who were teachers, especially those on his mother's side, and teaching seemed the natural course to take. His proficiency with music created opportunities to teach his peers and instruction came naturally. He always assumed he would teach at the college level, but the lack of a terminal degree has prevented him from achieving this yet; independent schools seemed like a good fit. George is in his third year of teaching music at his independent school, a co-educational, 9-12, boarding and day school, and is in his ninth year overall. He noted that while he did not explicitly define his identity during his interview process, he thinks people made assumptions, something that helps him navigate the constant process of coming out. George observed that he has always been aware of his queer identity.

### **Amanda**

Amanda knew from high school that she wanted to pursue special education, which was directly related to her mother's theater activities with intellectually challenged children. In high school Amanda was involved in a program that assisted students with intellectual challenges. She studied special education as an undergraduate and moved directly into the graduate program her college offered. Her first few years after graduate school were spent working at a charter school as an inclusion teacher. Amanda moved to her current school, an all male, 9-12, boarding and day school because she wanted to be physically closer to her then girlfriend, now wife. She is in her fourth year at this school and teaches learning strategies and provides tutoring for all of the students, and has

taught for a total of nine years. Amanda identified as queer within the past five years. She arrived on campus as an out individual to colleagues and administrators, and has just this past fall come out to the entirety of the student body during a back to school introduction chapel assembly where every member of the community introduces her or himself and relates something of significance about her or himself.

### **Themes**

Using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of analysis, as directed by Moustakas (1994) to understand both my co-researchers and my own experiences, I constructed a textual-structural description of the meaning and essences of all of our understandings and practices as queer educators. I then integrated these narratives into a portrayal of our experiences that represents the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). The entirety of this depiction reveals three themes that have, and continue to, impact each of us and will be presented separately. They include personal identity, professional identity, and school culture.

The overarching identity construct of a person is created by both their personal and their professional identities, and identity for the queer teacher is a different construct than that of the non-queer educator. Given the inherently implicit and explicit heteronormative environments that compose educational institutions, there is significantly more for a queer individual to navigate both personally and professionally than a non-queer person who has far less to consider in the heteronormative culture that is pervasive throughout the U.S. (Cass, 1984; Connell, 2012; D'Augelli, 1989; Eliason, 1996; Evans, 202; Jackson, 2007, Troiden, 1988). These three themes, personal identity,

professional identity, and culture, are further developed and expanded for clarification and explication.

The first theme, personal identity, encompasses and is further illuminated by: coming out personally; coming out as a constant process; and staying true to ourselves. The second theme of professional identity includes how we became teachers, which is further illustrated by: invested adults; working with students with special needs; and alternate routes to teaching. The second theme also incorporates: coming out professionally, which is clarified by, the glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008), how we are seen but not heard; authenticity; and inclusion. Finally within the second theme of professional identity, our perception as role models is further defined by: modeling for our students, and the GSA. The third theme, culture, includes heteronormativity, which is further illuminated by: single versus coupled, and voiceless. Culture as a theme is also elucidated by the construct of modeling for adults in our schools, which includes queer teacher and queer student safety. Lastly, within the third theme of culture, the persistent misperception that queer teachers are predators is presented. These three themes are clarified with descriptions from the interview data of my co-researchers, coupled with my synthesis of our lived experience in the following sections.

### **Personal Identity**

The first theme, personal identity, is an important aspect of development for all teachers, particularly queer teachers, as one must begin to understand who she or he is in order to fully develop all of the different facets, including a professional identity, of one's overall identity. Sexual identity researchers Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988) note that the final stage of identity development for a queer individual is self-acceptance of one's



queer identity. While both researchers differ in opinion about whether a queer individual must reach this stage to live successfully, together they are important frameworks that inform the success my co-researchers and I have achieved in developing our personal identities. Whether one of my co-researchers had recently discovered her or his queer identity owing to age or latency, or had been aware and accepting of her or his queer identity for a number of years, it was evident that each of us considered our queerness important, and as a part of the larger construct of who she or he was.

Exploration into the development of personal identity for the queer teachers within this study revealed several important components: coming out personally; coming out as a constant process; and coming out to stay true to ourselves. These three areas of identity development, as revealed by the 12 of us, will be explored in the following three sections.

**Coming out personally.** Within the theme of personal identity, coming out personally and publicly was an important overarching construct that became apparent as I analyzed the data from our research, which is discussed in this section. As previously stated, both Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988) note that self-acceptance is the final stage of identity formation for queer individuals, and that coming out personally within all contexts of their lives is important. All of the individuals in this research are educators and we are all out in our independent schools, as required by the parameters of my study. The range of ages at which people came out, and the diversity of their experiences, positive and negative, is wide and quite varied.

George recognized his queer identity when he was very young, and noted “So, well, I've known in some way, whether I could call it gay, or whatever, I didn't have the word for it, but I've known since about first grade,” and continues:

I knew I was somewhere in that area, even as a first-grader. And if I didn't know that for myself, and I think I didn't have the word for that... other people had the word for that. So I got lots of "fag" and "queer" and... had long-lasting interaction with how I think I've developed as a person.

George knew early on, similar to my experience as a child, about his difference of being other (Memmi, 1965), apart from his peers, and as he notes it had a significant impact upon his identity development. My experience in some ways parallels George's, without the bullying, though certainly with the self-questioning about my identity. Other co-researchers identified as queer in high school and college, and finally, three co-researchers realized their queer identities as adults and came out well after adolescence. From the interview data it appears that those co-researchers who embraced their identities and came out within the last ten years encountered significantly less resistance personally, than those of us who came out before the positive developments that have emerged culturally over the last 15 years for the queer community.

Amanda experienced short-term resistance from her parents; they were initially shocked despite being inclusive people and having queer friends. She implied that other than her parents' initial response, coming out was relatively easy and she encountered no resistance from friends stating:

Because I came out four years ago... I don't have the historical experience being [queer], you know? For better or worse, I think [the] struggle and work and effort

of people in the [queer] community before me, I haven't actually been forced... to figure that [the coming out process] out.

**Coming out as a constant process.** No matter when an individual comes out, as the data from my co-researchers reveals, it is not a one-time process, and is a large part of personal identity development (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1988). Coming out is continual throughout life, owing to the heteronormative assumption that everybody, unless one deviates in appearance from social norms, is straight (Butler, 1990). This is an issue that our non-queer individuals almost never have to confront or navigate, and one that defines how we as queer members of society conduct ourselves within both our personal and professional lives.

Julia, who has been out since high school, discussed how being out was important and indicated that she derived comfort from her visibility; she noted further that coming out was a continual process, saying:

I still have a little bit of a sort of vestigial hitch. I can feel myself gathering my momentum to cross the invisible threshold of, "Okay we're going to go there [discuss her wife]." I still have that a little bit around conversations in which I know that two sentences in I'm going to be out to them because they're asking me about my weekend. And now I'm going to say my spouse and then the next thing is going to be "she".

Julia then goes on to state that, "It's like you have to refresh... The coming out thing is like you constantly need to fluff the pillows because it is, it's a totally constant process."

In acknowledging the fluidity or movement between being out or in the closet, James noted:

I sort of officially came out the summer after my senior year of high school... It [the identity shift] was also an interesting piece for me, because I still wasn't fully comfortable with it [being out] when I arrived at college, you know? It had been about of being out and so I sort of stepped out and then retreated a little...

This movement out of and back into the closet is not uncommon, and it is important to recognize, as asserted by Harris and Gray (2014), being out or in is not binary, and even if one is out there is a constant need, as observed by the 12 of us, to reassert one's identity, especially within the heteronormative world of education.

The awareness of one's personal identity, as expressed by both Julia and James is definitely a topic present in my own mind as I start each school year with a new group of freshman. I often wonder whether my personal identity is an element they need to know, and invariably at some point in the year my students come around to asking me about myself. In my desire to be that authentic individual, with whom students can connect and hopefully learn from more effectively, I do not avoid their questions. Much like Julia intimated, there is a voice in my head that says, "Well, here we go, I hope they are ready." I have yet to receive a negative response.

**Coming out to stay true to ourselves.** As a part of personal identity, the data revealed there were slight differences among the 12 of us in how we projected and broadcasted our personal identities; collectively however, it remains important to each of us that we are out and open about our queer identities. The age span of my participants ranged from mid-twenties to early sixties, and there were a few older participants who had experiences with being closeted. Their conversations with me spoke to the discomfort and disconnect they felt when they were younger about trying to pass or hide

who they were.

Julia noted, “I had had just enough of the experience of trying to cover that I knew what the cost was [personally]. So I was strongly motivated to not ever go back into that mode [the closet].” These experiences were jarring, and the self-perceived dishonesty personally motivated them, as Julia noted, to never go back into the closet. There was a sense in the data among all of the co-researchers that who they were as queer people mattered, and how they were perceived publicly mattered personally. Being in the closet, or passing, was not a viable option or representation of identity. Catherine, who came out four years ago, observed, “I feel like it’s important in general for me not to let people assume... especially being sort of an identity that I just figured out relatively recently.” Catherine further noted, “It was more about me, it being important to me to be out.”

Ann, who only graduated from college three years ago and came out during college, is the youngest member of this study, noted, “I wear a blazer and bowtie every day to school, so that answers that. If that is a marker of my queer [personal] identity, then great.” She moves on to state about her queer identity, “It’s an important identity for me.” Hannah, who also graduated within the last five years, and recently accepted her queer identity, stated emphatically, “I had already made a decision, sort of, with myself that I would never lie about who I was again, or lie by omission about who I was again.”

These co-researchers gave voice to the overarching mindset that being out about their personal identities in a public manner mattered significantly, and personally, to their sense of selves and how they navigated their worlds. This personal perspective underscores both Cass (1984) and Troiden’s (1988) theory about the final stage of queer

identity development where self-acceptance is instrumental in personal development. As individuals within our respective families, schools, and communities, my co-researchers and I found validation and wholeness by accepting our queer personal identities as a part of our overarching identities, which also included our professional identities.

### **Professional Identity**

In exploring the second theme, professional identity, research has revealed that developing one's professional identity is an important aspect for all educators. This development is challenging, more so for the queer educator who must navigate elements that counters the heteronormative construct of schools (Connell, 2012; Eliason, 1996; Jackson, 2007). Examining all 12 of our identities within the queer identity development frameworks of Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988) revealed a distinctly well-adjusted group that has accepted our identities as queer individuals. Furthermore, we have incorporated this aspect into the larger sense of being, of which our professional identities are composed. Building upon Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988) frameworks, Jackson (2007) combines personal identity with professional life and advances that the final stage of professional identity development for a queer individual is the development of an understanding, and acknowledgement, of one's role as a agent of change in terms of one's personal views about oneself and others.

The following sections will explore the concepts that emerged from our research about what was important to the 12 of us as we navigated the development of our professional identities. This includes becoming teachers, which is further illuminated by: invested adults; working with students with special needs; and alternate routes to teaching. A second concept in our professional identity development was coming out

professionally that includes the topics of: the glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008); authenticity; and inclusion. A final concept important to the professional development of our identities includes role modeling for our students.

**Becoming teachers.** For the queer educator, professional identity is often a greater challenge to navigate than it is for the non-queer educator, as there are challenges asserted and reinforced by society about the appropriateness of queer individuals in the teaching profession (Birden, 2005; Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Machado, 2014). How educators present themselves as professionals is an important aspect of teaching (Friesen & Besley, 2013; Goodson, 1991; Pillen et al., 2013). The personal life of a queer educator impacts her or his professional life in many unnoticed ways, compared to non-queer teachers who do not have to constantly reflect upon how they enact their identity in the classroom (DeJean, 2010; Evans, 2002; King, 2004; Turner, 2010). Fortunately, all 12 of us involved in this research had people in our lives who believed in our ability to effectively work with students, and supported our professional aspirations.

My co-researchers and I all found our way to teaching through one of three occasionally overlapping routes. Over half of my co-researchers either spoke of invested adults, parents or teachers, who valued education, and how all of these invested adults guided them toward education as a vocation. Over a third of my co-researchers worked with special needs children in a variety of capacities, and finally there were three members who reported that they entered the teaching profession through an alternate route. For some of us these routes overlapped, as in my case. I had two parents as teachers, and while I studied education as my undergraduate degree and was encouraged to pursue teaching, I left independent school education after one year in the classroom. I

eventually found my way into special education working with severely physically and intellectually challenged children, before returning to independent school education six years after departing.

***Invested adults.*** One critical aspect of professional identity development is the formative experience we all encountered as children when we began to understand what area of life interested us and informed what might become our professional vocation. Invested adults, parents and teachers, helped to shape and guide our curiosities as we developed, which as Vygotsky (1978) suggests, is critical to intellectual and emotional growth of children, all of which, it can be assumed, adds to the development of a professional identity.

As a child, Laura's experience of her mother as a teacher permitted her a view of how important loving one's work was and how powerful that experience can be. She shared the following about her mother as a teacher, "My mother was a teacher, and I remember when she went back to work... She was thrilled to be working again; she loved what she did... Work was important. Loving your work was important." This experience had a significant impact upon Laura, helping her to realize the value of, and later, her ability to teach, in much the same way many of us in this research came to understand ourselves as individuals with the capacity to teach. Through the experience of our parents, those of us with parents as educators could glimpse that teaching could offer us fulfillment as a vocation.

Catherine reflected about her own family "I have a lot of teachers in my family", indicating the importance of education as a vocation, and went on to observe:

Teaching was what I looked into mostly because I had so many teachers in my



family, and I had a little bit of experience both visiting my mother, my sister [both teachers]... I even did a little substituting for my mother...

Catherine makes clear that the influence of teachers in her family, visiting, and substituting for her mother in particular, created a lasting impression about the importance of teaching.

Charles noted that his parents were not teachers, but that they were invested in his education, and this helped steer him toward education as a profession, “I would say my interest in teaching started at a pretty young age... My family background is one that's, we're pretty stern about education... I always felt that education was important. So, I had a profound respect for teachers.” Charles went on to discuss the importance of his high school history teacher, in addition to his parents’ influence, who helped guide him towards becoming an educator. This history teacher in particular was willing to talk about what was required of someone considering teaching in their future, and Charles offered this observation, “my history teacher is who actually shared the most, and it's probably why I ended up becoming a history teacher.” Seeing adults who were invested in education allowed all 12 of us to consider education as a vocation worth pursuing; a profession our parents and invested adults in our lives were clearly passionate about.

