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Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Storied Lives, Unpacked Narratives, and Intersecting Experiences:

A Phenomenological Examination of Self-Identifying LGBTQ Public School Educators

Robert J. Bizjak

Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Jerry McGuire, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

The thrust of this qualitative study was to research, reveal, explore, and understand the lived experiences of self-identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) public school educators through formal, qualitative interviews. The researcher interviewed six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers using a phenomenological framework, braced by history, queer theory/criticism, and intersectionality. In-depth, rich, and prolonged semi-structured interviews yielded personal, candid, and poignant insight from the six co-researchers. Further, by using a narrative approach, this phenomenological study revealed five emergent themes and discussed how these interpenetrating themes captured the essence of these six teachers' lived experiences. The five salient themes revealed that self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers want to maintain meaningful relationships with their students, experience fear (in terms of both being rejected by and losing relationships with students), struggle with the decision to self-disclose their sexual orientations at work, and need to feel safe and affirmed at work through safe spaces and district inclusivity.

Keywords: self-identifying LGBTQ, self-identifying LGBTQ teachers, phenomenology, LGBTQ phenomenology, intersectionality, LGBTQ intersectionality

Dedication

This work of love is dedicated to those self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers whose voices have been either lost, silenced, or never celebrated, and, most importantly, to those teachers' voices yet to be heard.

Acknowledgments

I am eternally grateful to the amazing group of professors and advisors who guided me as I journeyed through this life-changing project. First, to my dissertation chair, mentor, and collaborator, Dr. Jerry McGuire, whose much-deserved retirement from education does not signal an ending but rather a new beginning and a new adventure—for both of us. Second, to my reader and research champion, Dr. Marty A. Bullis, whose early Saturday morning and late evening meetings I am going to miss. Third, to my content specialist, Dr. Anne Grey, thank you for always aiding and believing in my research. Your insight and observations were so crucial to this study. I cannot thank each of you enough for your unwavering, enthusiastic, and generous encouragement over the past three years. It has been an honor to work with each of you, to call each of you mentors, and, most importantly, to call each of you friends.

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To the members of Concordia's Institutional Review Board: thank you for entrusting me to represent the university through and for supporting my qualitative research.

Next, to my mentor, editor, computer-program extraordinaire, and dearest friend, Dr. Darlene Geddes: without you, I would not have finished this project. Your involvement in and loyalty to my study is so great, you deserve a second doctorate.

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To my family of champions: my mom and rock, Joanne Vincent; my brothers and heroes, Jeremy and Justin Bizjak; and my guardian angels, my grandmothers, Josephine (Blaz) Bizjak and Patricia (Monahan) Pahut: each of you has inspired, encouraged, and motivated me more than you can imagine. Each of you has made me who I am—a dreamer, a leader, a teacher. Your unconditional love has shown me that you will believe in me no matter how many letters follow my name. I dedicate my life's work to you.

To my supportive colleagues, cherished friends, and courageous students throughout the Hillsboro School District: please know that the hours I committed to this project were to make our professional lives richer, our learning environments safer, and our roles as educators more powerful and impactful than ever.

Last, thank you to the many teachers upon whose shoulders I stand as a self-identifying gay public school teacher. This dissertation is dedicated to those future self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers who will eventually stand on my shoulders as they continue to fight for the rights and liberties that each of each of us so desperately deserves.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

> As Americans, we respect human dignity, even when we're threatened, which is why . . . we continue to reject . . . the persecution of women, or religious minorities, or people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. We do these things not only because they're right, but because they make us safer. (CNN, 2016b)

In recent decades, ongoing conversations about the rights and experiences of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities have become more visible and relevant due to societal, cultural, and political homophobia and heteronormativity (D'Emilio, 2014; DeWitt, 2012). Once rejected by mainstream heterosexual society, homosexuals have had to camouflage their identities to maintain protection from and to avoid discrimination, oppression, and, most strikingly, violence. Historically, suspected and self-identifying homosexuals have been criminalized, institutionalized, pathologized, victimized, and even murdered by society out of misunderstanding and homophobia (Faderman, 2015). Although once categorized as mentally ill by the American Psychiatric Association and relieved of that diagnosis in the late 1970s, the homosexual community today still endures much stigmatizing from the medical field, from the criminal justice system, and from employers throughout the country (Anthony & Newsome, 2015; Bausum, 2015; Bawer, 1993; Socarides, 1968). From the mid-1970s to today, the LGBTQ communities have made significant strides in its efforts to gain protection from discrimination. For some reason, explain Birden, Gaither, and Laird (2000), while most of society has "outgrown overt racist and sexist attacks, for many people it's still okay to take shots at homosexuals" (p. 639).

To dismantle and extinguish homophobic discourses, judicial and political structures of the United States of America have done much to increase local, regional, national, and global

discourses surrounding LGBTQ rights and visibility. For example, the Obama Administration (2008–2016), most recently, signed into a law to protect the self-identifying LGBTQ communities from crimes based on perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender identity/expression. Adding to this, in 2009 the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act (2009) made it possible for local and state authorities to investigate, prosecute, and criminalize those who willfully cause bodily injury against any person based on "the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, . . . gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of any person" (Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, 2009). At the time of this study, 17 states and Washington, D.C. honor the bill and recognize the urgency of enacting a law, given the alarming statistics that report, on average, "a crime motivated by the perpetrator's bias against the victim occurs" (Campaign, n.d.) once every hour in the United States.

Perhaps most crucially, in his penultimate State of the Union address, President Barack Obama (Obama's State of the Union, 2015) became the first president in the annals of United States' history to mention LGBTQ rights on a public platform. While addressing the potential repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), President Obama assured the nation, "I will work with Congress and our military to finally repeal the law that denies gay American the right to serve the country they love because of who they are" (CNN, 2016a). Although President Obama repealed DADT, the LGBTQ communities still suffer; in fact, violence and intolerance toward the LGBTQ communities have greatly increased in recent years. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) reported in its most recent publication that "2014 was a tumultuous year for LGBTQ . . . communities nationally" (2014 HV Report, 2015, p. 4). The national study also revealed that while the "LGBTQ . . . communities continued to witness

historic wins in 2014 against a national backdrop of open and state-sanctioned discrimination, public discourse and action against police brutality . . . persisted in 2014" (2014 HV Report, 2015, p. 4). The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs found an 11.11% increase in anti-LGBTQ violence compared to its findings in 2013 (2014 HV Report, 2015). Even greater, the NCAVP data concluded, "20 to 25% of lesbian and gay people experience hate crimes within their lifetimes" (2014 HV Report, 2015, p. 17). The repealing of DADT without question has made it somewhat easier for self-identifying LGBTQ individuals to serve their country. Recently, on June 30, 2016, the Pentagon struck down the ban on transgender persons not serving in the military. For the transgender person serving in the United States military, "The decision comes as the military has witnessed major changes in . . . the inclusion of gays, lesbians and bisexual service members in recent years" (CNN, 2016c). Though this is a positive impact on the transgender community, new discourses surrounding the use of bathrooms have surfaced and further intensified the discussions around LGBTQ issues.

Scherer (2016) writes, "The 2016 battle over bathrooms is, after all, about far more than public facilities;" (p. 32) the debate is more about human and civil rights. The bathroom debate "is about gender roles, social change, federalism, physical danger, political polarization and, most strikingly, a breakdown in the ability of anyone in this country to speak across our divides, or appeal to common humanity" (Scherer, 2016, p. 32). The continuing struggle for social justice and equity, in all likelihood, still adversely affects those Americans whose viewpoints, sexual orientations, and gender expressions/identities differ when it comes to the unconscious acceptance of heteronormativity, gendered norms, and stereotypical roles.

To commemorate one of the most prolific events in the fight for LGBTQ rights, President Barak Obama made "history by naming the site of the Stonewall riots the first national LGBT

monument" (2016: Year in Review, 2016). Nearly half a century after its now-famous riots, the Stonewall Inn represents "a site to mourn the Orlando mass shooting" (2016: Year in Review, 2016). Then, on June 30, 2016, the Pentagon ceased "the ban on transgender people being able to serve openly in the U.S. military," (CNN, 2016c) and, most recently, on January 9, 2017, former Secretary of State John Kerry apologized "for the LGBT government employees fired from their positions starting in the 1940s, when an anti-queer conspiracy known as the Lavender Scare rocked the State Department" (State Department Apologizes, 2017).

History of the Homosexual and the American Public School Classroom

> Public schools are governmental entities ruled by laws, regulations, and policies. The people who teach, lead, study, play, and otherwise live within a public school's walls must conform to these dictates or face various legal sanctions including expulsion and job termination. These legal mandates are established through political processes that include court decisions at the state and federal levels. (Lugg, 2003a, p. 97)

Over the past three decades, the fight for and support of LGBTQ peoples' rights in the United States has gained momentum. It is due to these cultural shifts of embedded homophobic discourses and ideals that the people of the United States have witnessed great systemic change in the ways they view and think about homosexuality. While general, political, and social movements, such as marriage equality, parenting rights, and non-discrimination policies, have garnered much national attention, there still exists a need for recognizing, affirming, listening to, and validating the voices of those whose stories need investigating—the self-identifying LGBTQ public school educator.

The genesis of American public education. When European settlers reached the shores of what would become the United States of America, they brought with them the entire familiar

“long-standing class divisions and political struggles” (Eaklor, 2008, p. 15) that had plagued them prior to their migration to the New World. The European colonization “paved the way for expansion into the Americas,” (Rupp, 1999, p. 15) bringing with them the ideals that had driven the colonists to migrate across the Atlantic, including religious superiority and “competing sexual and gender systems” (Rupp, 1999, p. 15). The colonists’ goal: to create a moral, civic-minded, God-fearing society in which all its citizens would be educated for the sole purpose of serving God. In order to become and remain true servants of God, the enterprising colonists began schooling their children at home and using females as the at-home instructors; thus, inaugurating the concept of females as teachers. With this in mind, Eaklor (2008) stresses that the formal education system of the Massachusetts Bay Colony “work[ed] in concert with [and reinforced] strict gender rules, rules of masculinity and femininity that prescribe appropriate . . . [occupations] for each gender” (p. 16).

