

## Discourses Governing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual Teachers' Disclosure of Sexual Orientation and Gender History

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Significant progress has been made in equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) individuals, yet schools remain institutions where sexual and gender diversity are marginalized and/or silenced (Ferjola & Hopkins, 2013). Heteronormativity enables a social and institutional context where LGBTQIA teachers must make decisions about coming out or disclosing who they are or how they identify, while cis-gendered, heterosexual teachers are exempt from such decisions (Gray, 2013). For LGBTQIA teachers, decisions about if and when to disclose sexual orientation and gender history require a great deal of emotional energy that could be spent teaching (Orlov & Allen, 2014). Developing an understanding of LGBTQIA teachers' decisions around disclosure is essential for teacher educators who prepare sexual and gender minority teacher candidates and for school administrators to develop school climates that are inclusive of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Decisions around such disclosures are complex and implicated with numerous trade-offs (Gray, 2013). Many LGBTQIA teachers do not disclose sexual orientation and/or gender history for fear of employment termination or limiting their opportunities for promotions (DePalma &

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Atkinson, 2010; Rudoe, 2010). However, LGBTQIA teachers who choose the relative safety of non-disclosure may feel less a part of the school community (Gray, 2013). LGBTQIA teachers' reluctance to discuss their lives with students limits these teachers' abilities to connect with students, reducing pedagogical opportunities, as these teachers feel less free to draw upon their family life to build rapport with students and/or build students' conceptual knowledge (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013). When LGBTQIA students perceive a teacher as LGBTQIA, but the teacher does not disclose their identity, students interpret the teacher's message as one of shame (Hardie, 2012).

Conversely, LGBTQIA teachers who come out serve as models for LGBTQIA youth and allow heterosexual cis-gendered youth to understand more about sexual and gender diversity (Ferfolja, 2009). This self-disclosure serves to disrupt heteronormative assumptions that prevail in schools (Hardie, 2012). Yet, such teachers risk job security, particularly in states that do not include sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression in employment non-discrimination policies (Connell, 2012). Additionally, some openly LGBTQIA teachers have reported being excluded from school social gatherings or being overlooked for supervising extracurricular activities after coming out to colleagues (Gray, 2013).

As a former K-12 teacher and a lesbian, I have first hand experience with the complexity of disclosure decisions, particularly in today's schools in which neoliberalism serves as a "normalizing regime" (Win-nubst, 2012, p. 80). To understand the regulatory, normalizing discourses (Foucault, 1978; Gee, 2005) that inform LGBTQIA teachers' decisions around disclosure, I engaged with queer theory to inform my interviews with 20 LGBTQIA educators from diverse geographic regions, guided by the following research questions:

1. How do inservice teachers articulate their decisions around (non)disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender history?
2. In what ways do teachers' perceptions of school, community, and societal discourses shape their decisions?

### Theoretical Framework

Queer theory, a non-linear theory that disrupts dominant beliefs about gender and sexuality and what constitutes "natural" or "normal" gender and sexual expressions (Foucault, 1978; Warner, 1993) is a productive tool for identifying normalizing discourses that shape LGBTQIA teachers' decisions around disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender history. Discourses are "frameworks which limit what can be experienced

or the meaning that experience can encompass, and thereby influence what can be said and done. Each discourse allows certain things to be said and impedes or prevents other things from being said” (Purvis & Hunt, 1993, p. 485). Queer theory interrogates discourses as a means through which notions of gender and sexual normalcy and deviancy are socially constructed (Piontek, 2006). These normalizing, heteronormative discourses emerge via social, religious, medical, psychological, and educational institutions, having the effect of pathologizing individuals who deviate from the norm. These normalizing discourses position such individuals as social deviants, aberrations, and less-than [their normative peers] (Foucault, 1978). The very use of the word queer “has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the cite of violence” (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). Thus, queer theory questions and critiques what Piontek (2006) calls “the taken-for-granted assumptions we make about categories and the supposedly stable relations among them, the dichotomies and reifications [of heterosexuality]” (Piontek, 1993, p. 2).