***Working with special needs students.*** Secondly, within this construct of becoming teachers, several of us had formative experiences working with special needs populations that helped shape our professional identities. These experiences permitted us to see ourselves as effective teachers despite the cultural message we understood about the dangers of teaching and being queer (Blount, 2005; Ferfolja, 2010; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003). Growing up and discovering ourselves as other (Memmi, 1965) is an

underlying component of the empathy all 12 of us have developed and used in our teaching. As part of the larger overall professional identity theme, working with populations with special needs provided the foundation for some of us to become the educators we are now. Ann noted that she found her way into teaching, not only at the urging of her mother, but also from a class in college. In discussing the course that directed her towards education, Ann stated, “I was taking a class on Disability Studies and that's how I got into that. It was a required internship... [there was] one teacher in the room for 15 kids... we helped out. That was very, it was fulfilling.”

Amanda’s mother, who worked with children with intellectual disabilities in theater groups, sparked her early thinking about working in special education that she continued to explore in high school. She noted that these experiences encouraged her to pursue what had become a passion:

My public high school had a program called the Occupational Development Program, and it was for students in the community with intellectual disabilities. So you could actually take Intro to Special Ed as a high schooler, which I took. So I learned about IDEA and the legal piece and I was like a teaching assistant for one of the classes.

In a somewhat similar experience to Amanda’s, Charles knew he wanted to become a teacher in high school. He was able to see a future for himself, while in college, when he worked in a program that helped students at his university with severe learning disabilities transition to regular classes:

My freshman year I started working with a program on campus [special education], which was this transition program [for] students with learning

disabilities, but on the severe side. I said to myself, "These are also people that a lot of people would throw away and pass off as weird, freaks, abnormal..." I was like, "Man, if they can have the courage to be here on this college campus, and be in a regular class, and be in the same social hall... [As a queer man] I can probably find the courage myself."

It appears for both Amanda and Charles that working with students with different learning abilities was pivotal in allowing them to pursue education with confidence.

After leaving the boarding school where I first taught following the completion of my undergraduate education degree, I began working in a residential school with children who had severe physical and intellectual challenges, most of whom were blind, or deaf and blind. After four years of this work, I understood I was teaching and that I loved the process. I realized I would be more effective teaching a subject area I was curious and passionate about, and decided it was time to return to independent school education to teach the discipline I studied in college.

*Alternate routes: "I fell into it sideways."* Finally, a third of my co-researchers discovered their ability and love for teaching despite not originally thinking about education as part of their professional future. Four of my co-researchers indicated they did not initially plan to become teachers, and found their way into education through a love of learning and school. These educators discovered a passion and curiosity for teaching after they either were enmeshed within what they thought was their career, or as soon to be college graduates thinking about their future professional careers. Either way, circumstances, and their personal history and relationship to education, intervened and they discovered a love for teaching.

Peter said at the outset of our conversation, “I fell into it sideways. I had not even considered teaching as I left undergraduate school.” After college he returned to work for his former high school in its administration and eventually worked his way up to assistant headmaster. While Peter was working as an assistant head of school he was asked to cover the headmaster’s African History class while the headmaster was away on an extended trip, and it was here that Peter discovered his love of teaching. He stated, “I had absolutely no idea what I was getting into... so I was woefully under-qualified and didn’t end up teaching much that year. But I did love that course [and teaching].” After his experience substituting in the African History class, Peter pursued a doctorate in economics and African development that eventually allowed him to teach economics in addition to continuing his work as an administrator.

At a job fair sponsored by her college, Ann encountered an independent school teaching placement agency and decided, because she was not excited about her other options at the time, to fill out an application with placement agency. Ann received an email from the placement agency about a potential teaching position the same day that she was given a job offer at an education research company that did not interest her:

It was kind of last minute and I really didn't think I wanted to teach, especially high schoolers. But I went and I said, "You know what? I'll give it a shot," and I didn't even think I'd like it, but I ended up liking it.

She has spent the last three years at the school that initially contacted her and went on to describe how the school nurtured and guided her, ““We’ll give you this guidance, but you are the one who has to kind of implement it your own way’, which I thought was a

perfect fit for me.” It was clear from our conversation that Ann relishes her role as a teacher.

Like Ann, Liz signed up with the independent school job placement agency, though well after she finished college. At the point when she contacted and signed up with the agency, Liz had completed her MBA and had begun working in a job she realized was not going to fulfill her, “I wanted to do something that made me happy.” Growing up in a family with many members who attended independent schools, and graduating from an independent school herself, Liz understood the culture and thought she might like to teach in such an environment. She described how she called her high school field hockey coach and asked how to find a position teaching at an independent school:

She helped me navigate that [using a placement agency]... I knew I wanted to do something that I enjoyed every day and I wanted to be going to a job that I was happy waking up [to] and being a part of, and working with kids and getting to do the activities that I enjoy.

Liz had a strong feeling that teaching would be a vocation that would fulfill her professionally, as it seemed a natural extension of the summer coaching she had experienced as a sailing and lacrosse coach, as well as her work as a winter ice hockey coach.

Despite thinking throughout the majority of their undergraduate work that they would pursue professional work unrelated to education, all four of these co-researchers have found within their respective schools that the construct of education ignited a

passion for teaching. Additionally, they have developed connections with their students and colleagues that have continued to sustain them professionally.

**Coming out professionally.** It was critical to the 12 of us, as a part of our professional identity, to be out in our schools and publicly visible as members of the queer community. Jackson (2007) expands upon professional identity development by stating that a queer educator must adopt the role of a change agent in order to attain the final stage of professional identity. By choosing to come out as queer teachers visible within our schools, the 12 of us have implicitly accepted our roles as change agents. Though, as all of us noted, being out had challenges that our non-queer colleagues would never experience (Birden, 2005; Machado, 2014). In the following sections the construct of coming out professionally will be clarified by the concepts that challenge us: the glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008), authenticity; and inclusion.

***The glass closet: just do not talk about it.*** Despite being out and visibly queer within our communities, many co-researchers felt unacknowledged or silenced in a variety of ways. One of the ideas many schools espouse is that they treat all of its members, from students to faculty and staff, equally. We know that schools are not the equitable environments they would like to be (Dantley & Tillman, 2010; MacLeod, 2009), and the perception of feeling othered (Memmi, 1965), as members of the queer community within our respective schools, is perpetuated by a culture that accepts us as people, but is reluctant to acknowledge our personal lives in the same depth as our colleagues.

The concept of the glass closet first arose in relation to movie stars, who were not out, but not in either, and were known or thought to be queer (Musto, 2008). Celebrities

such as Montgomery Clift, James Dean, Rock Hudson, and Agnes Moorehead were rumored to be queer for years and they lived their lives squashing rumors while quietly continuing to date those who they wished, and often marrying someone of the opposite sex as the main means of deflection (Greeley, 2000; Slade, 1996). Until it became culturally acceptable to be queer in the movie industry, stars such as Jodie Foster sought to hide their identities (Musto, 2008), though the public would often develop their own understanding and perception of the identity of various stars based upon physical attributes and cultural gender norms (Butler, 1993; Musto, 2008). These assumptions were often denied by the individuals in question, yet still understood by the community at large to have some validity (Musto, 2008) and had the effect of making knowledge public, yet not discussed in any depth beyond the acknowledgement that such an identity might in fact exist.

As a construct, this concept of the glass closet works within the confines of independent school institutions. Schools espouse a belief in diversity, but often in practice avoid actual inclusion because so many schools confuse diversity with actual inclusive practices, and assume that acceptance of diversity is inclusive enough (Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014; Sadowski, 2016). This assumption by schools that precludes actual inclusion makes it almost impossible for the queer educator to present the entirety of her or his identity. While the recent changing cultural climate in the U.S. has created a slightly greater sense of safety in parts of the queer community at large, the overarching heteronormative construct within education remains pervasive, and often our freedom to express ourselves as out educators is silenced despite the desire to embrace diversity espoused by our schools

As Musto (2008) suggests, while it is acceptable to be visible and queer, for most queer educators there is a perceived message to not talk about their identity, a silencing. The glass closet (Kissen, 1993) is an apt descriptor for the school culture that wants the diversity the queer community offers, but is resistant to the concept of inclusion, meaning actually including and making comfortable those who fall outside of the boundaries of what school cultures consider the norm. This often forces queer educators who are out to self-monitor, and non-queer teachers and most students to avoid conversations about personal identity with their queer colleagues and teachers.

Hannah observed that some of her non-queer colleagues were people with whom she sensed ambivalence about her identity. She points out in relation to her colleagues, some of whom have been known to walk out of all-school assemblies and chapel talks addressing queer issues, that there is enough support from most of her non-queer colleagues to outweigh her concerns about her colleagues in question:

There's potential for me to be frustrated... I don't really know where they [non-queer colleagues] stand, so I don't really know what my little frustration is... My colleagues and administrators that I care about here are very supportive... There's enough people here that make me feel like accepted and loved, and that people I'm frustrated with are more outliers than the majority.

Clearly, despite the comfort she derives from her non-queer friends among her colleagues, the outliers she speaks of have an impact on her as a member of the community and as a queer teacher within her school.

Peter, who has been in education for 40 years, spoke about the discomfort of colleagues that he observed when he emerged from the closet after being married and



fathering a child:

I found that after I'd come out at my previous school [where he had been for over 20 years], people were very, very kind. But they were also hands-off... When I came out, there was nervous support. Ultimately, especially after my now husband moved in with me on campus... I began to realize, and he [his husband] noticed it, we weren't ever invited out anywhere. Whenever there was a party on campus, we were never invited. I mean a personal party.

Coming out in the early 1990's, after living as a married, non-queer man with a child at his former school, was not easy, despite the seeming acceptance and kindness surrounding his identity shift. This experience underscores the non-queer passive resistance and nervous response to queer colleagues that many of us in this study continue to experience. It is easier for non-queer teachers existing within the heteronormative construct to not talk about anything related to the personal identity and the personal lives of their queer colleagues than to build an understanding and an inclusive culture.

As previously noted, the process of coming out never stops for queer people. There is a constant need to identify and affirm one's queerness as an out educator. This is especially true for an educator sensitive to the needs of students who want to personally connect with and know their teachers. It also remains true that out queer teachers can have an impact on colleagues who remain moored within the hegemony of the heteronormative construct. Whether it is standing up during Pride Week and making an announcement about one's identity, coming out in a chapel talk or in an all-school assembly, or coming out in casual daily conversation, the need to constantly address

one's identity as queer is a presence that cannot be ignored. As Hannah stated, "I do try to make it [visible with] the safe stickers and I have a rainbow pin on my backpack... I think visible symbols are important."

Catherine related her experience of an interaction with a colleague over lunch soon after she began teaching at her current school, "And the person that just kind of chatting with me, getting to know me, and was like, 'oh, and do you have a husband?'" Catherine's response to this heteronormative assumption on the part of her colleague was a real need to increase the overt visual signals indicating her queer identity, and she asked herself, "What can I do to up my gay? [I] bought my rainbow rings for my necklace..." and in addition to the rainbow rings, she bought and placed rainbow flags in her classroom. Clearly Catherine felt the need to further enhance her visibility in order to underscore her identity as a queer individual.

Early in our conversation James directed our conversation to his experience of being out at school in terms of his perceptions of his colleagues who placed him in a closet. Ultimately he added, "The way I've described it before is a culture of silence, so you don't necessarily talk about these things" speaking to his inability as an unmarried queer teacher to feel like he presents as a whole individual. His colleagues were not discomfited by his sexuality, or that his boyfriend would visit campus when he lived on campus, but there was little discussion with him beyond his professional life, in contrast to his non-queer colleagues who would regularly discuss their personal lives in terms of weekend activities with their husbands, wives, boy or girlfriends, and, or children. James goes on to state:

So there's a certain amount of limitation to how I feel I express myself and, for a while, I was thinking, "okay, is it because I have a social identity and a professional identity and these aren't the same thing" but then realizing that even if I have to be more professional with my colleagues than I would be with my friends, like, being gay is an undercurrent to both of those things... Where I should feel comfortable expressing it [his personal identity] in either situation.

This construct of undiscussables (Argyris, 2002; Dankoski, Bickel, & Gusic, 2014) is a well-known entity in organizations that struggle with change. As Dankoski, Bickel, and Gusic (2014) observe, "Dialog is essential to transform institutions" (p. 1610). Argyris (2002) further notes that double loop learning promotes reflection and allows for corrections, which is essential for organizations. As the data reveals however, most of our schools are content to passively accept their queer students and faculty, and do little to promote inclusivity beyond this acceptance, which leaves many topics undiscussed related to diversity and inclusion, among them collegial conversations about the personal lives of their queer colleagues.

As Charles observed about his non-queer colleagues, "Yeah, we [non-queer educators] are okay with the gays and the queers as long as they stay over there. Don't disrupt." Which was his interpretation of his non-queer colleagues' thinking, clearly underscoring our collective experience of being silenced as queer educators. This observation by Charles further emphasizes how independent schools, his in particular, think they support the queer community, but in reality contain us in silence inside glass closets (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008).

In speaking about his colleagues, James observed that the concept that a student might or might not be queer is not something his non-queer colleagues considered when discussing support structures for various students who experience challenges at his school. Here too the heteronormative construct prevails and students are either ignored or also placed in a glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008). James states:

There'll be students where I'll point out and say, "You know maybe that student is gay or a lesbian" and some teachers agree and some teachers sort of bat an eye, and you know the unsaid things are, "you know, how can you assume that?"

Whereas for me [it is], "how can you assume that they're straight?"

The non-queer teachers have either not thought to mention the possibility of the student's queer identity, and have silently accepted and chosen not to publicly support their students in the position as an ally, or perhaps the non-queer teachers remain stuck in the heteronormative mindset, blind to the possibility that a student might be queer. Either way, as James asserts, a glass closet exists for the queer community at his school.

*Authenticity as queer teachers.* As an aspect of our professional identity, the importance of our experience as queer teachers who are authentic in our position as educators, in our personal lives and our professional lives, emerged from all our conversations. In order to be authentic, we had to be out, and we needed to connect with our queer and non-queer students alike while creating a positive atmosphere to support learning on a higher level. Our authenticity has the potential, many of us felt, to provide a broader spectrum of what a student's future could look like beyond the heteronormative construct that is so often the only construct presented in independent schools. Hannah

states the following about her identity within her classroom. “I think it’s important for kids to see me living authentically. And I mean that goes beyond my sexual orientation...”