Moreover, Khayatt (1992) found that women as teachers “would be cheaper to hire since they were perceived as inferior to men, their abilities were more limited, and their work was traditionally voluntary and thus of restricted value” (p. 33). This practice of stationing women into a narrowly defined gender paradigm and professional role as teacher was one method by which patriarchal society kept women powerless and submissive in their jobs (Blount, 1996; Kaestle, 1983; Oram, 1989; Sanlo, 1999). In fact, when it came to hiring women for leadership roles, such as school administrators or school superintendents, Khayatt (1992) adds, “Hiring women school administrators prevailed only when willing men were unavailable, the demands of the position extreme, the pay relatively low, and lucrative opportunities lay elsewhere” (p. 27).

(En)gendering societal norms. Considering women instruments of religion, the home-school model of American education deposited women in the role of teachers within the home

and men in the role of workers, whose sole responsibility it was to earn money for the family. Harbeck (1997) explains, “Schools are the cornerstone of our moral structure,” (p. 49) setting the groundwork for a heteronormative moral code. This meant that early American women were considered natural-born nurturers and teachers, while men were conscripted to fill the role of the American working-class laborers. Due to the Massachusetts Bay Colony’s determination to preserve the sanctity of the church and to uphold the morality of their private and personal lives, the first formal examples of English-speaking public schools appeared shortly thereafter in 1635 (Blount, 2003, 2005; Harris & Gray, 2014). It was in this very primitive example of early American public education that women helmed the role as teacher. This meant that the institution of teaching had become a female-identified and female-dominated profession almost instantly. At the same time, the public education system reflected a framework in which heteronormativity—the idea that “most persons are assumed to be heterosexual” (Hunter, 1997, p. 39)—heterosexism, homophobia, and gender stereotypes were introduced and eventually reproduced and perpetuated the policing of sex and gender expression/identity “well into the 20th century” (Eaklor, 2008, p. 15).

Additionally, the situating of women as subservient teacher within the American public education system has been crucial to past and modern-day society’s discourses on gender expression/identity and homosexuality within Western culture. Since its inception, American society permitted only women to enter the public sphere as teachers; thus, granting them the opportunity to work outside their expected domestic responsibilities. Patriarchal society, however, kept a tight grasp on the female teachers, expecting them to remain loving mothers to their children and loyal wives to their husbands while acting as teacher. Resultantly, it is within these environs of the colonized Americas that gender roles and gender identities came into

existence and forever altered the way Western civilization shaped its own interests in the male/female binary (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Khayatt, 1992; Kissen, 1996a). According to Eaklor (2008),

> The dynamics of sex and gender in this era would have effects far beyond the 16th and 17th centuries. . . . In other words . . .'deviant' sexual practices [including those who disrupted the cultural and social expectations of gender] were linked to people considered dangerous to both church and state, and those dangers extended to influences on the next generations. (p. 16)

(En)gendering classroom norms. Following the American Civil War, the American public education system expanded, which "brought a pressing demand for a huge supply of relatively inexpensive teachers [because] . . . communities around the country recognized the simple economic advantage of hiring female teachers to satisfy this need" (Blount, 2000, pp. 81–82). This meant that greater numbers of women could enter the work force than ever before. For example, for every three men who worked as educators, seven female women served as teachers; women also fought for "and won positions as school superintendents" (Blount, 1996, p. 320). Even with this need for teachers, school districts still mandated certain rules of its female teachers, like them remaining single; thus, ensuring the repetition of gender oppression and stereotyping (Kumashiro, 2002). Blount (2005) contends that while "women came to be regarded as the moral exemplars" (p. 18) of both the academic arena and society as a whole through their roles as public educators, they were still viewed as inferior to their male counterparts. On one hand, school districts and society considered female teachers as property of the school and pillars of the community; therefore, female teachers were expected to remain unmarried to maintain their purity and to guarantee they would still be employable. On the other

hand, if female teachers elected to marry, they were not allowed into the profession forced to resign or were fired from their current teaching position (Callahan, 1962; Kumashiro, 2002; Herek, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Rousmaniere, 1997).

It was only a matter of time before American society changed its mind about women and their roles within public education. Blount (2005) points out, "Some critics worried that spinster teachers might compel girls to scorn marriage," (p. 16) ruining any kernel of "gender appropriate modeling" (Blount, 2005, p. 15) needed to underpin and frame the ideas and goals set forth by heteronormative and heterosexist society. According to Lipkin (1999), society perceived unmarried women "as unfit to teach" (p. 196). Lipkin (1999) also discovered that society's vested interest in an unmarried female teacher was blamed for "the imagined feminization of boys" (p. 196). This homophobic and conservative manner of thinking about single women emasculating, even homosexualizing, students not only affected female teachers, but also affected the ways in which both hetero- and homosexual men were viewed by society within the teaching field (Blount, 1999, 2000).

In fact, imbued by the belief that the teaching profession was solely a woman's job (with its rigid rules about marriage and feminized roles of women as nurturers and caretakers of children), the American public education system experienced low numbers of male teachers in its early years. Blount (2006) finds that public perceptions of males working in a typically female-dominated educational sector were regarded as more effeminate and, therefore, could not serve as role models for young boys. Eventually, school leaders aggressively recruited men to work in their schools—as administrators—to reinforce the gendered perception that women should serve as homemaker instead of the major economic contributor to the household (Harbeck, 1997; Herek, 1998, 2010).

As such, teacher-preparation programs ambitiously enrolled men into their programs, promising them leadership and principal positions if they completed the program (Blount, 2000, 2005; Callahan, 1962; Miller, 1971; Mondimore, 1996). As school administrators, men oversaw women in their roles as public school teachers. These roles (placing women as submissive workers and men as dominant authority figures) "resemble[d] traditional male-head-of-household families whose services they had come to supplement" (Blount, 2005, p. 15). According to Eaklor (2008), these heteronormative and heterosexist ways of thinking "help to explain some of the later attitudes and treatment of GLBT people" (p. 16) in the academic environment.

By the early 20th century, the homosexual-versus-heterosexual platform had emerged and had greatly influenced society's perceptions of sexuality. Society considered homosexuality an "unhealthy developmental outcome that violated gender norms and procreative sexuality, and as such fear of homosexuality in schools grew" (Mathison & Ross, 2007, p. 1). In fact, Blount (2005) observes American public education during this time had "socially constructed components. . . [because] schools assumed a greater share of the work of imparting 'correct' gendered behaviors and characters" (pp. 14–15) onto its students. It was vital, then, that male students did not lose their masculinity. Lugg (2003a) writes that schools wanted its teachers to "conform to these dictates or face various legal sanctions including expulsion and job termination" (p. 97). Harbeck (1992b) reports,

> In terms of an individual's experience, we do know that since colonial times that the most common scenario is one of a person living an exemplary life in fear of discovery. In that rare instance when his or her homosexual orientation became known, the teacher quietly

> resigned or quickly left town, since the potential consequences of challenging the system alone were extreme. (pp. 123–124)

By the 1920s, the burgeoning body of research surrounding human sexuality found its audience. It was during this time that the identification of hetero- and homosexuality entered the American vernacular, and with it came discourses surrounding homophobia (Katz, 1992). Harbeck (1997) cites that during the early stages of the 20th century, society regarded homosexuals as "unhealthy . . . because such behavior violated the supposedly natural gender norms and accepted notions of procreative sexual behavior" (p. 106). This idea clearly bled into the American education system when Waller (1932) wrote homosexuality was contagious and warned against the idea of hiring homosexuals as teachers due to their influence over and potential recruitment of children. Waller (1932) observed, "Nothing seems more certain than that homosexuality is contagious" (p. 147).

What is more, Waller argued that if a school administer suspected a teacher of being homosexual, then the suspected homosexual must be fired for the betterment of the children. Tierney and Dilley (1998) observe, "Waller suggested that homosexual teachers would be able to contaminate students and spread the illness" (p. 51). To recognize Waller's argument, school districts hired men as school administrators, coaches, and manual trade teachers. By hiring men in the role of supervisor, school districts were modeling for its male students the entrenched societal expectations of what it meant to be man.

Additionally, American public school districts adopted athletics as part of its school-wide curriculum; this explains why modern schools still include physical education and sports into its curriculum to reinforce masculinity and devalue anything that strays from the heteronormative expectation (Khayatt, 1992). Athletics, according to school leaders, guaranteed that heterosexual

practices would be implemented and fostered throughout the school day through curriculum and activities that "suit[ed] masculine-appropriate gender definitions" (Blount, 2000, p. 82). Pascoe (2007) writes that when institutions of learning force *compulsive heterosexuality* through its classroom curriculum, school leaders are not only enforcing a central component that guarantees heterosexuals emotional, physical, educational, and economic access at school, but also school districts and leaders are causing an even greater problem: homophobia.

Homophobia. First coined by Smith (1971) and Weinberg (1972), the term *homophobia* refers to an individual's dislike and fear of sexual minorities. Society's intolerance and hatred of homosexuals, according to Fone (2000), "must seem a constant and even ineradicable presence" (p. 13) to the homosexual community, given the number of attacks in recent years. Not unique to Western culture and certainly not an isolated occurrence within societies, homophobia is "the last acceptable prejudice" (Fone, 2000, p. 3) to the homosexual community, meaning other prejudices (like racism, anti-Semitism, even misogyny) are disapproved of by society. Blumenfeld and Raymond (1993) note, "Negative stereotypes and myths about lesbians and gays abound while they remain the butt of many jokes. These instances of negative symbolism are also employed as a means of control; . . . thus, all stereotypes . . . imprison individuals and erase diversity" (p. 261).