This theoretical lens is well suited to critique neoliberal ideologies and discourses, particularly as neoliberalism has been promulgated as a set of common sense ideals rooted in logic and rationality rather than as a political ideology (Garwood, 2016). “Through neoliberal discourses, certain bodies became privileged while others became pathologized” (Jones & Calafell, 2012, p. 969). In rejecting notions of normal (e.g., those privileged bodies), queer theory displaces and decenters the normative, thus troubling dominant, neoliberal discourses (Pinar, 1998), including what Duggan (2012) described as the 3M’s of the neoliberal agenda: the market, military, and marriage. Queer theory facilitates the analysis on how the 3M’s have been normalized in and outside of schools and facilitates epistemological and ontological possibilities beyond neoliberal agendas.

Such agendas (and their normalizing, neoliberal ideologies) have a shaping effect on discourses for teachers (Hursh, 2002). These are the set of implicit and explicit expectations for teachers on of what should and should not be said and done within (and beyond) schools and classroom settings. “Taken together, social, cultural, and institutional discourses set the conditions of possibility for who and what a teacher might be” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 215). As normalizing and regulatory influences, these discourses prohibit LGBTQIA teachers from discussing sexual orientation and/or gender histories. Ultimately, such discourses normalize heterosexuality and cis-gender identities while pathologizing and/or forbidding divergent expressions of self.

### Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, interpretivist framework (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003). Queer theory informed this methodology by maintaining a focus on how notions of normal and deviant are constructed within school settings, exploring participants' understanding of discourses within their schools and communities, and how these discourses serve to normalize certain behaviors and identities while pathologizing others.

### *Participants*

I employed purposive and snowball sampling to recruit participants through personal and professional networks, and teacher listserves. I was transparent in my calls for participants in that the interviewer was a lesbian and a former K-12 teacher. A total of 20 LGBTQIA educators volunteered, and all were included in the study. Table One includes participants' sexual orientation, gender identity,

**Table One**

#### *Participants*

Pseudonym	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Race/Ethnicity	State	Grade Level
Sophia	gay	cis female	white	WA	middle school
Jeff	gay	cis male	white	UT	elementary
Casey	queer	trans masculine	white	CT	elementary
Ann	gay	cis female	white	WA	high school
Bradley	gay	cis male	white	NV	elementary
Joanna	asexual	cis female	white	OR	high school
Liz	lesbian	cis female	white	CT	high school
Shauna	bisexual	cis female	latina/black	CT	elementary
Travis	gay	cis male	white	PA	elementary
Katelyn	lesbian	cis female	white	CT	high school
Tonya	lesbian	cis female	white	CT	high school
Molly	married to a woman	cis female	latina	CT	elementary
Byron	gay	cis male	white	CT	high school
Ariel	gay	cis female	white	CT	high school
Bea	lesbian	cis female	white	CA	middle
Lisa	lesbian	cis female	white	CA	elementary
Randi	gay	cis female	black	CT	elementary
Maria	straight	intersex	white	UT	elementary
Debbie	gay	female	white	CA	elementary
Abby	bisexual	female	white	CT	preschool

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race/ethnicity, state where they taught, and grade level of students they worked with.

### ***Data Sources and Analysis***

Each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview focused on their decisions around disclosure within schools and communities, factors that influenced their decisions around disclosure, desired levels of outness, and advice for LGBTQIA pre-service teachers. Participants chose between face-to-face interviews (when geographically possible), phone interviews, or Skype or FaceTime interviews. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews.

I input the transcripts into NVivo software and conducted my analysis using the constant comparison method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I read each transcript through to identify themes of regulatory discourses and the sources of these discourses. Thinking with queer theory, I identified these discourses when analyzing participants' statements of what was normal, commonsensical, or highly valued within their school setting and, conversely, what was viewed as transgressive or taboo, or what was feared. I narrowed the breadth of themes based on the robustness of data within each theme and by eliminating overlapping themes. Then I re-coded data according to my refined themes. I member checked resulting themes with participants. In the following section I discuss the findings. Excerpts from participants' interviews are included not only to illustrate these findings, but also give voice to a community that has been historically marginalized not only in schools, but in society as well.

### **Findings**

Participants related diverse choices regarding disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender history, ranging from being completely out to students, their families, and other school personnel to actively hiding any markers of diverse sexual identities or gender histories. On one end of that continuum, Travis, a white elementary educator from Pennsylvania, talked about being gay in his job interview and brought his partner to school related social events. On the other end was Molly, a Latina teacher in Connecticut, who described her sexual orientation as, "I don't know. I'm married to a woman." She explained, "With my students, I'll still say 'my husband.' It's a very tough predicament. Being gay is not acceptable in the Hispanic community. Ninety percent of my class is Hispanic".