George underscores this point as a music teacher with his observation, “But you teach so much through music... You have the power to affect a change. At least you hope.”

He goes on to state emphatically:

I think that they [students] respond to people who are authentic, who are open, who are real. If you have any pretense, then they're not really about you. And not just an effective teacher, but an effective community member. And I think some of it is just having face time with students. The more they see you, the better.

Because then it's more likely that they're gonna see you in a normal moment, and humanize you.

This mindset is echoed by Julia when she states about presenting her authentic self in her classroom, “I don't think you can be your best self if you're putting time and energy into self-monitoring or keeping track of who knows what, or all of that stuff that goes along with not quite being out.”

***Inclusion.*** Related to the construct of the glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008) is that despite being out, and enduring the constant process of coming out, my 11 co-researchers and I all felt, acutely at times, an awareness of being invisible and tacitly excluded despite our best efforts to combat the heteronormative culture of our schools. This lack of inclusion, unintentional or not, has an impact on our professional identity, often causing the 12 of us to be even more determined in our efforts seeking equity.

As my co-researchers and I note, inclusion is the necessary component to diversity that allows for cultural acceptance, understanding, and change, and it begins

with how an institution treats its faculty. Hannah discussed at length the fact that her school has a number of out faculty whose many contributions in terms of athletics and teaching are applauded, but the work they do in support of queer activism is either not acknowledged or ignored, which is not inclusive, stating:

It feels like the school doesn't know what to do. It feels like there's more out faculty than there have [ever] been... And we're respected members of the community. We're teachers, we're coaches, we're in the drama department and we do great stuff with kids, but the GSA [remains unacknowledged].

This lack of recognition, as observed by Hannah, of the important work so many queer faculty members undertake in support of their queer students and fellow faculty members, is indicative of the kind of silencing and marginalizing that surrounds so much of the queer teacher's existence.

All of our schools have clearly thought about and are invested in the process of developing diversity, as reflected in most of our schools' mission statements. Those schools with Directors or Coordinators of Diversity navigate this practice more effectively, but all of the schools, even the most progressive, need significant work in understanding the difference between diversity and actual inclusion (Endo et al., 2010; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014; Sadowski, 2016). It is important for schools to have a visible representation, like a GSA, of their espoused values and beliefs surrounding diversity, but often there remains limited administrative support or recognition of the importance of GSAs for the student body as a whole beyond the mere fact that they are permitted to exist.

Examining the data revealed by my co-researchers and me, there remains significant reluctance for schools to interrogate their practices concerning intentional activism and inclusion in support of the queer community. As Julia commented:

It's a little frustrating. It would be really nice to work someplace where you felt like the institution had your back to the extent that even if you weren't currently engaged in [queer] activism on those fronts, that things would be moved forward [by non-queer administrators] you know?

Julia's statement that non-queer administrators should be on the forefront of engaging in equity and inclusion matters is an important critique. As Julia notes, it should not always fall to the faculty who identify as queer to carry this weight of creating equity and inclusivity. Queer students are aware of what administrators do and do not do in support of the queer community, as evidenced by adolescents who will seek out teachers they deem safe to find direction, comfort, and or safety. Catherine noted that she has had conversations with students who feel overlooked, silenced, or marginalized, and related:

Occasionally a student will talk to me about a struggle... or feeling misunderstood, or just feeling like their identity is not... [taken] into account when community policies are being set up, that I'm one of the people students might talk to about that.

Julia adds to this sentiment that her administration does not necessarily consider the perspectives of all of their students, with the following observation, "I don't feel like as an institution we are particularly grappling with issues around gender expression and sexual orientation in an intentional way."

Further underscoring the lack of institutional investment and intentionality in actively promoting an inclusive process for queer students and faculty, Ann stated, “I guess among other teachers [I am], I don’t want to say token queer, I think they [the administration] see me as a resource for these [queer] kids.” It is important to have resources, but this mindset of depending solely upon a member of the queer community to create that space of inclusivity and support lacks sensitivity and understanding about the breadth of who and what really makes up the queer community. We are not all the same, and as Crenshaw (1991) assert, our identities are constructed of intersecting elements.

One person’s experience does not speak for the entire queer community. As James so articulately points out, “ I think it’s important to know that my experiences won’t speak for everyone in this group.” James is speaking about the entirety of queer community, where there exists a spectrum of identities, and he argues the misnomer among many non-queer people is that we have all had the same experiences, and can speak to what it is like to be a queer man, or trans woman, or a queer individual of a particular racial identity, even when that identity does not align with our own. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) plays an enormous role in this understanding, and as James suggests, “the other people, the other [non-queer] teachers, could brush up on their identity politics, more or less.”

As Julia offers in speaking about how independent schools need to be more intentional in their diversity and inclusion work:

I always feel like the drive away from conflict, or any feeling of engaging with discomfort is so powerful. You really have to say over and over and over again,



“ this is not going to be comfortable, we're going to do it anyway” to make any kind of headway against the stuff that is really strongly ingrained.

Julia adds, “I feel like if it were a genuinely inclusive community there would be more kids who were openly queer.” This observation by Julia was echoed in Catherine’s comment about her school, “There haven’t been any completely out couples that I’ve known of.” The data from research and our experiences implies that queer students do not expose their personal identities for a number reasons (Kosciw et al., 2016), including the reality that their school communities are not as inclusive or as supportive as the schools espouse in their mission and diversity statements.

**Role models.** We, as 12 queer educators, have recognized our positions as role models within our respective school communities, and the importance of this as it relates to the development of our professional identities. As a part of the larger construct of how we navigate our lives within our schools as queer educators, was the prevalent idea that we all felt a need to provide an image of successful queer individuals. There was a definite awareness among all 12 of us that we could not be role models if we were not out, leading many amongst the group to opine that it would be beneficial to their communities if there were more faculty members willing to come out and share their queer identities.

Being present and visible was critical to my group of co-researchers, not only to provide an observable cue that successful queer people exist for those students who struggle with identity, but also for those non-queer students who have never before encountered queer individuals. As Julia pointed out:

I think... there have been some studies done about people's attitudes towards the queer community and towards the fight for full civil and human rights for that

community. ...If you were going to predict whether or not someone resonated with those issues... If you could only pick one variable, and you were trying to figure out what's the variable that will enable me to predict whether or not this unknown person is going to be a supporter, one of the single best variables to pick is, do they know somebody who's openly queer?

The presence of openly queer adults creates an opportunity for non-queer students and colleagues to interrogate their perceptions concerning the queer community in light of seeing successful queer members of their community actively engaged in the process of living life and teaching. As Liz also observes:

There are kids in my class who I know who have negative feelings about gay people and I think if I develop a relationship with them that maybe they will think about that [their understanding] more positively... if we connect on like a more human level. Maybe it's 'cause they don't know anybody that's gay.

The data from this research reveals that queer teachers and staff are thinking about the importance of their visibility within their schools, not only for students who may be queer, but also for those non-queer students who need exposure to experiences beyond what they have already encountered.

Within the professional identity theme, our perceptions as role models emerged from the analysis of the interviews with my co-researchers. Examining the theme of role models within professional identity uncovered two important ideas that will be discussed in the following sections: being role models for students; and the importance of the GSA.

***Modeling for students.*** The data revealed an investment among all 12 of us in terms of our need to be role models for our students. By being out and visible within our

schools, we, my 11 co-researchers and I, begin to combat the heteronormative and often-homophobic culture prevalent in our schools (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2014; Lugg, 2003; Toomey et al., 2012). As previous research has revealed, queer students have often been left alone to navigate their identities without any positive queer role models (DeJean, 2010; King, 2004), an element my co-researchers and I hope to eliminate for our students. Authenticity lends itself to connection with students, and it is this connection, that promotes learning, not just academic learning, but also social and emotional learning. Laura, who is an administrator who also teaches stated:

I think that I'm in the business of looking after kids, certainly intellectually, but also socially and emotionally, and making sure they get the support they need and take the risks they need to do, in order to [grow], some kids don't like to try new things.

She further underscored this point about modeling as an out queer teacher with, “I do think it makes a difference. I mean I know there are kids I've taught who discovered that being gay was normal because I seemed pretty normal,” and continued this observation about an interaction with a former student, “And he said ‘I just never had known anybody who was gay until I met you.’” suggesting he had changed his perception of queer people as a result. Following this line of thinking as a teacher in the classroom, Catherine stated:

And then also that question of as a teacher, as a mentor of teenagers, that our students need to know that not just kind of at a policy level, but at a personal level, there are adults here who could be models of what their path forward might look like, especially for those who may or may not have support at home.

Providing a visual presence that deviates from the heteronormative construct in education creates an alternative, for both queer and non-queer students, to consider when thinking about their futures, who they might become, and whom they will interact with socially.

In speaking about a student in her advisory, a group of students that teachers guide academically, and at times support both socially and emotionally, over the course of their high school tenure, Catherine stated:

For example, I had an advisee last year who had two dads. I remember one day at advisory I said something... and I saw her turn around and look at my plant [where Catherine had a pride flag]... I remember her turning around and looking at the plant and looking at me again. She was like, "Oh, okay, like someone gets my family here."

It is important for students who are queer to see themselves reflected in their teachers in the same manner that it is critical for non-White students to see themselves represented among their teachers (Tatum, 2003). Ann further supports this point with:

I think it gives kids, to be honest, it's [my school] a really conservative place. It's old-fashioned, so I want kids to see a different kind of gender expression and understand that, I'm a woman, but I can wear a bowtie and it has nothing to do with my sexual orientation [it is about gender norms].

And she goes on to state:

I think that that [wearing blazers and bowties] ties into modeling. I want the kids to know that we should all be ourselves. I really want them to know that being queer is not something that we should feel shame [about]. A lot of it is really tied

into modeling, but at the same time, it is an identity that's pretty important to me and I'm not just going to hide it.

All eleven co-researchers and I consider our positions as visible members of the queer community important, and a powerful contributing element to the overall structure of our schools by providing an alternative construct to the culture perpetuated by the historically heteronormative roots of independent schools (Meyer, 2008; Salomone et al., 1999). As Ray (2014) contends, it is critical for the entire student body to see successful queer adults amongst their faculty in order to promote both diversity and inclusivity.

*The importance of the GSA.* The second idea that comprises our perception as role models is the importance of the GSA to each of the 12 of us, at our respective schools, which emerged as an important element under the construct as a role model within our professional identity development. By being involved GSAs, we telegraphed implicitly to all those paying attention that we, as queer teachers, had embraced our personal identity and felt it was an important aspect of our lives to share professionally, just as our non-queer colleagues tacitly share their personal identity. GSAs offered us a way to reveal ourselves as visible role models who had successfully adopted our queer identities and as positive school members to all of the people in our institutions. GSAs also offer schools an easy way to promote inclusionary practices, though aside from a few non-queer allies and queer members of the faculty and staff who are actually engaged, often remain overlooked by the majority of those within the community.

As Hannah noted in the section about inclusion, schools often rarely acknowledge and support the importance of GSAs and their queer faculty's investment in it. This absence of acknowledgement occurred in a variety of ways as revealed by the data, from

what Hannah discussed about faculty work for the GSA being ignored in relation to other clubs and sports, to schools espousing support for GSAs, but doing little to facilitate meeting times or active student participation, as noted by Peter. One of my co-researchers reported that her or his school has made no effort to replace the GSA faculty advisor who retired, essentially leaving its organization defunct. Two of our schools did not think a GSA was important to their student body and did not have one, remaining unaware that, according to statistics (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016) they most likely have students in need of support.

In discussing the presently defunct GSA at his school, Peter stated, “There is a gay/straight alliance, but it doesn’t meet. It lost its faculty advisor last year, and it hasn’t really been rekindled. There are some kids that are very likely gay... No one talks about it.” This statement highlights the previously mentioned issue of undiscussables (Argyris, 2002; Dankoski et al., 2014) concerning the lack of administrative support around creating an inclusive environment. If Peter’s school was invested in inclusion, the administrators would have made certain the GSA was functional and supported. In speaking about the lack of a GSA at his school, James observed the following about his administration:

Going into the school [his current school] I said that that [the GSA] was something I was involved in my previous school that I was really excited to do, and I sort of got a “yeah okay, we have this thing [Community Connections] that’s kind of like that and why don’t you try this out and then we’ll see” ... and slowly finding out that my school is kind of steady with the status quo, that we

didn't need that right now... since then, I've gotten a sense that they're fine not having one [a GSA].

Amanda, whose all male school also has no GSA, observed. "If there was a need [for a GSA] that was identified, I don't think we would get any pushback from the school [in creating a GSA]." Her school has made the assumption, since there are no out queer students, that a GSA is not necessary. This assumption undermines the opportunity to create an inclusive culture, and to support queer students and faculty, since statistically there have to be queer students (Boyland, Swensson, Ellis, Coleman, & Boyalnd, 2016; Bryan, 2012; Ciszek, 2014).

GSAs are an obvious step towards creating inclusion in a school (Meyer & Bayer, 2013; Toomey & Russell, 2013), and is an easy group for administrators to visibly support by creating time and space for meetings, attending important yearly events, and giving recognition to its student and faculty leaders who participate in guiding the group. As the data reveals, this most basic step towards inclusion is barely addressed, if at all, in most of our schools.

### **School Culture**

The third overarching theme of school culture emerged as an important point to my co-researchers and me relative to the topics we discussed. Given the historical roots of independent schools in the education of privileged White males (Meyer, 2008; Salomone et al., 1999), heteronormativity as a construct is constantly present and never far from our collective minds. The 12 of us involved in this research remain deeply aware of how the culture impacts us as we navigate the environments of our schools.

In discussing the culture of our schools, three important aspects of the institutions within which we work were revealed: heteronormativity; modeling for the adults in our schools; and the misperception of queer teachers as predators. Heteronormativity, and how the 12 of us experience and navigate the inherently challenging heteronormative environment that exists in all of our schools is further illuminated by: perceptions of single versus coupled for the queer teacher; and feeling voiceless. The second element, role modeling for our colleagues, also contains our understanding of queer teacher and queer student safety. Lastly the third aspect examines the fear amongst several of my co-researchers about being perceived as a predatory teacher simply because of our queer identities (H. N. Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Stader & Graca, 2007).