In effect, stereotypes allow humans to detect and measure differences among their own communities. Meyer (2015) believes that one method employed by humans to differentiate themselves from one another is what he calls *marking*. Marking occurs when an individual either consciously or unconsciously categorizes a subject based on socially entrenched stereotypes and, then, most crucially, either values or devalues the subject based on those stereotypes. Butler (1988, 1993, 1999, 2004) and Foucault's (1978, 1980a, 1980b, 1990)

approaches on gender as performance and gender as discourse, respectively, deconstruct the language and its power structures surrounding homophobia and the actions produced therein.

Illustrating Butler's theory of gender as performance and Foucault's signature surrounding societal, cultural, political, and historical discourses, Meyer's (2015) theory asserts that heterosexual society uses marking to reinforce its framework and empower the discourse around that framework. Most critically, marking also works to police, produce, reproduce, and safeguard the gender paradigm. To mark an individual as homosexual means three things: first, the *marker* (in this case, a heterosexual) has to understand her or his own sexual orientation as such. Second, the marker then places value on the *marked* (the homosexual, in this case) individual based on the societal, political, and cultural discourses at play regarding sexuality. Third, the marker's sexual orientation is then *self-valued*, *normed*, and *repeated* based on the sexual orientation of the marked. In other words, marking ensures that the heterosexual/homosexual paradigm remains undisturbed and, most importantly, that the marker's heterosexuality is secured as the top half of the binary (Altman, 1971, 1983; Meyer, 2015; Rasmussen, 2006; Weinberg, 1972; Weinberg & Williams, 1974). Not only does the action of marking take place, argues Meyer, but also, by doing so, society is reinforcing and reflecting its own privileges and biases against the marked person or group (Meyer, 2015).

Clearly, Meyer's theory of marking a person based on her or his sexual orientation recapitulates and extends both Foucault's theory of discourse and Butler's outlook on gender and performativity. When it comes to homosexuality, a self-identifying heterosexual person can either accept "that sexuality is fundamental to [a] human being—both as individual and as species" (McWhorter, 1994, p. 46) or view it as potentially disruptive, even catastrophic, to heteronormative society. The discourse surrounding the belief that all sexualities are a natural

phenomenon seems healthy and affirming; still, the latter discourse, which suggests that homosexuality is disruptive, is "imbued [not only] with age-old delusions, but also with systematic blindness: a refusal to see and to understand" (Foucault, 1978, p. 55). That being said, it is worth mentioning that a Foucauldian reading of these bifurcated discourses (that hetero is normal and homo is abnormal) create fundamental systems of power and oppression that both favors and unfavors those items within its own frame, resulting in homophobia (Burgess, 2011; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Rasmussen, 2006). What emerge are two oppositional outcomes: heteronormativity and the Other.

According to D'Emilio (1983, 1985, 1989), the Other functions as a placeholder for those sexualities that defy and vex the normal example of sexuality (heterosexuality) while both complementing and advancing its counterpart (homosexuality). As Butler (1999) conveys, the Other lies in stark contrast to the heterosexual experience, and, therefore, holds a less-than-human status while simultaneously normalizing its counterpart (Butler, 1993; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). For society to recognize, interpret, and understand heteronormativity, society must leaven it with meaning through language (*discourse*) and actions (*performance*); hence, impregnating the privileged half with authority while robbing itself from any type of power (Butler, 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004). Society then makes use of that empowered discourse for nurturing or destroying the target of that language (Castro, Dhawan, & Engel, 2011; Foucault, 1990). Once a heterosexual looks for alternatives in another's performance, the heterosexual then feels required (through discourse) to "judge, punish, forgive, . . . [or] reconcile" (Foucault, 1978, p. 61) the marked subject; thus, imposing meaning onto the marked.

Tyson (2011) realizes that heteronormativity codifies and normalizes heterosexuality through "institutionalized discrimination against homosexuality" (p. 320). This is precisely how

the heterosexual paradigm functions: as a method to historically criminalize, institutionalize, pathologize, and ostracize those who self-identify as or who are perceived to be homosexual (Blount, 1996; Butler, 1988, 1999, 2004; Green, 1987; Harbeck, 1991, 1992a; Tripp, 1975; Zera, 1992). Continuing her argument, Tyson (2011) credits heterosexuality with the learned ability (through both discourse and performance) to be recognized, celebrated, and assumed as the "universal norm by which everyone's experience can be understood" (pp. 320-321). This understanding, once society adopts, considers, and enacts it, transforms into heteronormative discourse, ignores, and silences the Other's experiences and, perhaps more dangerously, engenders homophobia.

Since homophobia is a behavior that is imbedded within and imitated by various societies and cultures (Tomsen, 2006; Tomsen & Mason, 2001), homophobia exerts "implications far beyond the sexual realm," (Weinberg, 1972, p. 7) and, to a deeper degree, social mores. Goffman (1963) argued socially stigmatizing traits, such as homosexuality, illumines "the attitudes we [society] . . . have toward a person with a stigma [being homosexual] and the actions we take in regard to him" (p. 5). Some consider the act of homophobia as an intrinsic reaction; others see it as extrinsic. Either way, when viewed through a theorist lens, the results of homophobia are threatening, both to societal mores and to those who identify as homosexual. Blumenfeld (1992) reasons, "Homophobia inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity, making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant" (p. 13).

Hall (2003) theorizes it is symptomatic for a society and culture to use "language, images, unspoken beliefs and prejudices, laws and scientific concepts, and all other means by which human values are communicated, 'naturalized,' and reproduced" (p. 65) to threaten the

non-normative category. Taking into account Fone's (2000) earlier argument (that awareness of homosexuality gaining momentum over time), Foucault's notions of discursive power animate Butler's approach to gender and performativity. That is, heterosexuality is able to costume itself with the costumes of privilege, power, and hierarchy while homosexuality is dispossessed of those items. From here, homophobia emerges.

Homophobic behaviors can manifest as physical violence, sexual assault, verbal abuse, and social marginalization toward a homosexual (Connell, 1999; Green, 1987; Harbeck, 1991; Kimmel, 2014) that include "prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence against sexual minorities" (Sears & Williams, 1997, p. 4). These actions can be either benign or hostile in nature, and yet, "covert [homophobia] . . . pushes recognition of biased views outside of immediate awareness, consequently disabling" (Corbett, 2001; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011) the victim from addressing or confronting the homophobe. Homophobia continues to perpetuate antihomosexual discourses. Wertheimer (2000) expounds,

> Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered [sic] individuals were so completely intimidated by the collective impact of the fear and hatred that defines . . . [heteronormativity] that they suffered for centuries the violence perpetrated against them with virtually no organized response. . . . Whether they experienced the disorganized assaults of marauding bands of teenagers . . . or the highly organized agendas of hostility perpetrated by law enforcement officials . . . [instances of antihomosexual] violence were quietly accepted as the price tag for even marginal visibility. (p. 263)

Although antihomosexual violence may go unreported, Fone (2000) specifies, "People have found sufficient cause to distrust, despise, [and] assault" (p. 3) homosexuals. Even more, Fone adds, cultures "have been united in . . . [the] condemnation, loathing, fear, and proscription

of homosexual behavior" (p. 3) simply because homosexuality differs from the norm, and could, perhaps, cause a self-identifying heterosexual to question her or his own sexuality or cultural mores. Blumenfeld and Raymond (1988) remark, "Sexuality and values within relationships also reflect our socialization. Males in general (gay, bisexual or straight), are taught to express their sexuality differently from females. Males are trained in this society to be sexually aggressive" (p. 392). Blumenfeld (1992) continues the discussion by positing,

> Homophobia pervades the culture, and each of us, regardless of sexual identity, risks experiencing its harmful effects. Although homophobia did not originate with us and we are not to blame, we are all responsible for its elimination and, therefore, can all gain by a closer examination of its issues. (p. 17)

Blumenfeld (1992) acknowledges that heterosexual individuals use "oppressive [discursive] behaviors [like exclusion, shame, and hostility] to gain certain rewards . . . to protect their self-esteem against psychological doubts or conflicts, to enhance their value systems, or to categorize others in an attempt to comprehend a complex world" (p. 8). These exact behaviors, according to Blumenfeld, lead to actions, intolerance, and antipathy towards the homosexual community that "can be used to stigmatize, silence, and, on occasion, target people who are perceived or defined by others as gay, lesbian, or bisexual" (Blumenfeld, 1992, p. 11). Blumenfeld (2012) goes on to contend that these entrenched homophobic beliefs would eventually accelerate the homophobic discourses well into the 20th century.

Statement of the Problem

Qualitative studies continue to show that a majority of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers experience bullying, harassment, and discrimination while at work. These educators fear that their sexual identities will be exposed in a highly heteronormative and

homophobic work environment, potentially leading to wrongful termination or to accusations of child molestation. Despite recent political efforts to help dismantle and extinguish hate-language and homophobic actions in schools altogether, American public schools are spaces where the unconscious acceptance of heteronormativity and gendered norms are produced and reproduced.

Recent qualitative studies have indicated that a majority of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers experience bullying, harassment, and discrimination while at work. The literature reviewed for this qualitative study consist of survey questions (quantitative in nature), which do not offer the participant to contribute the crucial personal, candid, and poignant details that new phenomenological studies require to shed light on this problem. These missing stories may provide the necessary insight increase awareness, empathy, recognition, and affirmation of these peoples' stories, lives, and experiences (Lugg, 1996b; Mosher, 2001; Nixon, 2006).

Definitions of Key Terms & Discourse Choices

The following terms are used throughout this study and are defined below:

Terms	Definitions
Bind(ing)	The act an individual will take to compress her or his breasts to appear more masculine and/or flat chested.
Cisgender	A term describing an individual whose self-perception of her or his gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
Closet	A state in which an individual does not disclose her or his sexual orientation publicly.
Closeted	A term describing a person who does not disclose her or his sexual orientation publicly.
Coding	The process of developing categories to organize and sort raw qualitative data.