Twelve participants described themselves as completely out to family, friends, and neighbors. Seven were out only to family or friends or

to select family members and/or friends. Only one participant, Lisa, a white lesbian teacher from rural California, described herself as not at all out. During the interview, she referred to her partner as her sister.

Did I say sister? I'm so used to calling her my sister. That's sad, huh? Everyone thinks of [my partner] as my sister, because I call her my sister. I just don't think people are accepting enough. [My partner] is my sister to my family. But to my friends, she is my sister.

Participants' responses suggested that disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender history was not a one-time action. As Shauna, a bisexual and biracial teacher, stated, "There's not just one coming out. There's multiple coming outs when you meet other people." Compounding this situation was the lack of opportunity among participants to decide who held information about their sexual orientations and/or gender histories, as information about them spread among faculty or students.

These decisions about disclosure were governed by the participants' perceptions of school, family/community, and legal discourses. School discourses were communicated primarily through policies established by administrators and school boards and through principals' actions and reactions to homophobic incidents. Participants interpreted community discourses through their interpretations of community culture, especially as to the extent of conservative values and perspectives therein. They maintained religious affiliation and the values of particular ethnic culture as predictors of community discourses. Media also conveyed discourses of (non)acceptance of sexual and gender diversity. Finally, laws around marriage equality, employment non-discrimination, and other forms of discrimination communicated powerful discourses around sexuality and gender. Collectively, these served to inform the participants' level of disclosure as teachers in schools.

Disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender history were primarily based on discourses relevant to safety, diversity, sexual orientation/gender history as publicly held knowledge, and the divide between the personal and professional self. Participants' interviews highlighted that these were not monolithic regulatory influences, but instead conflicting and complicated with many other discourses overlapping, often with significant tension. In the following sections I discuss each of these discourses in turn.

### ***Safety***

Participants' discourses centered on safety, mainly the safety of students as well as safety of LGBTQIA teachers. In terms of safety for LGBTQIA teachers, laws pertaining to this population created significant discourses of safety (or the lack thereof). Participants described

these laws as “protections,” suggesting they provided safety that would otherwise not exist. Disclosing sexual orientation and/or gender identity was considered safer in cities and states with legal protections. Byron, a gay white high school teacher from Connecticut cautioned, “People cannot overtly discriminate against you in many states. But remember, there are still 24 states or so in which you can be fired for being gay.” The primary concerns around safety for LGBTQIA individuals was job security. Casey, a queer trans-masculine educator from Connecticut, stated, “There’s always the risk of either losing one’s job or experiencing harassment or violence in the workplace.” Non-discrimination policies (or the lack of such policies) at the school and district level influenced teachers, like Debbie, a gay white elementary teacher, who had been fired because of her sexual orientation. She shared, “There’s no non-discrimination policy at my school. It’s not safe to be out.”

Participants also discussed discourses relevant to safety within communities in which they lived and taught. Bea, a white lesbian living in rural California said, “[In my] neighborhood, I’m not out because of fear of retaliation.” Participants evaluated safety within a community based on perceptions of conservatism and gay-friendliness. Joanna, a white asexual teacher from rural Oregon, explained, “If the atmosphere is overwhelmingly conservative, you’re kind of like, I don’t think it would be safe [to be out].” Conversely, Liz, a white lesbian living in urban Connecticut shared, “I’ve been out in my community mostly because I see it as a more liberal part of the country, so I feel safe.”

The other foci on safety centered on children. For some, discourses relevant to the safety of children contributed to a decision to not come out. Many participants referred to insidious discourses of sexual minority individuals as pedophiles. Bradley, a gay white teacher in Nevada, explained, “A lot of times the assumption is that if you’re a male teaching and you’re gay, that you could be a pedophile. That’s something that I try to deal my way around. Just keep the [classroom] door open, just in case.” Discourses on children’s safety in LGBTQIA teachers’ classrooms contributed to a fear that students would be pulled from their classrooms should they disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender histories. Bea explained, “They think, ‘I want my daughter out of there, because the teacher is a lesbian.’ It’s ridiculous. I feel like we’re treated like deviants.”

Nonetheless, others related contrasting views and maintained that children’s safety was a reason to chose to be out to their students. These participants saw themselves as important role models for LGBTQIA students. Sophia, a gay white teacher in urban Washington, believed she was able to provide a safe classroom environment for students who did not have safe spaces elsewhere.