**Heteronormativity.** The overwhelming consensus from our research was an acknowledgement of the heteronormative environment, the main cultural construct, within which all 12 of us as queer educators are acutely aware, live and work. This heteronormative environment impacts all of us, and we actively push against this culture, some by wearing gender nonconforming clothing or explicit symbols, while others of us choose to be overtly vocal in how we speak and address our students and colleagues. Regardless, this implicit culture is present and very much a part of our awareness and it impacts how we conduct our affairs as queer educators.

The majority of independent schools, certainly the seven schools represented by my co-researchers and me, were founded in the early twentieth century or before; they are old schools. The foundations of these institutions were as places for moneyed, Protestant, White young men (Meyer, 2008; Salomone et al., 1999), and our 12 experiences supports an awareness that this history remains a deep part of the traditional



underpinnings within our schools. While most of the schools where my co-researchers and I teach have made concerted, intentional efforts to build diversity and move away from the roots of their origin, the data reveals that a heteronormative culture remains in place, and that schools lack inspection and interrogation of queer issues.

This history, as it related to my co-researchers' schools, obviously impacted their perceptions of their institutional culture as evidenced by Catherine's observation:

Broadly this is a historically male school... And it also being an independent boarding school, there are a lot of very wealthy students here... [and] a lot of very wealthy male alums. There is a vocal cohort of especially White male students who are very politically conservative, so they're very resistant to especially conversations... "why are we bothering to talk about it [issues around queerness, race, and sexuality]...?"

Catherine goes on to note, "there are a lot of sub cultures within the community including these sort of heels dug in conservative, rich White men, young men." Peter further underscored Catherine's observations about the tacit cultural mindset of some students, stating the following about his school:

This school is quite upper class Protestant. And to the extent that we have students that do not fit into that mold, they are welcomed and in some respects tolerated... And there's a sense of privilege here that feels like it is in the bone marrow of this institution. It makes me very uncomfortable. From our admission office, where a lot of this is generated, and an admission office that I don't believe has a strong enough mission, in terms of the type of population we wanna be creating for this school community.

Hannah furthers strengthens these observations with, “I mean... *[Laughter]* it’s an all-boys school until whenever, early ‘80s, late ‘70s.” when discussing the impact her school’s history has on present day heteronormative culture. She notes further, “If you walk down the [classroom] hall on the first floor you’ll see a lot of [photographs of] white guys... I don’t think that they [the administration] have had to think about it [how to present an inclusive physical environment] too much before.”

Charles observed, in considering the culture at his boarding school, that there is a feeling of being an outsider he experiences as a queer member of his community:

So, you always feel as if you're still – even if you have students who appreciate your presence and you can perhaps advise them with clubs, et cetera, you can have colleagues who become friends or just remain colleagues. ...but... you still feel as if you're somewhere on the outside. I still have not been able to escape that feeling.

This is something echoed in a variety of ways by each of my co-researchers, often leading to the idea that our institutions need to be more effectively intentional in addressing diversity and inclusion within our respective school cultures. Julia notes:

I think a lot of culture is tacit and unintentional... In some cases I think that's sort of the power of culture right? Like you're not even really aware that it's happening. But I do think that there's a place for intentionality.

The suggestion here, as stated by Julia, underscores the importance of an educational institution embracing inclusivity in their diversity practices. The implication among all of my co-researchers, as revealed by the data, was that their schools were not being intentional and mindful in their approach to diversity, culture, and inclusion. This was

reflected in the drive many schools have towards broadening their diversity without recognizing the importance of practicing inclusion, and how this ultimately impacts the community. Independent schools often are comprised of heterosexual couples and as James observed:

There is a lot of hetero-normativity in my school, because many faculty are married and their spouses also live with them on-campus and their kids go to the school, there's very much a system of it in place... I am working to sort of break that down [with] "I'm here and I'm queer."

***Single versus coupled.*** It was noted that being part of a couple within the heteronormative culture of independent schools made the constant process of coming out far easier to navigate, and often more organic. Several co-researchers, both coupled and un-coupled, discussed at length their perception of how much easier it was for a coupled queer educator to navigate the decidedly heterosexual construct that is independent schools. Being coupled for the queer teacher, according to the data, lends an appearance to the straight school culture of being mainstream, part of the normative construct.

The construct of the glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008) within which my co-researchers and I exist as queer educators, is significantly impacted depending upon our status as either a single person or an individual involved in a relationship. As each of us observed, being part of a couple helped to reduce the force behind the construct of the glass closet, particularly in boarding schools, where one's spouse is visible and not so easily avoided or sidestepped in casual conversation. Being a part of a couple made navigating the heteronormative environment easier because the visual impact of

coupledom is so obvious. A single queer teacher has none of those signifiers, and, as George observed:

I think it might be different for someone who is coupled, versus not. Being a residential member of the faculty, as a single person, it's a little hard... there are lots of families, a lot of straight families... There was this little sense of isolation. And while you have this great sense of community, it's like, "We all live here together. And it's bustling." It also can be isolating, too. I felt that acutely.

Being half of a couple offers obvious public signifiers about identity, especially in boarding schools, that are not available for single queer educators. George spoke about the advantage being coupled and non-queer has for teachers, and how being single and queer can be isolating:

I just think that being coupled gives you the opportunity to interact with others in the community in a way that doesn't make you feel like a third wheel, or as if you don't have a family of your own. Most people on campus who live on campus have a family with them here, so one feels that acutely as a single [queer] person... it increases the feeling of isolation.

Even for the coupled queer individual there is still a tremendous amount of uncertainty to navigate, and while having a visible partner is a signifier of identity, the construct of partner brings an entirely new set of issues, particularly as they relate to housing on boarding school campuses. As Charles explained:

I was left with the impression that my partner had to also work in some capacity for the school to be able to live on campus. That is not the case, but it was what I was told in conversation casually with colleagues... Which I had to bring up [with

the administration despite having discussed his partner during the hiring process] as a question to clarify because I kept getting questions [about it] so much.

Being partnered, or now given Marriage Equality, married, creates a somewhat easier daily life for the coupled queer teacher to navigate, but there remain significant problems in traversing the deeply rooted heteronormative construct, and sometimes openly hostile environments, as noted in the data, that comprise independent schools.

*Voiceless.* The observation among the 12 of us, despite being out, that many of us exist within the previously mentioned construct of the glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008), often leaves us feeling voiceless. We feel we are expected to represent the entire queer community within our heteronormative schools, which ignores the individual experience each of us has that often differs vastly from person to person. This becomes apparent especially in relation to policy issues that have a greater impact on non-queer faculty and students. The visible number of heterosexual couples in all of our schools is easily observed, and is certainly in evidence at the school where I teach where a number of married couples both teach, or work in other non-teaching positions, while there are no individuals from queer couples both working on campus.

James noted, in response to a policy change that required all faculty to participate in afternoon clubs, that he felt voiceless in the conversation that ensued around the issue:

Many of my colleagues were understandably frustrated by this change, and the go-to complaint or line of defensiveness was about loss of family time, specifically time spent with children. Both as a younger faculty member without children, and a [queer] faculty member, I felt like their complaints de-legitimized my perspective/experiences... Furthermore, the heteronormative presumption of

family structure [as vitally important] did not feel inclusive to my identity... such that I felt voiceless in the situation.

Often it is these subtle policy changes, how they are discussed, and how they are resolved which often pass unnoticed by non-queer members of the school community that have a lasting impact on queer faculty, and on our understanding of how our place and value within our schools is revealed.

Hannah discussed her feelings, as a relatively new queer faculty member, about how difficult she felt it would be to have her voice heard because she does not have the history and longevity with her school with her statement:

And so for a teacher in her third year [and as a queer teacher in a heteronormative culture] to say I'm uncomfortable with certain things or to challenge the way anything really is done... when you're talking to someone who's maybe been here for twenty years [is very uncomfortable].

Catherine observed, when her school undertook a revision of the student policy handbook, that it was only at the urging of queer faculty with support from a non-queer administrative ally, that her boarding school thought to address visitation policies for all students. She stated :

Recently some of our health team and dean of students office folks were having conversations with the student body around [non-queer] issues around consent and also talking about appropriate use of space... If you have a friend with you in the dorm, the door has to be open this much, and... And one of my other colleagues who is out, she and her wife live in a dorm attached apartment, she

raised her hand and asked, “Okay, are we gonna make sure the kids know that these rules apply to everybody [meaning queer students as well]?”

Ultimately the handbook employed more inclusive language that provided guidelines for all students, queer and non-queer, removing the ambiguity students might perceive as a part of a queer couple. Charles brings this issue of feeling voiceless, marginalized, or ignored, into finer focus with his observation, “So, what happens is queer identities become null and void [silenced] because conservative, more traditional identities need to be not [only] legitimated, but protected.”

We are all visibly queer members of the community who are cognizant that there are queer members of our communities who are either not out, or are not comfortably out and have chosen to remain visibly invisible. As Ann offers, “I’m one of four openly queer faculty members. The other three are much more quiet about that identity. Much, much, much more quiet about it.” She goes on to speculate, “I do sometimes wonder what it would be like if they [the other queer faculty] were more open... where kids could feel like they have different people to go to.” Ann suggests that she feels as though she has to address all issues of the queer community for her school despite only possessing an understanding of her experience within the spectrum of queer identities.

Catherine, underscoring the heteronormative culture in her school, made a point to discuss the importance her institution places on students and faculty coming out publicly as a way to disrupt the heteronormative construct, and observed:

It was amazing and she [a student who came out in all-school meeting] got a standing ovation, which at the time I was like, “Really? We have to give a standing ovation?” Because I was very happy that it happened, but [at the same

time] I was like kind of this is where we are as a community that that [coming out] needs a standing ovation?”

With this statement, Catherine points out how heterosexuals never have to publicly identify who they are, and they certainly are not applauded for being non-queer. It also directs attention to a lack of inclusivity, in a less heteronormative school coming out publicly would not have to take place, much less be repeatedly celebrated, because it would be part of the norm. This mindset that we from the queer community, must continually come out within our heteronormative schools was persistently echoed in subtle ways throughout all of my conversations with my co-researchers.

In examining the underlying reasons why some queer members choose not come out, it emerged that our schools do not, despite the ideals they espouse, feel a deep urgency to change. Hannah spoke to this directly in her observations about the historical, institutional roots and teacher longevity:

Then who’s gonna be motivated to take that on [develop inclusive practices] especially when change doesn’t feel like... this place doesn’t seem like it wants to change... I think that has to do with also the administrators who have been here, the number of years that they have. It feels like a lot of people have been here for like 20 plus years. And so I don’t want to say it’s complacency but it’s more like this is what they’ve been – they’re 50 and they’ve been doing this since they were 25 in this way and they understand their job... So like it’s hard. Imagining it [a culture shift] would be hard for them to position themselves in a new framework.

This longevity of faculty, combined with the normative construct of heterosexuality, creates the heteronormative environment that remains largely unexamined, as explicated



by my co-researchers, and it impacts every aspect our institutions, most particularly the safety of our queer students and faculty. In each of the seven schools where my co-researchers and I teach, there is an overarching idea that every student is of concern in terms of providing them a space to grow and develop critical knowledge and thinking skills in a learning environment of safety. As my co-researchers and I know, and the data reflects, this is not always what actually occurs in our schools, especially if one does not align with heteronormative foundation of the institution.

**Modeling for adults in our schools.** The second main element related to culture was the importance we felt about modeling for the adults in our schools. Many of my 11 co-researchers and I felt a need to assist our colleagues in understanding the experience of otherness (Memmi, 1965). In discussing the adults within our communities, teachers and administrators alike, a sense emerged from the data that most non-queer members of our schools have not interrogated their position in relation to the queer community, and had little understanding about what it means to be queer and exist outside of the heteronormative construct that is such a prevalent value in independent school culture.

Hannah observed when speaking about her experience as a queer teacher invested in changing the culture within her school:

I think it can be heavy because I feel responsibility... I mean the adults are definitely more challenging in a lot of ways... Especially adults that have been in these communities forever, for such a long time, these places are built on and survive on tradition, and the way things are, and this is the way things have [always] been.

This construct of the deep roots within the independent school community emerged frequently in all of the conversations I undertook with my co-researchers, and the impact of these roots upon their communities was evident in their comments about how colleagues undertook, or did not, professional development in relation to diversity in general, and the queer community specifically. James mentioned a colleague who had asked him, in relation to a television show, about what the difference was between queer and gay, and observed:

They [the faculty at large] don't necessarily seem like, or that person in particular doesn't seem like someone who's just going to pull off and research it [the questions queer culture] themselves, so I'm happy to explain it if it's going to broaden someone's perspective or be instrumental to them in some way.

James goes on to discuss that he feels professional development is important for his colleagues and is something he is deeply invested in providing in order to more fully support all of his students. He states, "There is acknowledgement and not a deeper processing of it [diversity and inclusion by the faculty] and so I'm there and sometimes will do professional development that will be about diversity inclusion."

In discussing the adults within their communities, it becomes clear from the data that my co-researchers and I are cognizant of the strides made in our schools in terms of queer acceptance over recent years. We have simultaneously acknowledged there remains considerable work to do by the non-queer members of the community in terms of moving beyond mere acceptance to constructing inclusive environments, which is not always taking place. As James and Hannah pointed out, many of the cultural origins of independent schools are firmly entrenched, embraced, and perpetuated consistently, with

apparently little thought or reflection (Argyris, 2002) about the current cultural relativity they might possess.

*Queer teacher and queer student safety.* An important aspect of modeling for our colleagues within the overarching culture construct was our perception of safety, or lack thereof, both for us as teachers, and for our queer students. As noted in previous research, safety is an issue faced by both queer students and teachers as they navigate the oftentimes-unsafe heteronormative and frequently homophobic environment of schools (Check & Ballard, 2014; Horn, 2010; Lugg & Adelman, 2015). The experiences of my co-researchers all point to the inherent difficulties we experience as members of the queer community within our schools, which informs how we traverse and negotiate the environments within which we work for the betterment of both our students and colleagues.

In the printed policies of our schools, both hard copy and digitally on websites, there exists language about non-discrimination clauses, and for students, a desire to construct a safe and inclusive learning community. Today much of this language is mandatory (HRC, 2016) given the cultural shift occurring in the U.S., and schools do want to create the safety they espouse within their communities. Yet this is not necessarily what occurs, as Julia observed about the language of her school's policies and benefits for faculty and staff:

The nondiscrimination clause is actually expanded to include sexual identity and gender expression [for students]... I don't feel like we're as much on the cutting edge [with policy language] as we could be in terms of being a genuinely inclusive community.