Coming out	The process wherein an individual accepts and/or comes to identify her or his own gender identity/expression; the process wherein an individual discloses her or his own sexual orientation with others.
Co-researcher	The individual whose experiences are being captured, coded, and decoded through descriptive and prolonged interviews.
Educator	An individual who is trained in teaching; an individual who is a specialist in the theory, practice, and praxis of education.
Fieldnotes	A researcher's written account of what she or he hears, sees, experiences, thinks before, during, and after a formal qualitative interview.
Fieldwork	The data collection process performed by the researcher.
Gay	A term describing a person who self-identifies as male who is primarily or exclusively attracted to other people who self-identify as men.
Gender binary	The idea that there are only two gender identities—male/female—or man/woman based on sex assigned at birth, rather than the idea of gender existing on a spectrum.
Gender conforming	A person whose gender expression is consistent with and reproduced by the cultural norms expected for that gender.
Gender dysphoria	The distress an individual experiences because of the sex and gender she or he were assigned at birth.
Gender expression	The external display (or costuming) of an individual's gender through dress, demeanor, social behavior, affectations, or other factors, usually assessed on scales of masculinity and femininity.
Gender fluid(ity)	An individual who does not identify as having a fixed gender as set forth by the binary male/female
Gender marker	The mark (female or male) that appears on an individual's identity documents, such as birth certificate, driver's license.
Gender nonconforming	A person whose gender expression is not consistent with and reproduced by the cultural norms expected for that gender
Heteronormative	A viewpoint that expresses heterosexuality as a given instead of being one of many possibilities for an individual's sexual orientation; the belief that heterosexuality is the default sexuality.

Heterosexuality	A term used to describe the sexual activity between a couple of opposite gender identities.
Homophobia	An irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or those who self-identify or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.
Homosexuality	A term used to describe the sexual activity and attraction between same gender identities.
Informed consent	The written or verbal approval given by the co-researcher.
Intersectionality	A term used to describe the intertwining and intersecting identities that make up a person's lived experience; these inter-colliding elements cannot be separated from one another.
Lesbian	A term used to describe a person who self-identifies as a female who is primarily or exclusively attracted to other people who self-identify as female.
LGBTQ	An acronym used for and by the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer communities.
Microaggression	Small acts of hostility toward the LGBTQ communities, which can be at times unintentional
Out	A state in which an individual reveals her or his sexual orientation.
Pass(ing)	A term referring to a person who can belong to or assert themselves within a major group without question or suspicion.
Pronouns	The ways in which is person's gender identity/expression is affirmed and defined grammatically.
Public school	An elementary through secondary school in the United States of America supported by public funds, which provides free education for children of a community or district.
Queer	A term referring to any individual who self-identifies as non-heterosexual, non-binary, non-lesbian, non-gay, or non-bisexual.
Researcher	The individual who facilitates the interview and who codes, distill, negotiates, and interprets the raw interview data.

Sex assigned at birth	The determination of an individual's sex based on the visual appearance of the genitals at birth
Sexual orientation	A term used to describe a person's physical and/or emotional attraction to people of a specific gender or multiple genders; it is the culturally defined set of meanings through which people describe their sexual attraction.
Transgender	An umbrella term used to describe a group of individuals whose gender identity/expression are different from the sex assigned at birth.
Transition(ing)	This term is primarily used to refer to the process a transgender person undergoes when changing her or his bodily appearance either to be more congruent with the gender/sex she or he feel themselves to be, to fit into a binary gender identity/expression, and/or to be in harmony with her or his preferred gender expression.

Summary

With an increased visibility of LGBTQ issues in the American consciousness, either due to advanced historical, political, social, or cultural discourses, or due to targeted violence aimed at the LGBTQ communities, it is crucial for the American public to engage in discourses on the experiences that individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ endure on a daily basis. The historical antecedents surrounding LGBTQ issues contain many examples of the ways in which heteronormative and homophobic discourses have worked to dominate and Other sexual minorities in Western culture, as well as to reproduce and sustain itself, through its very nature, as the prevailing social, historical, political, and cultural constructs of discursive language.

Chapter 2 will provide a rich historical context for this phenomenological study. The chapter will discuss and reveal the past and contemporary lived experiences of the American homosexual—both as an everyday citizen and as a public school teaching professional—as represented through history, landmark court cases, research, and empirical literature. Further, these representations will be buttressed and reticulated through the frameworks of queer

theory/criticism, intersectionality, phenomenology, all of which will be used to guide and inform this qualitative research study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Search Strategy

To build a solid, reliable, and proficient understanding of the concept of phenomenology and qualitative research, the researcher culled multiple resources, including published dissertations and peer-reviewed journals, to locate information based on the research topic. The researcher used the following library databases offered through Concordia University to access peer-reviewed journal articles for this qualitative study: ERIC; JSTOR; Sage Journals Online; and Taylor and Francis Online. Additionally, the researcher searched the databases employing the following key words to mine the aforementioned databases for material: *phenomenology; phenomenology LGBTQ; phenomenology self-identified LGBTQ; phenomenology self-identified LGBTQ teacher; phenomenology gay teacher; phenomenology gay teacher lived experience; phenomenology LGBTQ interview; qualitative LGBTQ teacher; qualitative LGBTQ teacher lived experiences;* and *lived experiences LGBTQ teacher/educator*.

Review of the Literature

> [Public schools must] move beyond just protecting . . . educators from harassment and bullying along the lines of gender and sexual orientation. . . . [T]he roles of teachers . . . need to be reconceptualized, away from the masculinist traditions, which have for too long dominated the culture of public school in general. (Lugg, 2003a, p. 124)

The purpose of this literature review is to understand and explore the lived experiences of self-identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) public educators as captured through an in-depth review, presentation, and explication of the historical, theoretical, seminal, and current empirical literatures. Chapter 2 illuminates the researchable landscape of this topic by culling, reviewing, and discussing the literature relative to the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Most importantly, the literature contained

within this chapter will be used later to engender meaning around and understanding of the salient themes that emerged in the qualitative data.

Historically, countless self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators have feared losing their jobs in an occupational system that favors conformity to prejudicial rules, silence about one's sexual orientation and heteronormative discourses (Blount, 1996; Crenshaw, 1989, 1996; Lugg, 1996a, 1996b). "Underlying . . . these fears is the one great fear of losing the opportunity to teach," argues Kissen (1996a, p. 73). Kissen (1996a) maintains when it comes to being dismissed from a teaching position, "Gay teachers say they think the pressure would be more likely to come from the community" (p. 75). Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century, qualitative phenomenological studies have been conducted to capture the essence of self-identifying LGBTQ educators' lived experiences in public schools. These studies have revealed evidence that contemporary LGBTQ educators have lived experiences fraught with fear, misunderstanding, discrimination, and homophobia.

This chapter will describe the theoretical framework of queer theory/criticism and how this scholarly lens coincides with and parallels Judith Butler's (1988, 1993, 1999, 2004) theory of gender as performance and Michel Foucault's (1978, 1980a, 1980b, 1990) theory of gender as discourse. The chapter will find that both of these seminally influential theorists' work has allowed researchers to dissect the ways in which how society understands sexuality and gender expression/identity have reinforced the idea of LGBTQ as the Other, have vexed conventional ideas of normative sexualities set forth by society, and resisted against heteronormative discourses. Related to these frameworks, the theory of intersectionality will then be explained as a system of power that works to shape, dominate, and oppress an individual based on the ideas and discourses set forth by Western society, resulting in the individual's lived experience as

understood by the ways in which these overlapping networks of intersections have informed and deformed their lives.

Chapter 2 then leads into the historical foundations of education and its discourses surrounding gender norms and heteronormativity, all of which continue to shape the often-turbulent climate of American public schools and the lives of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Additionally, the chapter provides a detailed history of the landmark court cases, formal policies, institutional barriers, and significant ballot initiatives that have perpetuated discrimination toward the self-identifying LGBTQ communities; thus, yielding an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers throughout American history.

Theoretical Frameworks

Queer Theory/Criticism

Queer criticism emerged as a personal and cultural response to the gay liberation and feminist movements of the 1970s, which are often seen as "the social experiments of the day" (Cowen, 2015). These movements thrust LGBTQ issues onto the cultural and societal scenes; however, those who did not fit the stereotypical roles of gay or lesbian, and certainly not in heterosexual culture, felt excluded and marginalized from gays, lesbians, and "heterosexual couples in terms of clothing, grooming, and personal style" (Tyson, 2006, p. 335). Feeling excluded, the group decided to adopt (and reclaim) a term to express their sexualities and gender expressions/identities. The term this group of non-conforming individuals used to separate themselves from the mainstream: *queer*.

Once considered offensive to the homosexual community due to its association with discrimination and hatred, the term queer has been reclaimed by the LGBTQ communities. In

fact, “The word *queer* . . . as an inclusive term seeks to heal these divisions by offering a collective identity to which all nonstraight people can belong” (Tyson, 2006, p. 335). Ahmed (2006) adds, “We can turn to the etymology of the word ‘queer,’ which comes from the Indo-European word ‘twist.’ Queer . . . then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a ‘straight line’” (p. 67). With these definitions in mind, Plummer (2005) argues, queer theory “puts everything [society’s notion of normal] out of joint, out of order” (p. 359). From here, queer theorists began to take a disciplined approach to the examination of those works created by queer writers, thinkers, activists, and scholars.

More so, self-identifying as queer means a person is problematizing the pre-established gender binary; thus, breaking the rules regarding sexual orientation/expression. Hall (2003) describes *queer* as “a term commonly used to deride and vilify same-sex desiring people” and is an “umbrella term to celebrate . . . difference from the ‘norm’” (pp. 53–54). The term queer finds its history embedded in the same context as *lesbian* and *gay*; however, *queer* implies ambiguity and elasticity on the part of a person’s sexual orientation and gender expression, whereas, lesbian and gay ground a person’s sexual orientation as desiring the same sex. This concept also suggests a new form of self-identification/expression. When one self-identifies as queer, for instance, she or he is troubling the conventional ideals of the universally accepted heterosexual/homosexual binary. Just as vital, this refusing to remain within the gender paradigm explodes society’s gender expectations and expands the boundaries of gender and sexual identities/expressions, and orientation, altogether (Butler, 1988; Hall, 2003; Mondimore, 1996; Morland & Wilcox, 2005; Nicholson, 1994).