One of the counselors asked me to be a mentor to one of the gay students. They're like, "You know, we have some kids that would really look up to you and need the guidance, because they don't get it at home."

### ***Diversity***

Discourses on diversity also shaped participants' disclosure decisions. Participants found it easier to be out when a value and respect for diversity was an espoused aspect of the school culture. Byron, who was completely out in his high school, described his school as "an incredibly diverse and tolerant place. It's not cool to be a bigot here. It just isn't." Conversely, Randi, a gay Black elementary teacher, who is out in the community but not at school, described her appearance as "I love big costume jewelry and wild eye make up." She shared, "My test scores speak for themselves, just like everyone else's. But because I don't look like the average teacher, it's automatically assumed 'She must not be a good teacher, because she's not wearing the cardigan set and the khaki pants.'"

School discourses on diversity were also established through the presence or absence of out LGBTQIA staff. Bea, who is only out to a few staff members, expressed, "Maybe if other people were [gay], and it was known at the school, then it wouldn't be so hard. But to be the first one, I can't." Katelyn, a white lesbian high school teacher who is out to all staff and some students and expressed being more comfortable being out because of other LGBTQIA staff members, suggested that being out can shape discourses around diversity in sharing, "I think just being more vocal about just existing and how normal we all are would help. The more you see us, the more used to us you get."

The communities in which schools were situated also communicated discourses around diversity. Homogeneity in communities frequently established a discourse of diversity as an undervalued aberration, as Randi highlighted.

The more diversity in a place, the more acceptance [of sexual diversity] there's going to be. If you try to go out into an area where everyone looks the same, dresses the same, everyone's house is pretty much the same shape, the same size, they're going to expect you to be the same, and if you're not, you'll probably have a problem.

The intersection of school and community discourses around diversity was sometimes problematic. Shauna, who was only out to one or two staff members, explained her dilemma.

Being different is just a thing [at my school], so I don't know that having a different sexual orientation would cause people to treat me differently. I think the staff would be accepting, but at my school, the parents are pretty much married, heterosexual couples. I don't see myself coming



out to any parents, because even being divorced or being a single parent here is very strange.

Similarly, Casey shared that his supervisor cautioned him about his upcoming transition from female to male. “He said he thought it was really cool and a great thing that I was doing, although, he also mentioned, ‘I’m not asking you to lie about anything, but families can be a little weird, so if you want to keep that quiet...’” Divergent discourses in schools and communities informed participants’ approach to (non)disclosure of identities.

### ***Sexuality and Gender as Public Knowledge***

As discussed in the prior section, school, community, and legal discourses governed the extent to which sexual orientation and gender (and gender histories) were disclosed in schools. For many, these aspects of self were frequently positioned by these regulatory discourses as public knowledge. Analysis of the participants’ discourses suggests that this perspective was informed by heteronormativity and the tacit belief that everyone is heterosexual and cis-gendered. Liz suspected, “Parents are making heteronormative assumptions when they see that I’m pregnant. They still assume that everyone is heterosexual.” The discourse on the pregnant body thus maintains it is a proxy for heterosexuality. Liz, and others who do not have visible markers of non-normative sexual or gender identities, are thus considered straight and cis-gendered. Molly described herself, “You wouldn’t look at me and say lesbian. I could pass as straight. I know that sounds weird, but it’s that stereotype.”

Legal discourses, particularly state-sanctioned marriages, not only communicated messages of safety, as discussed in a previous section; they also made sexual orientation public knowledge. Randi explained, “I’m married, so everyone knows. I’m pretty sure they know I’m married to a woman just by the way things move around schools.” Abby, a white preschool teacher, on the other hand, talked about how difficult it was for her to make her bisexuality known, because she was married to a man. “I feel like I’m supposed to be out, but I’m not really sure how to go about that.”

Other discourses related to sexuality and gender as public knowledge pertained to the extent to which an educator “owns” knowledge about their sexual orientation and/or gender history. One strategy was being strategic about whom (and when) to share this knowledge. Ariel, a gay white high school teacher, described intentionally sharing her sexual orientation. “I’m out to students. I don’t come out to every class I’ve ever taught. I come out to a large group of students in a program I run.

Obviously if I come out to them, then they talk.” Another strategy was self-censoring to keep one’s sexual orientation from becoming public knowledge by not socializing with other faculty members. Lisa chose this strategy, “After hours I don’t do stuff. I try to stay away. I’m nice to them of course. I just don’t get involved. Because then they start drinking and they start asking you stuff. And I don’t want to go there.”