Laura offers a similar observation about her school, “I mean so we're not hiding who we are. Our non-discrimination is clear.” She continues with, “...we're not hiding from it, we're not shirking it, we're not shirking the words... But we may not always live up to that promise.” It is evident in the data from the conversations with my co-researchers that there is an undercurrent within our schools surrounding queer safety, where issues of cultural diversity are undertaken more readily than issues of sexuality and gender diversity.

In speaking to her sense of safety as a teacher Hannah states, “I have specific people in my mind that I feel, my perception is that they have a problem with the way I live.” She continues, “I’m also just used to that so, you know, if people have a problem with it [being queer] then they’re generally not my type of people anyway.” The idea that queer teachers have to tolerate colleagues, who as Hannah states, have a problem with and at times animosity toward, our identities, is disconcerting. Peter observed, “Straight faculty... I have to be honest, I don’t know to what extent people [non-queer colleagues] are uncomfortable with our gayness as opposed to just going through their own shit, you know?” He continues speaking about his role as an administrator, reflecting on some of his colleagues who are also part of the administration at his school:

I think there's open discrimination that is tolerated on the part of some administrators, and that drives me up a wall. I've raised it with several people. I've actually confronted people directly with it. It's been denied, obviously, and that's a real source of anguish, actually, for me.

The data from these conversations reveals there is a distinct sense of discomfort, if not outright experience of discrimination, and of remaining cultural outsiders experienced by

many of us. This is further underscored in the observations my 11 co-researchers made about their perceptions related to students and their sense of safety. Julia made a very direct statement about safety for queer students in her school:

And I think to the extent that people allow themselves to be aware of it [queer identities] as generally inclusive and supportive as this community is, and I think it is, I think there are kids every day here who don't feel safe.

Julia goes on to point out about the importance of safety for students, “But one of the things that I said is that a feeling of safety is a basic prerequisite, if you don't feel safe you're not learning, because you're protecting yourself. You're trying to figure out how to be safe.” Likewise, if a teacher does not possess a sense of safety, they are not going to be fully focused on educating and mentoring. Schools, given their heteronormative constructs, are not necessarily sensitive, as the data suggests, to the needs of the queer population on their campuses and as George notes, there is little work taking place to interrogate this concept of safety. He observed about his colleagues, “There are plenty of people [colleagues] who have no awareness of sometimes the things that come out of their mouth. And the detriment they can have.” In making a similar observation about creating and maintaining student safety at her school, Liz related :

One of my advisees who believes she is gay, though she's never been in a gay relationship before, she asked to be moved out of one of our history teacher's classes because she was like, “I don't feel comfortable, I don't feel good.”

Ultimately that particular student was moved out of that teacher's class, and Liz wondered why this teacher's mindset was permitted at all by the school. She then revealed the teacher's opinions were well known to the community and the individual

was publicly understood as homophobic because, in addition to his frequent derogatory comments and slurs about the queer community, he was one of three faculty members who walked out of an assembly that addressed topics of inclusion, queer issues, and commonly used homophobic phrasings with students that undermined a students' sense of safety and personal well being.

The research data reveals this tacit acceptance of intolerance by our institutions influences the perceptions of queer faculty and students alike about the general lack of safety within their schools. Julia's observation about the lack of out queer students in her school underscores this point:

I don't feel like I see lesbian couples in school. I don't feel like I see gay male couples in school. And by definition there are queer kids here. So I feel like the message for kids is not one of unalloyed acceptance, just because if it were really then we would see that [queer couples], we would see expressions of affection [just as we do with non-queer students].

In a conversation following our initial interview, Charles noted that those of us who are visible help to construct a positive environment for our queer students, ensuring their sense of safety, and observed:

For those students who might choose to openly identify [as queer] in their school environment, they should feel confident in knowing that they will not be discriminated against... Educators who are out in their professional environment ensure that that particular aspect of the microcosm-macrocosm dynamic of school life is adequately addressed.

My eleven co-researchers and I are all aware of colleagues who do not feel safe enough to come out. When this is combined with our observations that there is only a small minority of students who have come out, and given the statistical ratio of individuals on the queer/straight scale, it is obvious that there are students, and teachers as well, who have not emerged from their closets. It appears as the data states, that schools are not the inclusive safe environments they believe themselves to be.

**Predatory teachers.** The third element within the culture theme is a challenging construct, one that is often not discussed yet keenly felt, as evidenced by many conversations with my co-researchers both female and male. The homophobic and heteronormative assumption, exacerbated and inflamed by Bryant's Save our Children Campaign in Florida and the Briggs Initiative in California in the 1970's (D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Lipkin, 1999; Lugg, 1988; Marcus, 2002), that queer teachers are predators persists within the culture of many schools (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Stader & Graca, 2007). As the 12 of us have noted, merely working within the heteronormative environments that are our schools, we regularly contend with and have to navigate our history as marginalized people (Blount, 2005; Check & Ballard, 2014; Ciszek, 2014; Endo et al., 2010; Irwin, 2002; Lugg, 2003; Marcus, 2002). Whether or not my co-researchers know or understand the extent of the damage that the Bryant and Briggs campaigns brought upon the queer educational community (Blount, 2005; Lugg, 1988; Marcus, 2002), there was a sense among some of my colleagues that we needed to be aware of how we interacted with our students for fear of being considered predatory. Charles spoke openly about his fears before entering an education program while he was to deciding to become a teacher:

I had real fears because there were, what I was often reminded of by being surrounded by conversations that were popping up in the news... was that [of] the predatory teacher. Then it was like, there are what you call pre-predatory or something... abnormal or whatever. So I was like, "Oh my gosh. I'm gonna become that... Like a blow up, or a blow out case where I get accused of something, but I can't defend myself."

It was through his work in college with the program designed to help students with serious learning disabilities, and observing them finding success despite their challenges, where Charles was able to find the courage to address his fears. This experience for Charles, of being aware of how he physically presents his identity, is something he continues to think about as an adult in his community and he observed, "I did not like the feeling... I mean, like a lot of people do... [you] constantly [watch] your moves and your steps and your speech and your this and your that."

Catherine observes, "I'm a little bit aware of if I'm working individually with a student, obviously I have this classroom with these nice big glass walls [anyone passing by can see in] so I don't have to worry so much." George also evidenced an awareness of his identity in relation to the idea of queer predation when he discussed giving private voice lessons and how it took him a while to overcome his anxiety:

How are we gonna know what's okay [in relation to students] and what isn't? And that was particularly vexing for me, because it's like, "Well, what if whatever is okay for everyone else isn't okay for me?" Just because there's this extra thing [being queer]... Having to think about that, can I give a voice lesson to a guy?



Because then I'm gonna be in a private room. And probably some place without a window. And how's that gonna be?

Catherine's experience about feeling a need to protect herself from the possible perception among students and colleagues that she might be a predatory teacher reveals the issue that exists within the minds of many queer teachers. This, when coupled with the fears Charles and George advanced, points to remnants of Bryant's activity from the 1970's that the Conservative Right has continued to emphasize, remain a concern for queer teachers (Blount, 2005; Lugg, 1988; Marcus, 2002). The awareness of the concept of predatory teachers, which the data shows is a very present concern for queer teachers, is indicative of the heteronormative culture that Bryant sought to reinforce by castigating queer educators as immoral and depraved (Blount, 2005; Lugg, 1988; Marcus, 2002).

### **Summary**

Collectively, my co-researchers and I acknowledge and understand that significant growth addressing issues of diversity and acceptance of the queer community has occurred within our independent schools over the past decade and a half, though we remain fully aware of how far we have still have to go. All of our conversations about our experiences as queer teachers in independent schools reveal data that points to the disconnect our institutions have about their diversity and inclusivity practices in creating a safe environment for all community members. Debate has emerged recently discussing whether a school can in fact be considered safe if institutions have to denote safe places and safe teachers (Sadowski, 2016). The data emerging from this study suggests, as a group we are highly cognizant of the ways in which our schools remain inherently unsafe

for many groups, the queer population in particular, who comprise part of the community within our institutions.

As queer teachers, my co-researchers and I address, and will continue to address, the challenges we face personally and professionally as members within the hegemony of our heteronormative independent schools. The common goal my co-researchers and I share is one of helping to create change within our schools by disrupting, to the extent we are each able, the heteronormative construct that is so deeply entrenched in the historical roots of our institutions.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Implications**

As stated previously, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological heuristic inquiry was to explore my experience, and those of eleven other queer independent school educators, to understand how we make sense of, and navigate, the heteronormative, traditionally male-dominated, independent school environment. The essence and meaning of our experiences in relation to our school communities captured our sense of being perceived as other (Memmi, 1965), often living within a glass closet (Endo et al., 2010; Musto, 2008). We are out, yet rarely acknowledged personally in the same way that our non-queer colleagues' personal lives are accepted, and feel marginalized within our educational communities that do not appear to value the diversity we bring to our schools. This has been an uncomfortable, and at times painful, exploration for all 12 of us, particularly when we see our personal safety, and that of our queer students, overlooked or compromised, while feeling, as out queer educators, a responsibility to be role models and representatives of the queer community for our schools, and a duty to provide support for GSAs.

### **Discussion**

In this chapter I provide a discussion of the findings of my research in the first section, which are a result of my analysis of the synthesized data, and then follow this part with an examination of the implications of these findings in the second section. The discussion of the findings encompasses a brief overview of the data collection process, of previous research, and a summary of the data developed by this study, before discussing in depth the four guiding research questions in relation to the data. The first section is

followed in the second section by my examination and discussion of the implications for policy, practice, future research, and leadership.

### **Overview of the Data Collection**

A total of 11 queer out educators, as specified by my research parameters, from seven schools within the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions joined me in my research. As co-researchers, the 12 of us shared our experiences as queer independent school teachers, and together we explored and illuminated how openly queer independent school educators navigate their personal and professional identities. The critical significance of 12 queer educators developing meaning of their experiences within the hegemonic heteronormative educational environment as valid research cannot be overlooked, as Freire (2000) writes:

Some may think it inadvisable to include people as investigators in the search for their own meaningful thematics: that their intrusive influence... will “adulterate” the findings and thereby sacrifice the objectivity of the investigation. This view mistakenly presupposes that themes exist, in their original objective purity, outside of people – as if themes were things. Actually, themes exist in people in their relations with the world, with reference to concrete facts (Freire, p. 106, 2000).

In choosing my co-researchers, I employed purposeful sampling using both intensity sampling and snowball sampling methods (Maxwell, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2012) to create my pool of 11 co-researchers. I used open-ended questions (see Appendix B) and an in-depth informal conversational interview approach with my co-researchers in these conversations, consistent with Moustakas’ (1990) preference for heuristic inquiry.

Data was collected in person during February of 2017 at a location chosen by each of my co-researchers. These conversations varied in length from 54 to 169 minutes, and were then transcribed. The transcriptions were returned to my co-researchers, along with my synopsis of our conversations for each co-researcher to check for accuracy in reflecting their voices and meaning (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). After receiving affirmations, and any corrections or clarifications, I then applied the four-step Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of analysis modified by Moustakas (1994) to the data, which revealed the previously mentioned three themes. In addition to data from these in-depth conversations, I also examined relevant faculty and student handbooks publically available on the web sites of the seven schools, which provided further insight into both policy and culture.

### **Summary of Previous Research**

The literature review revealed a paucity of research about how queer independent school teachers navigate their identities, what it means to be out within U.S. educational institutions, and how educational institutions support queer teachers. A close look at the queer community and education reveals a heteronormative hegemony that has persisted for centuries (Blount, 1996, 2000; Castro & Sujak, 2014; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003).

The synthesis of the data from our research reveals that our collective experience has connections to the three main topics of the literature review, and lays bare the significant amount of work that still needs to be undertaken despite the many gains accomplished within the queer educational community. The historical roots of the hegemonic heteronormativity, evident at the outset of mandatory free education for all children in the early 20th century, remains a construct deeply embedded in U.S.

education today (Blount, 2000; Cavanagh, 2006; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003) that has been resistant to change, because change requires the shifting of long held values and beliefs (Schein, 1985) and the process is often long-term and slow (Kezar, 2001). The research my co-researchers and I conducted helps fill the void that currently exists pertaining to the experience of queer teachers as they navigate their personal and professional identities within independent school institutions.

The aforementioned three themes were each clarified by topics drawn from the data that illuminated our experiences. The first theme, personal identity, encompassed and was further explained by: coming out personally; coming out as a constant process; and staying true to ourselves. The second theme, professional identity, included how we became teachers, which was further illustrated by: invested adults; working with students with special needs; and alternate routes to teaching. The second theme also incorporated coming out professionally, which was clarified by: the glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008), how we are seen but not heard; authenticity; and inclusion. Finally within the second theme of professional identity, our perception as role models was further defined by: modeling for our students; and the GSA. The third theme, culture, included heteronormativity, which was further clarified by: single versus coupled; and voiceless. Culture as a theme was also illuminated by the construct of modeling for adults in our schools, which included queer teacher and queer student safety. Finally, within the third theme, the persistent misperception that queer teachers are predators was presented.

### **Summary of Data**

As introduced in the previous section, co-researcher conversations varied in length from 54 to 169 minutes, for a total of 809 recorded minutes with the average

length being approximately 74 minutes. This produced a little over 14 hours of taped interviews that created 343 pages of data for analysis, which I reduced by applying the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of analysis as directed by Moustakas (1994) to reveal the previously mentioned themes and their clarifications and illustrations.

In examining the four guiding research questions for this study in relation to the three emergent themes from my analysis of the interviews and related research, I found that these themes, (1) personal identity, (2) professional identity, and (3) culture, wove in and around the four questions, and were integral to revealing an understanding and making meaning of the experiences my co-researchers and I navigate, often daily, within our schools. My four guiding research questions (RQs) were:

RQ1. What does it mean to a queer educator to be out in her or his independent school institution?

RQ2. What do the various school policies and attitudes of the administration and colleagues mean to queer teachers as they navigate their professional identities?

RQ3. What are the various strategies that queer teachers employ in determining when and to whom to come out to in school?

RQ4. What experiences from a queer teacher's own educational past help shape her or his professional identity?