From here, critical queer theory was borne as a political and societal reaction to the stigmatizing and ignoring of gays and lesbians in works of art, literature, media, and society.

Tyson (2011) emphasizes that queer theory "is used as a broad, inclusive category that acknowledges the shared political and social experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and all people who consider themselves, for whatever reason, not heterosexual" (p. 177). In this vein, to perform a queer interpretation of a situation or text, one takes into account the assumed and expected roles of gender, the text's roles and their effects on characters, and the characters who or situations that trouble the male/female, heterosexual/homosexual paradigms within the heterosexual framework. Operating under the assumption that human sexual and social practices, behaviors, gender identifications, and community relations are dictated and privileged by heterosexuality (termed *heteronormativity*), queer theorists recognize heteronormativity as a limiting system, in which heterosexist thinking is the default and, therefore, is expected, engrained, sustained, and reproduced (Warner, 1993).

Authors, artists, and film directors, such as James Whale, Radclyffe Hall, Truman Capote, Bayard Rustin, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Gore Vidal, E. M. Forester, and James Baldwin, among other LGBTQ luminaries, created works of literature, art, and film spotlighting queer characters, situations, and relationships. These authors and their now intensely studied examples of queer texts were not always studied or recognized for their artistic merit, the chief problem being these people who self-identified as queer, gay, or lesbian were often largely ignored by scholars because the dominant heteronormative discourses and even closeted homosexual critics did not take seriously lesbian and gay issues in such artistic endeavors (Berlant & Warner, 2013; Solomon, 2017). It was not until the explosive social change brought about by the HIV/AIDS outbreak of the early 1980s that one particular critic exposed the mistreatment of the LGBTQ communities by society through the framework of Hollywood. Vito Russo (1987), a gay activist and film historian, published his compelling and acclaimed

meditation on the American film industry, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, which broke taboos and ushered in a burgeoning form a study: queer criticism.

Moreover, Russo (1987) exposed the mistreatment and exploitation of LGBTQ characters in Hollywood films, and, perhaps most importantly, by tracing the years of "gayness and lesbianness in films," (Steinberg, 1998, p. 187) Russo deconstructed the ways in which Hollywood has both overtly and covertly trained its audiences to see, treat, and to "think [either positively or negatively] about gay people [in general]" (Steinberg, 1998, p. 187). Russo's reasoning behind critiquing the American film canon was to expose and study "the various ways in which gays . . . have expressed themselves [and have been rendered by Hollywood] on film" (1987, p. xi). Russo's work showed how the film industry perpetuated negative gender stereotypes while misappropriating gay themes and characters for the sake of entertainment. Through his seminal text, Russo commented on the "pattern of oppression similar to the one suffered by blacks, long typified onscreen as simpletons and domestics" (Russo, 1987, p. 35). To a greater degree, Russo effectively amalgamated film analysis, queerness, queer identity, civil rights, LGBTQ awareness, academia, and queer liberation to help shape and eventually develop what scholars today consider queer theory. Most strikingly, Russo engendered a much-needed public discourse surrounding gay rights. Russo (1987) noted that his study of Hollywood's mistreatment of homosexuals "is not meant to be the last word on this subject; it is meant to be a beginning—a starting point from which further, more specific analyses of where we're going may emerge," (p. 326), as well as a discourse to trouble the ways in which the American film industry, and heteronormative society at large, regarding the self-identifying LGBTQ communities.

Michel Foucault: Gender as Discourse

Prior to queer theory's emergence in the latter half of the 20th century, philosopher and historian Michel Foucault believed humans did not possess an informationally complete version of social reality, especially a reality around the act of sex. The reality to which one succumbs to the socially acceptable act of sex (or any other thoughts or desires, for that matter) is through the influence of power and language. Languages, in general, according to Foucault, are amalgamations of smaller parts called *discourses*. The discourses concerning matters within society, such as sexuality and gender expression/identity, is what allows languages surrounding these very items to exist and, from there, to be governed and empowered by society, or by those who control the discourses. Foucault (1978) argued, "The learned discourse . . .[is] imbued with old-age delusions . . . [and] systematic blindness" (p. 55). Even more, a learned and then adopted discourse reflects a society's beliefs, values, and interests. Once a discourse has found itself embedded within a society, it is difficult for that society to relinquish power over or extinguish the discourse all together. By being virtually indestructible, a discourse is afforded the power to be "spoken about, and to cause *it* [author emphasis] to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail" (Foucault, 1978, p. 18).

Foucault believed that the various discourses that reflected the performance of sex are competing and struggling for power, which ultimately produces and sustains the very language of that society (Foucault, 1980a). Likewise, by repeating and spreading beliefs about sex and about which sexual acts are deemed acceptable, society is reinforcing, empowering, and protecting the discourse itself (Foucault, 1980b). The "scheme for transforming sex into discourse had been devised . . . [and] made into a rule for everyone," (Foucault, 1978, p. 20) meaning that any given society's beliefs that existed after a rule (or discourse) came into effect

would be taught and shaped by this belief. In other words, those who own and dominate the discursive language, have the power to perpetuate or extinguish it. When it comes to the discourse surrounding sex, most importantly, Foucault credited those in power for affirming the use of sex as a tool for economic and population control. Those controlling the discourse are, according to Foucault, responsible for suppressing certain aspects of society, including gender expression and sexual orientation (Foucault, 1978, 1980a, 1980b, 1990). Indeed, by talking and thinking about sexuality, society has unconsciously infused itself with certain ideas and beliefs regarding sexuality. Eventually, the idea of sex was strong enough to find its way into social discourse, where it would "not simply [be] condemned or tolerated but managed" (Foucault, 1978, p. 24) by those controlling the public discourse.

Additionally, Foucault indicated that the regulated, even censored discourses surrounding sexuality worked in the heterosexual's favor. For instance, "Society had affirmed, in a constant way, that its future and its fortune were tied not only to the number and the uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organization, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex" (Foucault, 1978, p. 26). In this instance, the very discourses that privilege heterosexuality is simultaneously placing limitations and restrictions upon those who identify differently from the norm. These discourses are also buttressing the frame against which all other sexualities are imbued with or exorcized of power. It is within the framework of society that economic and political dominances are established, maintained, and propagated; it is the specific discourse of heterosexuality, moreover, that normalizes and reproduces itself while problematizing, disadvantaging, and stigmatizing homosexuality.

Judith Butler: Gender as Performance

Judith Butler (1990), author of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, asserts that humans recognize, negotiate, and come to understand gender through ancient social constructs, not through rigid discourses, as first animated by Foucault. Gender as a social construct, intimates Butler, has allowed societies (with its rigid constructs on gender expression/identity) to interpret "gender itself . . . [not as] a free-floating artifice, [but as a]. . . consequence that [has established] *man* [as] *masculine* [and *woman* as *feminine*]" (1990, p. 10). For Butler, this interpretation of gender has influenced our patriarchal, heterosexist culture. Butler contends that in doing this, Western society has cleaved the terms *woman* and *man* not only with their anatomical makeup but also with the ideas of woman and man as inferior and superior, respectively. When individuals refuse "to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility," (Butler, 1990, p. 23) the result of both the action and the appearance is termed *queer*.

In theory, the queer model of criticism rests itself on the belief that a person who self-identifies as queer cannot be easily placed into the two stringent categories of heterosexual/homosexual. Queer, essentially, undergirds and reinforces the concept of same-sex attraction without mentioning which sex is desiring. In a sense, the resistance against the societal power struggles is what makes a person queer. After all, Jagose (1997) intimates, "Queer itself can have neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics" (p. 96). In making this comment, Jagose is pitting queer against the status quo of heterosexuality, even lesbian and gay, for that matter. Altman (1971) wrote, "The very concept of homosexuality is a social one, and one cannot understand the homosexual experience without recognizing the extent to which we have developed a certain identity and behavior derived from social norms" (p. 2).

The potential for queers to dismantle the socially constructed paradigms of masculinity and femininity, while moving in and out of these roles, lies at the crux of queer theory.

With this in mind, queer theorists celebrate the fact that the queer body is one that purposely strays from and vexes the straight/gay dichotomy. In disobeying the binary dichotomy, queer theory lends itself to a deeper examination of the social constructs and expectations regarding gender and the performativity of it. More precisely, gender is not something a person *is* (discourse), but rather gender is something a person *does* (performance). Butler (1990) addresses gender as a performance when she writes, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (pp. 43–44). Based on these concepts, Butler stresses that the frame in which people perform or costume themselves (putting on clothes) does not allow one to adopt another's costume, since the subject has limited costumes to wear. The frame functions as a predetermined set of expectations imposed upon a person to perform their assigned gender by societal, cultural, historical, and political means (Butler, 1990; Salih, 2004). Gender, therefore, serves as an unwritten dress code used by society to police gender within the frame of control. Moreover, the belief of gender as non-fixed represents and codifies the entrenched power system through repeated stylization and performance (Garber, 1992).

Further illustrating Butler's argument, Eve Sedgwick (1990), author of the seminally influential *Epistemology of the Closet*, views gender as performative. Sedgwick acknowledges that when a biological male, for example, costumes himself in male-appropriate clothes (as constituted by society), he is then participating in and reinforcing a heteronormative culture by conforming to what society expects of him. Conversely, when a biological male wears female-appropriate clothing, however, he is undermining society's endeavor to keep the genders framed

and solidified in place; thus, this is where the queer identity manifests (Butler, 1988, 1990; Salih, 2004; Sedgwick, 1990). Silin (1995) recapitulates both Butler's and Sedgwick's interpretations of gender by observing,

> All heterosexual gender identities are imitations, approximations, for which there are no originals. They do not express pre-existing or deep psychic realities, as traditional psychoanalyst content. Rather, needing constant repetition for the realization, gendered identities are precariously constructed and easily placed at risk by the failure to repeat the requisite performance. (p. 170)

In an attempt to counteract the negative perceptions of gays and lesbians by society, Butler elects to examine the narrow and inflexible classification of gender: the gender binary. Butler believes that by placing the masculine and feminine into the gender binary framework, society is establishing a paradoxical opposition that both mobilizes and immobilizes the two concepts. Butler (1990) accounts, "The masculine/feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in which that specificity [the female as the lower half] can be recognized, but in every way the 'specificity' of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated off" (p. 7) from their masculine counterpart. Butler situates these opposing genders against one another to demonstrate the privileged (man) half from its deprivileged (female) half; however, depending on either the interpretation of a given situation or how one examines the roles of gender, the female could easily subjugate her male counterpart and gain power as the top. To a queer theorist like Butler, both the stabilization and destabilization of the binary is what reinforces the importance of the queer, the queer body, and critical queer theory.