Other participants described a lack of ability to fully strategize disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender history to members of the school community. Molly expressed frustration with her sexual orientation being shared by others.

I don’t talk to the staff about it. When I first got to my school, I didn’t say anything to anybody. But it was the town gossip. It created a very mistrusting and negative environment and just an overall negative culture for me.

School discourses held that teachers’ sexual orientation and gender identity were public knowledge, with the public maintaining that those identities were heterosexual and cis-gendered unless there were indicators to the contrary.

### ***Personal/Professional Divide***

Discourses that influenced educators’ decisions relevant to disclosure pertained to whether or not one’s personal life and professional life should be discrete and mutually exclusive. Some maintained these should be kept completely separate. Joanna stated, “I know most schools don’t like teachers to talk about their sexual orientation or personal lives in general.” Others expressed that one’s personal and professional identities cannot (or should not) be separated. Bradley explained, “It’s hard to separate that when it’s so a part of you. It’s not like, this is my straight self. This is my gay self.”

Unlike the discourse on sexuality as public knowledge, these discourses on the tension between the personal and professional focused not on who knew these teachers’ sexual and gender identities, but on the extent to which these identities intersected with their teacher identities. Often, it seemed that the previously discussed discourses on laws and policies influenced the extent to which participants’ maintained that non-heteronormative personal lives must be separated from professional lives. Bradley noted, “I know that there are parts of the country where you really can’t say. If I were teaching in my hometown in West Virginia [where there are no non-discrimination employment laws], I would be a lot less vocal than I am.” By contrast, Katelyn, who taught in a state that prohibited such discrimination, shared, “We know that we’re protected

here. We know that the district would never let anything happen to us. And obviously it's illegal to have that kind of discrimination."

Some participants suggested that all LGBTQIA teachers should not mix the personal with the professional. Tonya, a gay white high school teacher, explained, "I don't make a big to-do about [being gay]. It would be like somebody else making a big deal because they're heterosexual. I don't see how what they do outside of teaching should affect anything they do in the classroom." In contrast, other participants reflect that sexual minority teachers had unique reasons to maintain a personal/professional dichotomy. Sophia's advice for LGBTQIA teachers was, "Don't make it a thing in your school. Don't make it be your mantra. It's not that you're a gay teacher. You're a teacher."

Some participants discussed maintaining the personal/professional divide because of the negative impact they believed sharing their sexual orientation or gender history would have on their teaching. Ann, a gay white high school teacher in urban Washington, explained, "Am I going to tell this student that I'm not married to a man, I'm actually married to a woman? Or am I just going to leave it because it's really more important that I teach him about DNA right now?" Another concern about not maintaining a personal/professional divide was that it would be interpreted as activism. Maria, a straight white intersex teacher in Utah, said, "Who I am, my situation is a blip on the radar. I'm not an activist. I'm not a crusader. I don't go around making speeches about my situation. I never make it part of any curriculum that I've ever taught."

### Queering the Findings

The normalizing discourses governing participants' decisions around disclosure of sexual orientation and gender history were complex and sometimes contradictory. Neoliberal conceptions about the institutions of marriage and the market (Duggan, 2012) were evident within the discourses influencing teachers' decisions about disclosure. Teachers' sense of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity being pathologized and ultimately considered dangerous (to student safety, to the community, and to the profession) is reminiscent of queer theory's critique of the heteronormative paradigm and the marginalization of those who are not aligned with this framework.

In the case of these participants, upholding the public/private divide served to stifle sexual and gender diversity within schools. Even the positioning marriage as legitimacy of identity reflects neoliberal "homonormativity" (Duggan, 2002, p. 175), assumption that all gay people want the same things, in prioritizing marriage and promoting families

as productive citizens/consumers (Garwood, 2016), facilitating future generations of individuals assimilated to what the state has regulated and determined appropriate and "normal."

Yet just as these discourses normalize neoliberal tenets, queer theory dissolves the lines between normal and deviant; it embraces and "honor[s] the messiness of human experience and empowers action" (Knopp, 2004, p. 127). Queering the participants' discourses enables the questioning of these taken for granted assumptions reinforced by legal, educational, and social institutions and powerfully reinforced by neoliberal ideologies that displaces any value on the individual as self-realized in favor of positioning the individual as a servant of the market, the military, and the state.