**RQ1: What does it mean to a queer educator to be out in her or his independent school institution?** To be queer and out as an educator in an independent school means, as a person, to be seen but not heard, to be a part of the community yet kept at arms length, to exist in a glass closet (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008), while being expected to act as role models, and to be change agents. Teaching as a queer person can

be uncomfortable, and is often fraught with challenges that remain unnoticed or unacknowledged by usually non-queer administrators. These administrators have little to no understanding about what their schools' lack of inclusivity means to the queer members of their community, and how this lack of inclusivity detrimentally impacts the entire community (Evans-Santiago & Lin, 2016; Meyer & Rhoades, 2006; Sadowski, 2016).

Of particular relevance to the first RQ for the 12 of us were the themes of personal and professional identity, and as queer educators, our position as role models for everyone in our communities. As Evans (2002) notes, heterosexuality has been preserved within U. S. education by the perpetuation of clearly defined gender roles, an element we see occurring within schools as they struggle with the issue of transgender students (Bishop & Atlas, 2015). This adherence to heterosexual norms perpetuates a hegemonic heteronormative construct (Bryan, 2012; Lugg, 2003) that queer teachers and students must continually navigate.

In addition to the identity themes was the specific sense of responsibility my co-researchers felt about providing role models for both our students and colleagues. Our visibility as role models combats bias against the queer community and promotes a stronger sense of inclusive diversity that benefits the entire school community, queer and non-queer alike (Meyer & Bayer, 2013). Both identity and role modeling will be further discussed in the sections below.

***Identity.*** In Jackson's (2007) six-stage framework focused on the professional development of queer educators, the construction of identity is considered complete in the final stage where teachers have become change agents. Becoming a change agent



means the queer educator has fully accepted and embraced her or his personal identity as queer, and uses this knowledge to support fellow queer community members in an overt manner (Jackson, 2007). As teachers dedicated to both their craft and their personal identities, my 11 co-researchers and I undertake this role of change agent, “empowering others to change their views about themselves and others” (Jackson, p. 78, 2007), through our openness and activity within our schools that brings attention to issues relevant to the queer community. Whether we have recently come out, or have been aware of our queer identity for most of our lives, each one of us understands our critical role as change agents who can disrupt the cultural norm that is deeply embedded within our inherently patriarchal and heteronormative schools (Meyer, 2008; Salomone, Riordan, & Weinman, 1999). By being out, we automatically become visible change agents and role models for the queer student population, as well as the greater community. Furthermore, as the data made clear, my co-researchers and I see ourselves as role models.

***Role models.*** DeJean (2010) and King (2004) suggest that queer students are often left to construct and navigate their identities without the assistance of role models in the form of queer teachers who are out. All 11 of my co-researchers and I were aligned in our perception that we provided this guidance by being visible role models, not only for our queer students, but also for all students, and the entire school community. As Julia noted, “I think in the absence of a concrete counterexample you can build up a kind of abstraction of prejudice that is just kind of a comfortable landing spot.” And she continues with, “If they [straight community members] don’t know anybody who’s openly gay they’re going to be much more comfortable saying ‘those people’”. Many of my co-researchers pointed to the importance of being out and visible to counteract the

narrative presented to some of our students by their families, their religion, and the media, of the queer community being other and undesirable (Balsam, Beadnell, & Molina, 2013; Bryan, 2012; Fetner & Elafros, 2015).

The prevalent attitude among all 12 of us was that we needed to be out and visible to provide a presence that countered the hegemonic heteronormative construct in order to normalize queer identities within our schools. Meyer and Bayer (2013) promote the idea that visibility benefits the entire school community by developing both diversity and inclusivity within the educational culture of our institutions, something each of us value and want for our schools. In examining queer identity development, Troiden (1988) notes that people are not born with an understanding of their sexuality and that this identity is developed.

Advancing this thinking, if people are not born with an understanding of identity, it is developed and therefore can be shaped by experience. Drawing upon this, it appears that out queer educators can help develop an understanding about the queer community in general within schools merely by being visible (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Fredman et al., 2015). Being out and visible to the entire educational community forces non-queer members of schools, adults especially, to choose whether or not to examine their preconceived understandings about the queer community. As noted by several of my co-researchers and in previous research (Bishop et al., 2010; Fredman et al., 2015; Horn et al., 2010), contact with queer individuals for a non-queer person often is the predictor of acceptance and inclusion. Within this construct of acceptance and inclusion, it is important that students be allowed to experience a diversity of people in order to develop an inclusive acceptance of all individuals within their communities.

**RQ 2: What do the various school policies and attitudes of the administration and colleagues mean to queer teachers as they navigate their professional identities?**

School policies, given their lack of specific guidelines, appear to have little impact upon how queer educators navigate their professional lives, though the attitudes of administrators do impact our daily interactions. These attitudes are reflected in the behavior my co-researchers and I believe is grounded in wanting to promote diversity without understanding the importance of inclusivity.

While the language of the policies in our schools has certainly developed over the past 15 years to include a more comprehensive non-discrimination policy, as evidenced by the change in policy text in my own school, there appears to be little other change to the overall language in faculty handbooks to create a stronger sense of personal safety for queer teachers and staff. The effect of this has been to perpetuate the concept of the glass closet, or seeming invisibility, for the queer members of the community (Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010; Musto, 2008). This effect underscores, as revealed in the data, the thinking by the administrators in our respective schools that because they have included a non-discrimination clause in handbooks they have addressed the issue of equity and inclusion for the queer students, faculty, and staff.

***Lack of policy.*** In examining the impact school policies have on the professional identities of my co-researchers, there is little evidence from our cumulative experiences that schools have provided much beyond the standard non-discrimination policy required of all schools by most states (HRC, 2016). The lack of federal laws protecting the queer community (Eckes & McCarthy, 2008; Elkind, 2014) coupled with the recent backlash by conservatives in North Carolina and Georgia (Socarides, 2016), against the Supreme

Court rulings in *United States States v. Windsor* (Oyez, n.d.), and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (Oyez, n.d.), undermines a sense of safety for queer educators.

While not directly referenced by my co-researchers, this lack of federal protection has been an element I have returned to repeatedly throughout the entirety of this research in trying to understand my own sense, or lack thereof, of safety. In the absence of a federal ruling about queer workplace protections, which given the current political climate appears to be an unlikely ruling, it is imperative the administrators of our schools consider the importance of protecting all of their teachers, including those who are members of the queer community with specifically worded policies (Ball, 2013).

My co-researchers who teach in boarding schools noted that until marriage equality was nationally recognized as a legal institution, there remained confusion about whether it was acceptable for a partner to live on campus with them. Since the establishment of marriage equality, schools, as observed by my co-researchers and me, have simply imposed the existing heteronormative construct on these issues, as noted by the limited change in language in faculty handbooks. In speaking about policies addressing co-habitation for unmarried queer members of her school, Hannah noted during her interview, “There is no policy, there’s nothing like that I know of in writing... this how we handle these situations?”

The lack of specific policy perpetuates the conception among the queer members of the community that they remain invisible, or if they are acknowledged, they are in a glass closet, visible but silenced (Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010; Musto, 2008). It is not enough for schools to merely apply what has always been policy for non-queer people to the queer faculty of their schools. All policies must be re-written at all levels,

for both students and faculty, to use language inclusive of all identities. Only then can parity be achieved and a culture shift begin to be instituted that supports every member of the school. The failure by our government to support and create safety for queer educators (Machado, 2014) must not continue to be perpetuated by weak policy guidelines for teachers, particularly queer teachers in schools.

*Administrative attitudes.* As introduced in the literature review, heteronormative constructs have been in place as long as schools have been in existence (Castro & Sujak, 2014; Kosciw et al., 2014; Robinson & Espelage, 2012), and they continue to impact schools today (McNeil, 2013; Neary, 2017). While many schools have embraced diversity and made space for GSAs, the concept of inclusion remains a struggle in many institutions (Evans-Santiago & Lin, 2016; Meyer & Rhoades, 2006; Sadowski, 2016) and must be addressed by administrators to fully support the queer community within their schools.

This disparity between diversity and inclusion, as evidenced by our experiences with administrators, was an element observed by all 12 of us involved in this study. Queer students and teachers struggle within educational institutions, and the protections offered to students through HIB laws, and potential inclusionary practices such as GSAs, are often undermined by the lack of workplace protections for queer educators (Connell, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Neary, 2017). Even in more progressive schools, the marginalization of queer teachers through invisibility and the construct of the glass closet continues (Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010; Musto, 2008), and is perpetuated by administrators who have not interrogated their practices around inclusion.

Reflecting previous research (Connell, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013), it was clear in the data that many of our educational institutions maintain a heteronormative hegemony by continuing practices and traditions that remain unexamined, which often persist as obstacles to navigate for queer teachers. This prevailing hegemony, often maintained by administrators who are either uninformed, or choose to ignore the issue of inclusion within education, prevents many queer teachers from fully developing their personal and professional identities (Jackson, 2007). The inability of queer teachers to fully realize their professional identity precludes them from becoming change agents, thereby reducing the number of people who could empower others within schools to examine their views about the queer community.

Most schools remain institutions riddled with the heteronormative hegemony and are endemic with real dangers for queer teachers (Denton, 2009; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013) that undermine support not only for the queer community, but also everybody connected to education (Meyer & Bayer, 2013). Ultimately this culture does not promote a safe environment that encourages queer teachers to come out (Jackson, 2007). Too often it is a personal mission for queer educators who work, in spite of the hegemonic school culture, to be out and visible within her or his school community, which is a construct that needs to change (Ball, 2013; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Vicars, 2006).

**RQ 3: What are the various strategies that queer teachers employ in determining when and to whom to come out to in school?** Despite the embedded culture that compels many queer teachers to hide, pass, or otherwise present an identity untrue to who they are (Connell, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Ferfolja & Hopkins,

2013; Mayer & Bayer, 2013), my 11 co-researchers and I have opened ourselves to our communities and maintain there is importance in remaining visible queer members within our schools. We all use different approaches in deciding which strategies we employ to maintain our visibility, though often with overlapping similarities. Of note was consensus about how important the process of maintaining our visibility was to our queer identity.

My co-researchers and I observed that we continually reinforce a public awareness of our queer identities within our schools' cultures by participating in a variety of public events, including observance of the Day of Silence, coming out days, and giving an all-school talk or announcement, or for K-12 institutions, announcements in the upper school, and by bringing attention to current events concerning the queer community. There were two specific aspects noted by all 12 of us in exploring the strategies for coming out, that while not specific strategies, certainly were tacit indicators about our queer identities as implied strategies for coming out. These included being partnered and being involved with a school's GSA. We were all in agreement that coming out was not a one-time event, and instead is an on-going and continual process that our non-queer colleagues do not have to address and often do not understand.

Among my co-researchers, those who are either married or partnered in long-term committed relationships, was discussion about the implicit ways in which having a same-sex partner or spouse enabled them to communicate their personal queer identity indirectly without having to specifically state their queer identity. Similarly, those of us without partners or spouses acknowledged the perceived ease being partnered creates for the navigation of one's queer identity. While involvement in our schools' GSAs, if the school has one, is not a direct approach for coming out, it is a tacit strategy to convey

one's personal identity that assists in the act of maintaining visibility and marking our queer identity to those non-queer members of the community paying attention. For colleagues not engaged with the queer community, an observation of our involvement with the GSA might mark their first realization that one of the twelve of us is queer. The data revealed, for those schools with GSAs, that my co-researchers and I all felt the importance of involvement on some level with the GSA as a part of our queer identity. All three themes, reinforcing identity, being partnered, and working with a GSA will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

***Reinforcing identity.*** As my co-researchers and I related in our dialog, a heteronormative culture is pervasive in all of our schools. Ferfolja and Hopkins (2013) note that the minoritization of queer individuals has long been the norm within the U.S. education system, and Evans (2002) writes at length about how identity is an ongoing negotiation, a shifting, and constant remaking of self in relation to one's environment and experiences, often in response to these heteronormative environments. Being out is not a concrete absolute, one is never completely out, and the process is ongoing and always negotiated. All twelve of us are consistently looking for ways, however subtle, as out queer educators, to be more overt about our identities.

Each of us has found ways to disrupt the heteronormative culture in our schools to reinforce our queer identity. Some of us approached this in quiet ways that consisted of simply standing up silently during an assembly exercise addressing the various types of othering and marginalization that exists outside of the White male heterosexual norm (Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010) within our communities. Others were more overt and gave an all-school or upper school talk about a personal story related to their



queer identity or coming out, and still others felt it important to be loud and proud in obvious ways by wearing flags, pins, and clothing, while also making regular public announcements about issues and events related to the queer community. It was readily apparent that we all found value in the different ways we attempted to interrupt the traditional non-queer, White male construct that the majority of our schools were built upon.

*Being partnered.* Machado (2014) observed that even with attitudes changing in the U.S., queer teachers still face homophobia on levels not experienced in most other professions. This recognition of homophobia was manifested by my co-researchers in much of the data, and our observations that being partnered is the best and easiest way to be out and visible also points to the hegemony of heteronormativity. Being partnered mirrors the heteronormative construct in its monogamy, and is a union many from the queer community desire as evidenced by the recent Supreme Court Ruling, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, that found in favor of same sex-couples' right to marriage (Oyez, n.d.; Underwood, 2015). In opposition to this ruling, the religious right continues to castigate the queer community as a promiscuous group of people unable to carry on stable relationships, and disseminates this misinformation across the U.S. (Bishop, et al., 2010; Lugg, 2001), perpetuating the damage that Anita Bryant's Save Our Children campaign wrought upon queer teachers in the 1970's (Bishop et al., 2010; Blount, 2005; Stader & Graca, 2007). Being partnered for the queer community effectively counters arguments of promiscuity, while promoting a stable image of queer relationships.

As James noted, "having a partner is a way easier way to come out than having to just announce that you're gay." He goes on to say:

I'm kind of looking for those organic moments with students, you know? If I were to get engaged and suddenly be wearing a ring or something like that, whereas I have other colleagues who have, you know, pictures of their spouses on their desks or pictures of their kids, or their kids go to this school.

Ann, Catherine, George, Hannah, and I, who are not currently partnered echoed this sentiment. The co-researchers who are a part of a couple noted their partner was an important part of their life at school, particularly for those teaching in boarding schools.