In a prime example, Eaklor (2008) accounts for the binary paradigm when she writes, "Gender is among those attributes that are *performed* [author's emphasis] though the

performance may be unthinking and simply according to societal mores" (p. 243). Most importantly, Hall (2003) writes, "The binary heterosexual/homosexual, while structuring our conceptions of human identity, obviously does not accord equal value to both identities;" (p. 62) thus, concluding that when one side (heterosexual, in this case) is empowered, the other half is disempowered. In essence, the power is not in the *doer* (the person who is queer) but in what is being *done* (the result of the person's queer performance).

Like Foucault, Butler believes that society has engrained itself with discourses that perpetuate the idea of heterosexuality as normal and expected. Butler's theory on gender as a result of socially constructed ideals lends itself to Foucault's notions of discourse as ingraining society with notions of gender expectations and sexual orientation. This Foucauldian way of viewing power is how Butler is able to evaluate the effects of the power in the performance and, in turn, analyze and interrogate society's reaction to that performance through a queer medium.

Intersectionality

Rooted in Black and feminist theories, intersectionality surfaced from a pre-existing cultural framework in which theorists recognized that an individual's lived experience in the world is influenced by a complex network of shifting, connected, and interpenetrating systems and structures of power, such as race, gender expression/identity, and sexual orientation (Andersen & Hill, 2010; Bunjun, 2010; Collins, 2008, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989, 1996; Nagal, 2003). Also known as *systems of power* or *systems of oppression*, this complicated network of overlapping sociopolitical grids adds greater depth and complexity to an individual's lived experience and to her or his understanding of the world, including power *over* and *with* others (Bunjun, 2010; Collins, 2009; Hankivsky, 2014; Henderson & Tickamyer, 2009). These intersections (race, gender expression/identity, sexual orientation) greatly contribute to the

stories, histories, and lived experiences of *all* people, as well as stress how discourses of normativity produce inequality amongst individuals and groups (Crenshaw, 1989, 1996). Resultantly, intersectionality seeks to examine the ways in which these multilayered, colliding forces have caused discrimination and marginalization on behalf of those people whose identities and voices have been silenced due to the very turmoil within the networking systems that sustains the discourses themselves (Bunjun, 2010; Crenshaw, 1996; Hancock, 2016; Nash, 2008).

In fact, McCreary (1994) asserts that Western society relies on the opposition and resistance of its binary devices (white/non-white) and intersectional oppositions (race, gender, sexual orientation) to render one as visible/invisible, empowered/powerless, or privileged/deprivileged to influence social, historical, political, and cultural advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, Anderson (2009) and Collins (1986, 2008, 2009) suggest these systems of power affect, shape, and inform a person's lived experience because these very interpenetrating discourses value some people's lives more than others; thus, resulting in either liberation or oppression on the part of the individual being acted upon. Simply put, "Inequalities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations, and [lived] experiences" (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2).

Given this, the importance laid upon these systems by society is predicated upon constructed and reproduced discourses that historically have been legitimized or delegitimized within their cultural and social frameworks (Collins, 2009). Like Collins, Crenshaw's (1989, 1996) Foucauldian-like theory emphasizes that those who dominate the systems of power are the ones who shape, retain, and control meaning and knowledge, not only for themselves but also for the oppressed (Bunjun, 2010; Collins, 1986, 2009). Havinksly (2014) argues, "Human lives [and

their lived experiences] cannot be reduced to single categories;" (p. 9) to a greater degree, "Intersectionality is concerned with understanding the effects between and across various levels in society" (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 9). Andersen and Hill (2010) preserve the conversation by writing,

> All social groups are located in a system of power . . . wherein your social location can shape what you know—and what others know about you. As a result, dominant forms of knowledge have been constructed largely from the experiences of the most powerful—that is, those who have the most access to systems of education and communication. (p. 5)

Collins (1986, 2008, 2009) and Crenshaw (1989, 1996) extend the theoretical approaches of Butler (1988, 1993, 1999, 2004) and Sedgwick (1990) when they argue that race, gender expression/identity, and sexual orientation frame a person in systemic injustice and social inequality that determine the extent to which a person is privileged. Further, these systems of power both benefit and handicap the same person depending on the intersection at play. For example, the systems of race, gender expression/identity, and sexual orientation have deposited the white straight cisgender male into a privileged intersection due to his race, sexual orientation, and gender expression/identity, respectfully. In this situation, the intersections not only aid the white straight cisgender male in Western society, but also these particular systems of power endorse and accelerate "their [privileged] role in the evolution of intersectionality as a paradigm" (Hancock, 2016, p. 40). Likewise, a white straight cisgender woman is privileged by her race and her sexual orientation; however, Western society penalizes her because of her gender expression/identity due to years of heterosexist and patriarchal discourses. For Hancock (2016),

this devaluing of women is a social, cultural, and political phenomenon “that has befallen” (p. 41) this particular group since before antebellum slavery.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the lack of complexity and depth in the straight white male’s perceived experience may lack segmentation and a more lucrative experience of the world altogether and are controlled only by those who govern the language (Higginbotham, 2009), especially when it comes to the intersectionality of race. For instance, a homosexual cisgender African American male is especially deprivileged since his sexual orientation (self-identifying as gay) and race (African American) are working doubly against since Western society has undervalued homosexual and African Americans, even though his gender expression/identity (male) privileges him (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2009). Lorde (2009) further discusses this lived experience of the homosexual when she writes that the inter-colliding identities of race and sexual orientation deposits gay men, or any homosexual for that matter, “as trapped by their fear into silence and invisibility and they exist in a dim valley of terror wearing nooses of conformity” (p. 208). As individual items, these intersections acting upon a person reflect a single experience of one’s identity and shape her or his lived experience in the world. When working simultaneously, however, these systems of power can and will bombard an individual to the point of oppression, given certain social dynamics and frameworks (Collins, 1986, 2008; Crenshaw 1989, 1996).

Nonetheless, Collins (2009) and Crenshaw (1989) note that the individual being acted upon by the systems of power has no control over these interpenetrating forms of oppression due to histories and discourses set into place by Western society; even greater, the individual cannot always control the value placed on the systems of power since the discourses surrounding them are pre-determined and exist because of the humanistic role of language. Because a person’s

lived experience is based on these overlapping, multi-layered identities, it is when these systems of power interconnect that an experience is formulated, authenticated, and realized.

Phenomenology

Predicated on philosophical and methodological methods, phenomenology can be used several ways to study, analyze, and attempt to understand the human consciousness, "including the modes of apprehension and the significance of the lived situations" (Wertz, 2011, p. 2). Moreover, "Phenomenology sheds light on intense and previously avoided phenomena, and reformulates. . . questions about life and its significance," posit Wojnar and Swanson (2007, p. 173). Finlay (2011) asserts that it is through a Husserlian approach that an individual's "rich and thick experiences" (p. 17) can be recorded, analyzed, unpacked, and shared.

Founded by 20th-century German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who adopted a *descriptive* method to describe the experience under investigation, phenomenology is a human science approach to understanding the world through an individual's point of view or lived experience (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) then challenged Husserl's descriptivist approach to phenomenology when he viewed phenomenology, not as descriptive, but as *interpretive*, meaning the researcher should focus on an individual's sense of embeddedness in the world. Both the descriptive and interpretive theories strive to utilize "the full sensitivity, knowledge, and powers of comprehension of the researcher and is consequently quite personal," (Wertz, 2011, p. 3) even though phenomenology "differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). This, of course, means that phenomenology allows for the possibility for any human being—especially the phenomenologist (the researcher) and those sharing their lived experiences (the

participant/co-researcher)—to be brought into direct contact with the world "by virtue of being conscious," (van Manen, 1990, p. 9) as well as to arrive at a "descriptive. . . consciousness, often with the purpose of identifying the essential structure that characterize experience of the world" (Hammersley, 2003, para. 1). To do so, the researcher can characterize her or his world as different in a Husserlian (1970) sense. For example, Husserlian scholars, on one hand, would recommend the researcher use bracketing, or the process of recognizing and excising her or his preconceived knowledge about the phenomena under study, before, during, and after gathering data. Heideggerian phenomenologists, on the other hand, recommend that the researcher not bracket because the researcher's biases are "valuable guides to inquiry" (Flood, 2010, p. 10).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define qualitative research as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (p. 17). Therefore, behavioral and social scientists often employ qualitative approaches to collect and analyze the intersecting dimensions of human phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Creswell (2007) emphasizes that research performed through a phenomenological lens is strengthened because this qualitative approach allows the researcher to suspend all judgment about what is *real* as perceived by the participant and to focus on an interpretation on that participant's experience. Moustakas (1994) reasons that the researcher will arrive at the *real* experience of the co-researcher's story when the both the researcher and co-researcher "[turn] inward in reflection . . . [and] whatever shines forth in consciousness . . . is what stands out as meaningful" (p. 92) and real.

Phenomenology is the description of phenomena, or a "primordial experience" (Husserl, 1970, p. 9) that fosters the understanding of the particular nuances of the phenomena that occurred in an individual's lived experience (Husserl & Gibson, 2012). Van Manen (1990)

maintains, “Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday lives;” (p. 9) hence, what intrigues phenomenologists is how an individual experiences and describes the topic at hand; for this reason, a phenomenological approach to a person’s life is rendered through self-perception, vital experiences, and “through the perception of their bodily behavior” (Husserl & Gibson, 2012, p. 10). As a means to glean “a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences,” according to van Manen (1990, p. 9) phenomenology focuses on the pre-reflective experience, rather than the person’s experience that has been categorized, reflected upon, or conceptualized by that person.