Queering discourses on gender and sexual diversity facilitates a recognition of how some identities are normalized and some are considered abnormal, different, or deviant, as some participants had experienced in their schools and communities. This epistemological endeavor allows for the acknowledgement of identity intersections and avoids what Letts (2002) refers to as the "laundry list" approach to difference and "uncovers and works against heteronormativity, deconstructs the powerful allure of dichotomies, and originates from a unique epistemological standpoint" (p. 120). Queering discourses on diversity means questioning which forms of difference are marginalized to facilitate efforts towards equity for all individuals.

Queering discourses on safety and LGBTQIA confronts the notion of the non-normative as unsafe. Many of the discourses on safety equated LGBTQIA individuals as a danger for children. A means of queering this discourse and countering such thought is through the visibility championed by Katelyn, "Just being more vocal about just existing and how normal we all are would help." A caveat to his approach, however, is that it posits the normalization of LGBTQIA identities as the ultimate goal. Normalization is not the goal. The goal is the inclusion of LGBTQIA as able to freely express and disclose who they are in schools without fear.

Similarly, queering the discourse that sexual and gender identity are publicly held knowledge contribute to the disruption of heteronormative assumptions, rejecting the assumption that everyone is heterosexual. Teachers in this study had experienced the feeling of being under this assumption or of being under surveillance. Lugg (2003) asserts that social, legal, and educational institutions police the lives of teachers, at times forcing LGBTQIA teachers to monitor and censor themselves (Lugg, 2003). Explicitly examining and analyzing regulatory discourses via a queer lens highlights how pervasive and detrimental these are to the livelihood and wellbeing of LGBTQIA teachers.

Within the discourse of the personal/professional divide, namely

heterosexual cis-gendered identities were positioned as normal. Often, LGBTQIA identities were considered deviant and unsuitable for school settings. Queering this personal/professional divide for LGBTQIA teachers means rejecting the notion that “normal” teachers have one set of personal lives that are appropriate to discuss in school settings and positioning the personal lives of LGBTQIA teachers as deviant and unsuitable for school. As with knowledge of sexual and gender identities, teachers should be able to work in school settings where there is no tension between the personal and professional, not only for heterosexual and cis-gendered teachers, but for LGBTQIA teachers as well.

### Conclusion

Interpreting and queering discourses that normalize some sexual orientations and gender identities/histories while positioning others as deviant is important for teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, and policy makers. For teachers, it suggests discretion as to selecting potential sites of employment. Those LGBTQIA teachers who wish to disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender history should seek out schools in which all types of diversity are valued. These teachers should consider tensions in the personal/professional divide and the ways that disclosing gender history and/or sexual orientation not only challenges heteronormativity, but pragmatically, can influence daily work as well.

For teacher educators, this work points to the need for discussing school and community discourses with preservice teachers. Preparing teachers to interpret and navigate these discourses empowers all teachers, not only those who are sexual and gender minorities, to promote affirmative discourses within schools. Employing a queer lens in teacher preparation courses can serve as a tool to develop teacher candidates’ ability to identify normalizing discourses. Queering teacher education “is not about reifying rigid notions of a normative dichotomous sexuality between hetero and gay/lesbian, but instead focuses on deconstructing and decentering normative heterosexuality” (Vavrus, 2009, p. 384). Working with teacher candidates to identify normalizing discourses is a necessary step for them to identify as agents of change within schools.

For school administrators who seek to make their schools safe places for LGBTQIA individuals, these findings highlight the importance of overtly and explicitly valuing all forms of diversity. Administrators should not presume to know or inquire on teachers’ sexual orientation, gender identities, or gender histories. Rather, they should reject the discourse that sexual and gender identity are a matter of public knowledge and

be sensitive to this as a matter of an individual's privacy. At the same time, they should not force LGBTQIA teachers to adhere unwillingly to personal/professional divide.

Policy makers should promote laws that protect LGBTQIA teachers. Such laws counter the discourses that LGBTQIA individuals pose harm to children or are a danger. To enable a school climate where all individuals feel safe and to counter deficit discourses on LGBTQIA individuals, such laws are necessary.

This study highlights the need to extend beyond simply examining school, community, and legal discourses. Teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, lawmakers, and policy makers must also actively work to refine and critique these discourses, working towards what Liz called, "That culture of respect and openness that encourages people to be themselves and be safe in revealing these potentially invisible parts of their identity."

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