Being coupled, as observed by several of the coupled co-researchers, removes a variety of questions and makes obvious one's identity. Peter stated about his husband, "He's been a huge part of my presence here, both officially and unofficially." There is a point of easy entrance in conversation about one's personal life that having a partner provides as James observed, and having a partner is an organic way to introduce one's identity as queer. My own experience of being formerly partnered was one of easy entrance to many conversations. With the end of that relationship, I no longer have that easy point of reference, and now find that many of my colleagues experience a more difficult time discussing any activities unrelated to school with me.

**GSA's.** With the exception of three of my co-researchers, all of us involved in this study teach at schools that have a functioning GSA for queer students and allies. These organizations provide a haven within the heteronormative construct that is the institution of our schools, and create a sense of safety and normalization (Mayer & Bayer, 2013; Toomey & Russell, 2013). All of my co-researchers and I recognize the critical import these groups provide as an implied means to broadcast our queer identities, and each of us finds ways to be involved to the extent our teaching and administrative loads permit.

Over half of my co-researchers advise the GSAs in their schools, and all of us make a point to be involved with Coming Out Day, Day of Silence, and informally join the GSA during meeting times. These opportunities permit each of us an opening to remind our communities that we are queer, that we are visible, and in doing so we create a shift in the heteronormative culture by providing discernable queer role models who have successfully formed positive queer identities (Castro & Sujak, 2014; DeJean, 2010). It is imperative that visible adult queer members of school continue to disrupt the heteronormative culture, not just for queer students, but for all students.

**RQ 4: What experiences from a queer teacher's own educational past help shape her or his professional identity?** All eleven of my co-researchers and I came to education, similar to most other teachers, with a range of early personal experiences that motivated us (Olson, 2010; Pillen et al., 2013) to become teachers despite being outsiders. Many of us have parents who were teachers, which provided an easy entrance into teaching, while others of us had adults who provided guidance and were very invested in our futures. Some of us came to education through our shared deep love of learning and a realization developed through working with tutoring programs in college and by coaching athletic teams.

Among our group were a few, most of the men, who experienced the deep injustice of bullying in their youth that has informed their professional identities. Additionally, among many of us was a recognition that misperceptions persist about queer educators using their positions of power as teachers to prey upon children (C. M. Bishop & Atlas, 2015; Stader & Graca, 2007). This impacts how we present ourselves professionally, and what we are willing to open ourselves up to in terms of actually

teaching. Many co-researchers discussed issues of what we present as the curricula in our classes, whether we go on overnight trips, whether we stay away from closed windowless spaces, or whether we make certain we are in group situations at all times?

The final commonality we shared as a group, which informs our professional identities, was our experience as other (Memmi, 1965), being outsiders. Many of my co-researchers and I acknowledged, in our position as outsiders, our ability to recognize struggling students, in any capacity, and how our experiences allow us to create connections with our students. Each of these themes will be discussed in greater detail below.

*Invested adults, and a love of learning.* DeJean (2010) discusses the importance of self-identity and its impact upon how educators teach and construct their classes. It was clear from the data, for a number of my co-researchers and me, that our professional-identity was influenced early by the presence of a parent who taught and loved teaching. For those co-researchers whose parents did not teach, adults in their lives who were passionate about education, or peers who encouraged them to participate in college tutoring programs, all served as conduits to education. In discussing the importance of his parents' investment in his education, Charles made this observation about their support, "My parents' openness allowed me to truly understand what it means to value oneself and the work that one does." Even while my co-researchers and I navigate the difficult and challenging intersection of the personal and professional aspects of our queer identities, a love of learning and teaching developed early in life by parents and invested adults underscores how we make sense of, and construct, our whole identities as educators (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

***Bullying.*** Hong and Garabino (2012) concluded that despite the many gains made for the queer community in the U.S. (Condorelli, 2014; Courtney, 2014; GLSEN, 2014), schools remained heteronormative environments, and in some parts of the country continue to be homophobic and openly hostile to equity and inclusion of the queer community (Connell, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013). With one exception in my group of co-researchers, all of the men, whether or not they had fully formed an understanding about who they were as individuals, experienced bullying. From their accounts, it became obvious to me that their focus on social justice was strongly rooted in this injustice they experienced as children and young adults. While my group of co-researchers and I may not all know what the experience of bullying and harassment feels like, we have an understanding of being outsiders, and of being othered (Memmi, 1965). Through these experiences we all have a strong urge to act as role models invested in social justice, and provide beacons of hope for those students, queer and non-queer, who feel like outsiders.

***Predatory teachers.*** As revealed in the literature review, there has been a long held historical fear of teachers in education who deviate from societal norms that remains true today (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Blount, 2005; Lugg, 2003). The appointment of an individual who has underwritten groups that support conversion therapy to head the Education Department, Betsy DeVos, coupled with appointments of other anti-queer politicians by President Trump (Weingarten, 2016) remains troubling, and is a stark reminder of how strong the heteronormative hegemony remains in education. Queer teachers, who are not afforded federal protections, and in some instances only limited state protections, are vulnerable to societal misperceptions and the

residual misinformation that remains from the homophobic Save Our Children campaign in the 1970's led by Anita Bryant (D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Lugg, 1988). As several of my co-researchers observed, and I have noted as well, there are often occasions where we worry about how our actions might be perceived, even though we are conforming to how our non-queer colleagues act in school. This is deeply discomfiting and undermines our sense of professionalism, as well as our sense of belonging within our school community.

*Other.* The majority of my co-researchers and I attended schools as children and young adults that were not only heteronormative, but also openly homophobic. My experience of beginning to understand my identity within this construct was an intense struggle, as it was for my older co-researchers. We did not have adult role models who could exhibit the successful formation of a queer identity (Cass, 1984; Fetner & Elafros, 2015; Russell, 2013) and instead had to navigate this process alone (DeJean, 2010). The idea that homophobia is either ignored or tacitly accepted within education undermines the espoused theory that schools are inclusive and embrace diversity, and creates a hostile work environment for queer educators. It is this experience for many of us that has most profoundly influenced the construction of our professional identity rooted in social justice.

### **Implications**

This qualitative phenomenological heuristic inquiry focused on the little understood issue of how independent school queer educators navigate their personal and professional identities within the heteronormative construct that comprises the majority of U.S. schools. Creswell (2013) underscores the importance of the qualitative research my co-researchers and I undertook, as we sought to examine the inherent and historical

issues of the heteronormative hegemony so pervasive in US education today, with the following statement:

We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored.

This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot easily be measured, or hear silenced voices (Creswell, pps. 47-48, 2013).

Fullan and Miles (1992) assert that educational change has been, and continues to be slow, cumbersome, and so multifaceted and complex that real educational policy and innovation is challenging. Schools are overloaded with problems and solutions that do not work (Fullan & Miles, 1992), and what drives change is not a charismatic super leader, it is sustained reform that comes from a collective effort of many, teachers, parents, administrators, and community within the educational system (Fullan, 2004). The teachers and administrators who comprise the co-researchers in this study are all invested in creating systemic change concerning diversity and inclusion to the extent that they are able. In this section, the limitations of the study will be described and made explicit and the resulting implications from the research will be examined. These implications include the topics of policy, practice, future research, and leadership.

### **Implications for Policy**

With the recent conservative shift in our government, it is incumbent upon schools to fulfill what Fullan (2011) states is the moral imperative of education: the necessity to provide equitable educational opportunities for all of our students. This imperative can be further extended to compel schools to embrace diversity and inclusivity by constructing cultures that encourage queer students and faculty to come out. Given the

adoption of practices surrounding HIB laws, laws preventing harassment, intimidation, and bullying of students, by many schools (HRC, n.d.; Wright, 2010), it is evident that some within education are invested in protecting their queer students, and these schools could be even more effective if they embraced protections for their queer faculty and staff.

The recent Supreme Court decisions striking down the Defense of Marriage Act and legalizing same-sex marriage have resulted in a significant backlash felt by the queer community in a number of states, most notably, Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, Texas, and Colorado (Wolf, 2016). This has been exacerbated by the election of our current conservative President and Congress. The pervasive heteronormative hegemony, with deep historical roots in U.S. education (Blount, 2005; Bryan, 2012; Lugg, 2003), has been a construct that the queer community has struggled to navigate. Currently, education still remains a largely heteronormative culture that continues to be inherently dangerous for queer teachers and students alike (Denton, 2009; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2014).

After a wave of student suicides (Murphy, 2011; Kosse & Wright, 2005), the majority of U.S. states have implemented policies and laws to protect students from bullying, harassment, and intimidation, referred to as HIB laws (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). Individual schools are required by law to implement HIB policies, but how these rules are applied is uneven and often not inclusive of specific language for queer students (Kosciw et al., 2014), undermining the safety of the queer community in education. As Connell (2012) asserts, this heteronormative construct and lack of specific non-discrimination policy for queer teachers prevents many queer



educators from feeling safe or coming out (deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Hong & Garbarino, 2012), undermining many advancements for queer student safety.

The decisions by many queer teachers within education to hide, avoid, or otherwise misrepresent their sexual identity, because of the institutional heteronormative culture that reinforces a sense of silence and marginalization within school environments, engenders a perpetual loop of cause and effect (Bishop, Caraway, & Stader, 2010; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013). This cause and effect loop of silence and hiding affirms the perception for many non-queer school administrators that specific policies addressing the queer community are unnecessary because they cannot see the queer members of their communities and assume they do not exist. Adoption of more inclusive policies for queer teachers and staff, coupled with a direct promotion of curriculum of the queer experience, would signal to the queer adults in school communities that they are supported and protected (Boyland et al., 2016; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014).

### **Implications for Practice**

Heteronormativity, as defined by Butler (1993) previously in this research, is the minoritization and stigmatization of non-heterosexual individuals, which has long been the norm within the U.S. educational system (Butler, 1993; Capper, 1999; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Ngo, 2003). Queer students are often forced to construct and navigate their identities without role models (DeJean, 2010; King, 2004), and many students, even today, are often marginalized for their appearance and mannerisms, regardless of their sexual identity, especially if they transgress socially constructed and accepted norms (Butler, 1990; Hong & Garbarino, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2014; Watson, 2012). The 11 co-researchers and I who undertook this study are deeply aware of the inherent challenges

within our heteronormative institutions, and we all work in a variety of ways to disrupt this narrative, and force recognition within our respective schools that the queer community is real, present, and in need of support.

Disrupting the heteronormative narrative and hegemony, while challenging, could be accomplished by calling upon our administrations to perform an equity audit (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). Providing our administrations with a copy of Weinberg's (2009) LGBT-Inclusive Language article that offers alternative, more inclusive approaches to common heteronormative phrases teachers use daily, would assist in the interruption of language that supports and perpetuates the pervasive heterosexual hegemony. Additionally, advocating for courses specifically focused on queer culture, introducing queer issues in health classes, and requesting standard courses be more inclusive of queer contributions to specific subject areas, would promote a greater awareness for all students, and a recognition by queer students, that education is for all members within our institutions. Lastly, requiring specific professional development of all faculty and staff in relation to queer student issues would be an overt statement by administrations about the importance of inclusion within the construct of diversity.

As previously noted, Perrotti and Westheimer (2001, p.47) state, "homophobia is the last acceptable prejudice." In addition to supporting all of their marginalized and minoritized populations, our schools need to undertake significant work to validate and endorse their queer communities. This research drew from the experiences my 11 co-researchers and I shared, spread across four states and seven schools, all individuals with similar understandings about how we navigate our personal and professional identities as queer educators, which given the range of age, gender, race, and lack of geographic

proximity is remarkable. Freire (2000) states, “The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it.” (p. 21). We, as visibly queer educators, understand our positions within our school and communities as radicals who are transforming and disrupting our heteronormative educational institutions as Freire (2000) would have us do.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Our experiences, as revealed by the research, show a group of intrepid teachers, willing to live authentically in order to be the best teachers and people we can be within our respective communities, despite the inherent challenges within our heteronormative educational system. While not one of us wishes to return to the closet, there is an acknowledgement that at times we feel marginalized and silenced, that there exists the construct of a glass closet (Endo, Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010; Musto, 2008), and at worst, we feel the effects of the latent homophobia that continues to exist. All of this reveals there is much within the independent school world to examine, reflect upon, and repair.

The number of visible queer teachers who are out remains undetermined (Machado, 2014), though my perception, and that of my co-researchers, is that we are few. We can all identify at least one member of our community who does not, or is reluctant to, reveal her or his queer identity. Further research about the attitudes of school administrations and heads of schools concerning queer issues might identify a means to more effectively support closeted queer educators by revealing where schools and administrators champion, or fall short of championing, the queer community within their schools. Additionally, further research is needed to develop an understanding of the

effectiveness a more visible population of queer teachers has on students, queer and non-queer alike, in promoting a sense of social justice that our children all need in today's globally connected world (Fullan, 2011; Lucey, Agnello, & Hawkin, 2010).

### **Implications for Leadership**

As Kezar (2001) asserts, change will take place when leaders, change agents, and others from both within and outside a community perceive a need for change. It is clear from our research that there are change agents already present in independent schools who are ready and willing to undertake the necessary work to create safe environments that promote learning for all students. What is needed now, for many schools, is for administrators to undertake the necessary self-examination of both their own biases and those of their schools, in order to promote the cultural change necessary that will create the positive change for their entire community. The following sections examine the leadership implications for both administrators and queer teachers, who, if they come together could create an inclusive culture for all.

**Leadership for administrators.** It is incumbent upon administrators to examine not only the policies and practices of their schools addressing diversity and inclusion, but also their own investment in social justice as a school leader, particularly in relation to their queer population. Dantley and Tillman (2010) assert there is a moral component, as an administrator, to critically interrogating one's own practice and the policies of one's school that has an important link to supporting issues of social justice, further underscoring the importance for administrators to undertake a full examination of their school's culture. In writing about multiculturalism, Meyer and Rhoades (2006) remind us that it is not enough to merely acknowledge diversity with celebrations and festivals; it is

essential for different cultural values and ethnicities to be actualized within the classroom, which by extension can easily include the queer community in the subject areas and disciplines taught in schools. A final word about the importance of administrators adopting a social justice construct, Starratt (2005) reminds us:

The world in which educational leaders operate is changing – from one dominated by national interest to one of a global community. In this transition school must prepare the present generation of younger people to participate as active citizens of the global community rather than as spectators or tourists. (p. 124)

It is this globalization that makes social justice a moral endeavor (Dantley & Tillman, 2010) and a critical part of the educational process for our students. Social justice is more than a moral endeavor; it is an imperative that must be embraced. It is not enough for our administrators to continue to operate by perpetuating the status quo and addressing the abundant crises that inevitably arise, school leaders must embrace a social justice mindset in order to make the well-being, and basic human rights, of all of our students the fundamental basis for decision making (AASA, n.d.).