Phenomenology’s qualitative mission is to describe common meanings based on the lived experiences of individuals within a certain phenomenon that surrenders “rich (quality) and thick (quantity) data” (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). Given this, phenomenology does not want to arrive at an explanation or analysis, as does its quantitative counterpart. Instead, phenomenology’s approach is to arrive at and capture the essence of that experience in the context of social science research being performed by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Van Manen (1990) describes, “By essence we do not mean some kind of mysterious entity or discovery;” (p. 39) rather, the essence is “understood as a . . . description of a phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p. 39) as shared by the co-researcher, or the individual being interviewed. In striving to capture the essence of an individual’s lived experience, the researcher aims to explore the world as an individual experiences it, while “encourag[ing] an open perception. . . [with a type of] unbiased looking and seeing” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89).

Phenomenology makes use of the researcher adopting the roles of observer/participant as well as interpreter (Wals, 1993). In other words, Husserlian phenomenology affords one agent (i.e., the participant/co-researcher) the opportunity *to know* the essence of her or his own lived

experience and another agent (i.e., the researcher) the opportunity to arrive at an understanding of the essence of what the participant has *come to know*. The trust and empathy generated between researcher and co-researcher "is crucial for creating an atmosphere that allows communication to take place in a relatively undistorted fashion" (Wals, 1993, p. 6). Most importantly, phenomenology provides two crucial levels for both the researcher and co-researcher: the descriptive level and the interpretive level.

Like queer theory, phenomenology "does not reduce people to clusters of interacting variables" (Wals, 1993, p. 5). Instead, both queer theory and phenomenology strive to "produce knowledge with emancipatory relevance that can promote autonomy of the individual and the solidarity of the entire community" (Wals, 1993, p. 5). Bringing to bear the theory of intersectionality, Ahmed (2006) writes that the affinity between queer theory and qualitative research shows "how bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space," (p. 5) yielding a rich, deep description about the world in which these bodies live. Creswell (2013) adds that the relationship connecting phenomenology with intersectionality ultimately "allows for keeping open to question the elements race, class, age, and anything else . . . to challenge and undercut identity as singular, fixed, or normal" (p. 32). As van Manen (1990) posits, phenomenology searches for what it means to be human, for the "meaning structures of our lived experiences" (p. 12) to arise out of remembered and storied moments. Ahmed, like van Manen, shows that every person when she or he enters the world is gendered, sexualized, and raced, and it is these very intersections that "phenomenology [works to] apprehend what is given to [the] consciousness" (p. 27) and, therefore, to the lived experience.

To a greater degree, Van Manen (1990) weaves in the idea of intersectionality when he remarks, "To understand what it means to be a woman in our present age is also to understand

the pressures of the meaning structures that have come to restrict, widen, or question the nature and ground of womanhood" (p. 12). These structures, recognized by van Manen and studied by Crenshaw, symbolize the very intersections that are constantly privileging or deprivileging an individual. Even Collins and Bilge (2016) admit, "Using intersectionality as an analytic tool demonstrates the synergistic relationship between critical analysis and critical praxis" (p. 49). The intersections of race, sex, and gender cannot be excised from the lived experience; after all, "Phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld" (van Manen, 1990, p. 11). As a result, the intersectional constructs are always inherent in the lived experience. Welton (1987) adds that intersections are crucial to understanding the lived experience because

> The emergence of new fields of empirical research, the concern with the possibility of political theory, and the confrontation of a theory of intentionality with our contemporary appreciation of the depth of language are some of the factors that have moved phenomenology beyond its first formulations in the early work of Husserl. . . . [P]henomenology becomes critical when it discovers that a simple, reflective apprehension of 'the things themselves' is not possible, and that analysis involves 'dismantling' of what would otherwise remain buried, an interrogation of what would otherwise not speak. (p. xxi)

Parallel to queer theory, both intersectionality and phenomenology's missions are to deconstruct the historical, cultural, societal, and contemporary assumptions about both gender and sexual identities, because those two categories consist of intersecting elements that challenge the social constructed ideas of both categories (Butler, 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004). Intersectionality, even more, realizes that those elements consisting of socially constructed

discourses cause a person to be either valued or devalued depending on discourses of the historical, social, and cultural pasts. Phenomenology works like queer theory and intersectionality in that phenomenology "attempt[s] to learn *about* people . . . and come to know *with* them the reality which challenges them" (Wals, 1993, p. 5) to produce knowledge, understanding, and the essence of the lived experience. Collins and Bilge (2016) stress, "The synergistic relationship [between queer theory, intersectionality, and phenomenology] is a special kind of relationality, one where the interaction or cooperation of two or more entities produce a combined effect that is greater than the sum of their separate parts" (p. 33). In this case, van Manen (1990) defines the term *essence* as the "linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon" (p. 39). The essence, therefore, is "a good description that constitutes the essence of something . . . so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us . . . in a hitherto unseen way" (van Manen, 1990, p. 39).

In Foucauldian (1978, 1980a, 1980b, 1990) fashion, the essence works as discourses do: both are made of attempts, languages, and descriptions used by individuals to "somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description" (van Manen, 1990, p. 39). The essence can then be shared, interpreted, valued, and/or devalued to question and deconstruct one's experience in the world. Like Foucault's discourse theory, phenomenology strives to reduce the individual experiences to reflect the universal essence of the phenomena (Creswell, 2008, 2013). Likewise, phenomenology and narrative inquiry reflect and complement the theory of intersectionality in that phenomenology argues that the personal and social contexts are always acting upon an individual. As such, Collins and Bilge (2016) note that qualitative researchers must "tackle questions of how interactions between social inequalities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability shape educational experiences and outcomes" (p. 39) to reach at the

very essence of any experience while taking an "unfettered stance" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85) on the topic being addressed. Clandinin (2013) reminds us that intersectionality is crucial to phenomenology when noting,

> As we engage in narrative inquiry with ourselves, and with our participants, we need to inquire into all these kinds of stories, stories that have become intertwined, interwoven into who we are and are becoming. These stories live in us, in our bodies, as we move and live in the world. (p. 22)

To a greater degree, people "cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Because of this, queer theory, intersectionality, and phenomenology attempt to improve society, interpret the nuances of one's actions and non-actions, and understand the lived experience through deconstruction, description, action, and reflection (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989, 2013; Husserl & Gibson, 2012; Wals, 1993).

Homegrown Homophobia and Historical Intersections

Prior to America's entrance into World War II, the Great Depression had crippled the United States into financial turmoil. American men and women toiled on fields and farms to survive, often migrating to find work. Once America entered World War II, however, these farmers and fieldworkers emerged onto the military scene, and, for the first time in American history, large numbers of men and women were working and fighting together in same-sex environments (D'Emilio, 1989, 1992a, 1992b; Howard, 2016). Following the Second World War, America found itself as the world's superpower, leading to the problem of "balancing power among many nations [and] . . . giving way to the polarization between the two emerging 'superpowers,' communist U.S.S.R. and the capitalist-democratic United States" (Eaklor, 2008,

p. 78). As a result, the citizens of America witnessed profound changes in the country's economic and social infrastructures, and in 1940, the United States Congress passed the Alien Registration Act.

The Alien Registration Act (ARA) required any person who was not a legal citizen of the United States to file a statement, explaining her or his occupational situation and political affiliations within America. The form made it illegal for any person to overthrow the American government through espionage, advocacy, or desirability. Eventually, the act focused its target on communism and perceived communist sympathizers suspected of working within the American federal government (Alien Registration Act, n.d.). Eaklor (2008) reminds readers that the anticommunist sentiment "would be the dominant ideal in the United States for the next 45 years, affecting foreign policy through decades and dominating domestic affairs in the '50s and '60s" (p. 78), resulting in a witch hunt that would engulf American for subsequent years.

A homosexual witch-hunt. By the early 1940s, the seeds of communist paranoia had been planted within the American consciousness, thanks in part to the Alien Registration Act. With a large number of Americans believing the threat of communist-takeover was an impending possibility and hearing rumors of a Russian atomic bomb being developed to incite war against the United States, it was only a matter of time for tensions to grow between the United States and the Soviet Union. With this tension came the growing threat of communist corruption, an idea that grew from China's adoption of a communist government. Horwitz (1995) recalls, "Between 1948 and 1950 . . . terrors associated with the triumph and expansion of Communism . . . dominated public perceptions" (p. 262). In a sense, American ideals changed from an anti-Nazi mentality to an anti-communist one. This mentality, juxtaposed with and incited by the ever-present threat of potential nuclear proliferation, led to the beginning stages of the Red Scare.

Gerassi (1966) suggested, “During the [Red Scare] era, many [US citizens] . . . became convinced that intellectuals are more apt to betray the nation that nonintellectuals and that all the new talk on mental hygiene, eugenic and preventive medicine was basically part of an over-all Communist plot” (p. 64). In fact, the Red Scare eventually led to the electrocution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, a middle-class couple suspected of leaking information about the atomic bomb to the Moscow Kremlin; their deaths accelerated fear and further divided the nation (Fitzgerald, 2007; Garber &Walkowitz, 1995; Horwitz, 1995). The Red Scare, to add, was further fueled by what historians called the *nuclear arms race*, a competition of sorts between the United States and the Soviet Union.

To ensure that communists were not orchestrating the upheaval of American democracy by trafficking with the Soviet Union, the House Un-American Activities Committee (n.d.) was formed. Established in 1938, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) surveilled individuals who completed the Alien Registration Act form, first used in the 1940s. In turn, HUAC used that information to identify and monitor those deemed a potential threat to American democracy. Without the individual’s knowledge, HUAC would conduct clandestine investigations into her or his personal, private, and professional lives and use that evidence against the suspected communist at trial proceedings (Howard, 2016; House Un-American Activities Committee, n.d.). Armed with evidence against certain groups of individuals, the House Un-American Activities Committee believed that the State Department served as an incubator for communism and communist sympathizers.