As a first step toward understanding the culture of their schools, administrative leaders should consider conducting an equity audit. Hernandez and Fraynd (2014) offer a five-question equity audit that easily develops an understanding of how a school either supports, or does not support, queer inclusive programming. Boyland et al. (2016) note that principals need to move beyond simply protecting students, and must also promote attitudes that are inclusive, accepting, and appreciative of diversity, including queer culture. They further suggest this can be implemented with the development and support of inclusive curricula and modeling, all of which can be extended to include queer faculty.

A second step toward developing a more inclusive community would be for administrators to use their new knowledge about the cultural and inclusive practices of their school to begin to develop a shift in thinking that moves beyond diversity and tolerance to a mindset that embraces acceptance and involvement of all community members. Administrators would be in positions of strength if they embraced a framework, such as Kotter's Eight Step Process for Leading Change (Kotter-International, n.d.), by developing a sense of urgency around the issue of cultural inclusion, building a coalition, and following the six remaining steps until change is finally instituted within the community.

Educational leaders must remain vigilant in recognizing and understanding their own personal biases and how these support, or fail to support, all of the students within their schools. It has been argued that everyone possesses privileges (Crenshaw, 1991) that require monitoring and reflection. This reflection on privilege is especially important in education (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004), in order to fully support all of our students by constructing an environment of safety for all, which is one of the basic requirements for learning.

In writing about economic disparities in education, Lucey, Agnello, and Hawkins (2010) observe, "If education is to be an equitable process, then all the stakeholders need an awareness of these differences to commence a respectful dialog about the meaning and direction of education" (p. 16). Extending this argument about economic inequality to the overarching heteronormative construct present in schools, parallels may be drawn about the importance of dialog, and the development of understanding and reflection centered

on the experience of queer students and teachers in educational institutions existing within a heteronormative world.

**Leadership for queer teachers.** As Machado (2014) explicates, homophobia within schools experienced by queer teachers is on a level not present in most other vocations. My co-researchers and I know that we bring value to our schools in the form of empathy for our students, and are a present and visible guiding force not only for queer students, but also the entire community. We all possess a deeply entrenched sense of social justice, and, as a result of our experiences as members of the queer community, we can be useful in helping to develop inclusivity within our schools.

Dantley and Tillman (2010) discuss the importance of teachers and social justice and assert, “Our teaching can and should have a significant impact on the leadership for social justice movement.” It is clear from our collective experience as 12 queer educators, that we know our value, and it would now appear it is time for us to harness this value, and come together as queer educators to support one another and provide role models for students and teachers still reluctant to expose themselves to the inherent risks of being out in a heteronormative culture. By bringing a stronger voice, we can begin to reflect upon and discuss the undiscussable topics (Dankoski et al., 2014) that are deeply rooted in the heteronormative structures built upon the historical background of independent schools that were founded to provide an education for privileged, wealthy, White, mostly Protestant, young men (Meyer, 2008; Salomone, Riordan, & Weinman, 1999).

The synthesis of our experiences in relation to our roles as queer, independent school educators reveal that, despite the gains that have been made in the U.S. by the queer community at large, much of what we encounter within our schools remains

uncomfortable and, at times, difficult to navigate. Meyer and Bayer (2013) remind us that a tolerant inclusive educational environment that normalizes queer identities benefits not just queer students, but the entire school community and society by challenging the heteronormative values present in the U.S. education system.

As a queer independent school teacher I have before me an opportunity to present this research at one of the independent school conferences, workshops, or seminars. I also have the ability to maintain contact with my group of co-researchers and perhaps develop a forum from this dedicated band of people, who can in turn build a network comprised of queer teachers more able to support one another in navigating the heteronormative structure of independent schools.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative heuristic inquiry was to illuminate and develop an in-depth understanding of my experience as a queer independent school educator, along with the experiences my 11 co-researchers, as we navigate our personal and professional identities, coupled with what it means to us to be out within our respective educational institutions. While some within education might suggest that such a focus is merely a cathexis, I argue that any attention on those who are marginalized, in such a way as to promote inclusion, remains critically important to the growth of a community.

The 11 co-researchers, who undertook this research with me and to whom I remain indebted, helped to construct a deep understanding of how we navigate our personal and professional identities as queer teachers, and revealed in this process a sense of remaining as other (Memmi, 1965), within the construct of a glass closet (Endo,



Reece-Miller, & Santavicca, 2010; Musto, 2008). We are seen though often not interacted with on a level that fosters connection.

This research was a challenge for all of us, me in particular. Acknowledging and fully understanding the ways in which I, and others in the queer community who teach are othered (Memmi, 1965) and kept, intentionally or not, in glass closets (Kissen, 1993; Musto, 2008) was, and remains, deeply painful. That homophobia and the heteronormative hegemony persist within our schools, now in the 21st century, remains inherently problematic. This is especially true when so many of our schools espouse a fundamental belief in the importance of diversity, yet appear not to understand that true diversity is inclusive.

The understanding I developed of this phenomenon as I analyzed the data was deeply discomfiting, and at times overwhelming. How could we, as queer teachers today, when so many gains have been made within the queer community as a whole, still feel invisible, and in such need of awareness and vigilance about our public professional presentation of our personal identity within our schools? Despite the hope the data created about where independent schools have come from and where they appear to be heading, this understanding was both saddening and disheartening. The challenge of constantly navigating the process of coming out, the importance of being visible as role models for everyone within our communities, and the effect that the underlying heteronormative culture has on our community, are issues we, as queer educators, will continue to traverse.

These emergent themes from our research, our collective experience as queer teachers, reveal that for the queer community there is still much for educational

institutions to undertake and address in order to combat and disrupt the heteronormative structures that persist within the independent school world. It is imperative that schools interrogate their practices surrounding the issues of inclusion. Finally, it remains essential that we as educators, queer and non-queer alike, within the independent school world, and education as a whole, find ways to continue to develop diversity and promote inclusion, not only for our queer teachers and students, but also for the good and betterment of the communities in which we each teach.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Definitions**

Ally – A straight person who supports the queer community

Faggot – A pejorative, slanderous term for a male homosexual

GLSEN – Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Educators Network

GSA – Gay Straight Alliance or Gender Sexuality Awareness

Heteronormative – The minoritization and stigmatization of non-heterosexual individuals

HIB Laws – Laws passed in many states aiming to protect students from harassment, intimidation, and bullying

Homophobia – Prejudice against non-heterosexual people

Independent school – A private school not obligated to any state, governmental, or religious entities

LGBQ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Queer individuals

Other – A person perceived to exist outside societal/cultural norms

Out/Out of the closet – The term used to refer to the openness of one’s sexual identity, this is generally not a binary position and is usually a life-long process

Passing – The act of hiding one’s queer identity by appearing to be heterosexual

Private school – A non-public school

Queer - All people perceived by society to be “other” in regards to their non-heterosexual position on the sexuality spectrum

Straight – A non-queer individual, a heterosexual

Tacit homophobia – Homophobia that is institutionalized and not overt

Title IX – The federal law passed in 1972 requiring schools that receive federal funding to sustain gender equity in all of their programs

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### A Heuristic Inquiry into the Experience of Queer Independent Schools Teachers

##### **Introduction**

Thank you for meeting with me today. This research is being conducted to develop an understanding about the experience queer independent school teachers undergo as they navigate the ongoing process of revealing their identity within their schools, and what this experience means to them.

Following the research model I have chosen for my research, heuristic inquiry developed by Clark Moustakas, I consider you my co-researcher in developing an understanding of the experience you and I, and many other queer teachers at independent schools have and continue to navigate.

Illuminating this experience will help to develop an understanding of how queer teachers steer their course through the, oftentimes, heteronormative construct on which many independent schools are modeled. Your personal stories, experiences, and observations will add to the depth of this understanding and I encourage you to be open and forthright throughout this interview. Your perspective, experience, and stories are a critical element of our research.

Though you are considered a co-researcher you are also considered a research participant and you have specific rights that include:

- There are no direct benefits to agreeing to participate in this study
- You may refrain from answering any of the questions during our conversation/interview
- You may withdraw from this study at any point you so choose for any reason
- Your identity will remain anonymous in whatever future forms, including dissertation, this study might take
- Your school will not be identified by anything other than a pseudonym and its general region e.g. Northeast, Mid Atlantic

I ask your permission to audio record our conversation/interview that I will have transcribed to ensure that I understand the full scope of our conversation and accurately express your experience. Your identity, as previously stated, will remain confidential and you will be given a pseudonym that only I will know. This recording and transcript will remain in my sole possession until three years after my dissertation has been completed upon which the recording and digital transcripts will be deleted and the printed transcripts will be shredded.



- Have you reviewed the Participant Release Agreement?
- Do I have your permission to record this interview?
- Do you have any questions about this document?
- Do you have any questions about anything related to this study before we begin?

**Background information:**

Name:

School:

Grade levels taught:

Subject area:

Years at your current school:

Total years teaching:

**Personal:**

1. Please describe how you decided to become a teacher.
2. What were your reasons for deciding to become a teacher?
3. Please describe your coming out process, outside of education as it relates to your personal life.
4. How do you describe your sexual orientation and why?

**Teaching:**

5. How do you describe your professional (teaching) identity and your personal identity?
6. Can you explain how these identities are different and/or how they overlap?
7. Please describe how your queer identity impacts your role as a teacher.
8. Please describe your experience as a queer teacher in an independent school.
9. Please describe why, if it is important for you as a queer individual, it is important to be a teacher.
10. Please describe the impact being queer has on you as a teacher and your approach to teaching. (If the person came out after he/she started teaching), how did your approach change after coming out?

**School:**

11. Can you tell me about your experience coming out at the school where you came out?

12. Please describe how your sources of support among fellow faculty, administrators, staff, students, and/or families impacted your decision to be out in your school?
13. Please describe the factors that allow you to be out?
14. Please describe how your personal sense of safety factored into your decision to come out.
15. Please describe what, if any, reaction there was to your disclosure of your queer identity.
16. Please describe the culture of your school.
17. What messages does your school communicate in relation to being straight and being queer?
18. Please describe any of the structures, if they exist, in place within your school that support the queer community?
19. Please describe an experience, negative or positive, in relation to your queer identity in school that particularly surprised you.
20. Is there any other experience, event, anything you wish to share with me about your experience and our conversation?

## Appendix C

### Participant Release Agreement



#### CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**TITLE OF STUDY:** A Heuristic Inquiry into the Experience of Queer Independent Schools Teachers

Interview Protocol

**Principal Investigator:** MaryBeth Walpole  
Primary Researcher: Caroline C. Dunnell

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

Caroline Dunnell or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

#### **FINANCIAL INTERESTS:**

None

#### **A. Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding the experience that out queer (LGBQ) independent school educators have as they continually navigate the process of coming out in their professional life.

**B. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?**

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are publically out as a member of the LGBTQ community within your institution and you teach at a private independent school.

**C. Who may take part in this study? And who may not?**

Educators who teach in independent private schools and are publicly out as members of the LGBTQ community may participate in this study. Heterosexual independent private school teachers may not participate because they have not experienced the phenomena of navigating their personal and professional identities as members of the LGBTQ community

**D. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?**

There will be between 10 and 15 participants.

**E. How long will my participation in this study take?**

The study will consist of one in-depth conversational style interview that will last approximately an hour to two hours. A brief follow-up telephone conversation, or email exchange, for clarification might also occur.

**F. Where will the study take place?**

This study (interview) will take place at a mutually agreeable location, geographically close to the participant, that is acceptable to the participant and the researcher.

**G. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?**

You will be asked to respond to a series of questions during the conversational style interview.

**H. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?**

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for this conversational style interview should you choose to participate in this research. You are, however, being asked to re-visit and recall what may have been a painful aspect of your development as a member of the LGBTQ community, though the risk of this causing undue psychological discomfort is rare.

**I. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits of taking part in this study.

However, your participation may help us understand the phenomena queer independent school educators experience as teachers who are out in their institutions as they navigate their professional identity in relation to their personal identity, which may help other educators to navigate the adoption of their professional identity.

**J. What are your alternatives if you don't want to take part in this study?**

There are no alternative treatments available. Your alternative is not to take part in this study.

**K. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?**

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

**L. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?**

There are no costs for participating in this study.

**M. Will you be paid to take part in this study?**

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

**N. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?**

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. The digital audio recording of your interview will be deleted as soon as I have transcribed the interview, and I will keep the digital text transcription, with all personal identifiers removed, on my personal laptop computer, accessible only with the proper password, until this study is finished.

**O. What will happen if you are injured during this study?**

This study is considered No Greater than Minimal Risk.

If you are injured in this study and need treatment, contact your Healthcare provider, or Wellness Center and seek treatment.

We will offer the care needed to treat injuries directly resulting from taking part in this study. Rowan University may bill your insurance company or other third parties, if appropriate, for the costs of the care you get for the injury. However, you may be responsible for some of those costs. Rowan University does not plan to pay you or provide compensation for the injury. You do not give up your legal rights by signing this form.

If at any time during your participation and conduct in the study you have been or are injured, you should communicate those injuries to the research staff present at the time of injury and to the Principal Investigator, whose name and contact information is on this consent form.

**P. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Caroline C. Dunnell, [Dunnellc4@students.rowan.edu](mailto:Dunnellc4@students.rowan.edu).

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

**Q. Who can you call if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can contact the Principal Investigator:

MaryBeth Walpole  
School of Education  
856-256-4706 or [Walpole@rowan.edu](mailto:Walpole@rowan.edu)  
or  
caroline c. dunnell  
973.943.0457 or [dunnellc4@students.rowan.edu](mailto:dunnellc4@students.rowan.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance  
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
AUDIO ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM



You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted Dr. MaryBeth Walpole and Caroline Dunnell. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording will be used for analysis by the research team.

The audio recording will include your responses to the questions from the interview protocol and recording will begin after you have stated your name, school, and years of employment.

The recording(s) will be stored under passcode on my (Caroline Dunnell) personal laptop computer, which is in my possession at all times. There will be no link to subjects' identity and will be retained for the duration of the study and will be destroyed upon completion of the study procedures.

**What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?**

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

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**AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE**

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:**

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_