By the mid-20th century, the blacklisting of people suspected of practicing communism doubled and, by February 1950, “homosexuality made its unexpected debut as an issue of Cold War domestic politics” (D’Emilio, 1992b, p. 58). The reign of paranoia precipitated by the

potential threat of communist collusion and by the publication of Alfred Kinsey's (1948) seminal classic, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male,* did very little to protect the status of or advance the rights for American homosexuals. Kinsey's report fueled societal homophobia by estimating that one in 25 men were

> exclusively homosexual throughout his adult life. . . . Some men venture into homosexual experimentation for a year or two and revert to heterosexuality. Some are bisexual; some marry, have children, and keep their homosexual contacts on the side. This much is certain: male homosexuals in America number in the millions and that number is growing. (Morgan, Wallace, Peters, McGarrity, & Reichenthal, 2007)

In all likelihood, there was no doubt that the affinity between Kinsey's report and cold-war hysteria brought against homosexuality "proved to be a volatile mix" (Lugg, 2003b, p. 107). Blumenfeld and Raymond (1988) conclude,

> The publication of Alfred Kinsey's . . . provided empirical data that homosexuality was pervasive in all strata of American life and that homosexuals could not be identified by stereotypes. In addition, the Second World War brought about major upheavals in American life—women were encouraged to work in factories; there was increasing urbanization, bringing gay men and lesbians into contact more than ever before. Life outside the traditional nuclear family became possible as divorce increased. (p. 377)

The McCarthy trials. Wanting to broaden and deepen the investigation within the United States government, Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy worked separately from HUAC to become the leading authority on ferreting out both practicing communists and communist sympathizers. McCarthy argued that his patriotic duty was to protect America from the "faggots . . . [who were] honeycombed in high places with people you wouldn't let in your garbage

wagons" (Mortimer, 1952, as cited by D'Emilio, 1992b, p. 60). Armed with this agenda, Senator McCarthy began an aggressive pursuit to expose the personal and private lives of hardworking Americans whom he suspected were conspiring to upend the federal government, specifically targeting homosexuals who, he contended, would dismantle the moral fiber of the American landscape by colluding with Russia (Garber & Walkowitz, 1995; Howard, 2016).

McCarthy used excessive power to conduct highly publicized—and extremely controversial—hearings aimed at exposing pro-communist sentiment. The senator "believed homosexuals . . . [might] join with other minorities in defeating capitalism and replacing it with socialism" (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1993, p. 293). This mindset morphed into what is now known as the *Lavender Scare*, the *Homosexual Menace*, or the public fear "that homosexuals had infiltrated the [American] government and that they were spreading their influence throughout the United States" (Toops, 2013, p. 91). D'Emilio (1992b) writes,

> Within weeks after Eisenhower's inauguration, the Republican president issued an executive order that made homosexuality sufficient and necessary grounds for disbarment from federal employment. In addition, all applicants for government jobs faced security investigations, and the number of homosexuals and lesbians who never made it past the screening process far exceeded those whose employment was terminated. States and municipalities, meanwhile, followed the lead of the federal government in demanding moral probity from their personnel. (pp. 60–61)

McCarthy's theory behind the identifying and excising of homosexuals from government offices predicated itself on the principle that homosexuals (when government officials questioned them about their sexuality) would rather expose the secrets of the United States than reveal their own sexual orientations (D'Emilio, 1992a; Howard, 2016; Karslake, 2007;

Scagliotti, 1985). McCarthy contended that communism perverted the mind, whereas homosexuality perverted the body, and when each intersected, the homosexual could not help but become security risks. "Already morally enfeebled by sexual indulgence, homosexuals would succumb to the blandishments of the spy and betray their country rather than risk the exposure of their sexual identity," (D'Emilio, 1992b, p. 60) which was perceived as a dangerous, terrorizing threat to national security. McCarthy's advanced anti-homosexual discourses swelled across the country, engulfing Americans into a state of paranoia. D'Emilio (1992b) remembers that

> in some localities the concern about homosexuality became an obsession. In Boise, Idaho, the arrest of three men in November 1955 on charges of sexual activity with teenager precipitated a fifteen-month investigation into the city's male homosexual subculture. A curfew was imposed on Boise's youth, and the city brought in an outside investigator with experience in ferreting out homosexuals. Over 150 news stories appeared in the local press, and newspapers in neighboring states gave prominent coverage to the witch-hunt. Gay men fled Boise by the score as the police called in 1400 residents for questioning and pressured homosexuals into naming friends. (p. 60)

The idea of homosexuals as terrorists to national security heightened as America entered the 1950s. At this time, 48 states considered homosexuality a felony, with only rape, murder, and kidnapping receiving harsher penalties (D'Emilio, 1982, 1983; Hooker, 1957; Tooms, 2007; Tooms & Alston, 2006). To expose the societal, historical, and cultural misrepresentations of homosexuals, throngs of lesbian and gay activists mobilized throughout the United States. Among the groups were the Mattachine Society, often credited as the "first successful gay rights organization in the United States," (Brownworth, 2015, p. 45) and the Daughters of Bilitis, a San Francisco-based lesbian cohort. Both groups were "tired of the repressive circumstances under

which they were forced to live, [so the groups] began to address their rising concerns about . . . inequality and the ever-expanding injustices against them" (Brownworth, 2015, p. 46). Bronski (2011) acknowledges,

> In its internal study of the problem of homosexuality, the [State] [D]epartment articulated several rationales for removing homosexuals, none of which involved the threat of blackmail or any other link to national security. Instead, the department feared that homosexuals created a 'morale problem' because most 'normal' men did not want to work or associate with them. Sexual perversion was unacceptable in the department because it was 'repugnant to the . . . mores of our American society.' . . . What the State Department and other federal agencies feared was publicity about their homosexual employees. (p. 74)

Fearing the loss of countless jobs due to homophobic discourses, the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis assembled to stop the social persecution of homosexuals, which spearheaded movements that would eventually "shape the movement that has brought LGBTQ people closer to equality than ever before" (Brooks, 2015, p. 50). By targeting gays and lesbians in the work force, McCarthy further fueled the already growing concern for middle-class morality, leading to the ruined lives and reputations of homosexuals and forcing them into or keeping them in the closet. Johnson (2006) explains further,

> The chief of every [diplomatic] mission received a memorandum underscoring the need to eliminate the homosexual problem. Inspectors sent to every embassy, consulate, and mission were given special training sessions on 'methods used in uncovering homosexuals,' instructed to be 'continually on alert' to discover homosexuals, and asked to brief others on the topic during their tours of inspection. (p. 75)

The closet. Metaphorically, the closet, or *being in the closet*, is when a homosexual does not disclose her or his own sexual orientation to others out of fear, misunderstanding, rejection, or retaliation (Blount, 1996, 2003, 2005; Sedgwick, 1990; Silin, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2005). "The defining structure for gay oppression in this century," (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 71) the closet acts as a repressive and dominant form of silence for homosexuals who do not feel comfortable or safe disclosing their sexual orientation. As such, "The homosexual, literally aware of his rejection, respond[ed] by going underground . . . where they . . . [could] escape the disapproving eye" (Morgan et. al., 2007) of homophobic society. Woolley's (2014) study of the theoretical constructs of the closet (or a space where silence is naturalized and reproduced) in public education and its influence on lesbian and gay teachers recapitulates the studies of Foucault when she writes, "Silence [a form a discourse] can be both a manifestation of domination and an act or practice of resistance" (p. 329). That is, by not revealing their sexual orientation, closeted homosexuals are illustrating and highlighting the power of intersectionality and discourse when they participate in the "complex [systems of] interrelatedness of sex, desire, and notions of sin with silence and discourse" (Woolley, 2014, p. 329).

Schools are public spaces where social-structural features like lived experiences and discourses are both limiting and enabling, meaning that silence causes both harm (homophobic remarks) to and usurps the voice (homosexuals who are silenced) from those whose "bodies and identities . . . are situated in secrecy and silence in the closet" (Woolley, 2014, p. 330). Brockenbough (2012) asserts, the closet serves as a "socially and historically produced [mechanism] . . . of power . . . that wield[s] political, economic, cultural, and ideological . . . [power over] queer subjects," (p. 745) most notably lesbian and gay teachers. Shiller (2014)

confesses that the closet "made things more challenging since I felt the need to distance myself from my students" (p. 13).

Historically, Lugg (1998) reports society's discourses have rendered the homosexual teacher as "the symbolic enemy of children, their parents, and public schools;" (p. 278) thus, the intolerance perpetuated by society resulted in lesbians and gays refraining from leaving the closet**.** One view held that "lesbians . . . formed cells in schools and colleges that preyed upon the innocent. They infiltrated the armed services, where they seduced, sometimes raped, their peers" (D'Emilio, 1992b, p. 60). In fact, studies conducted by Fraynd and Capper (2003) and Smith, Wright, Reilly, and Esposito (2008) reveal that homophobic comments were commonly heard in and out of the classroom throughout schools nationwide. Not wanting to deal with or feeling ill prepared to stop and redirect students who used the hate-language, teachers remained silent, whereby, perpetuating, even condoning the homophobic behavior. Fraynd and Capper (2003) and Smith et al. (2008) found that some of the teachers did not intervene out of fear they would be labeled or perceived as homosexual by students.

Additionally, Nickeson (1980) found that misconceptions of homosexual teachers as pedophiles were a common assumption. Nickeson posits, however, those misconceptions are not based in reality: "Most crimes of sexual molestation are cases of adult men abusing underage girls. . . . [I]n those cases, it has been shown that the man usually has a heterosexual orientation" (1980, p. 107). Other factors, like homosexual discrimination on the parts of school districts and administration, have caused sexual minority teachers to remain closeted (Elia, 1993; Smith et al., 2008). Wright and Smith (2015) observe school administrators and "leaders continue to struggle with acknowledging and improving the experiences of LGBT educators" (p. 395).

Lecky (2009) also discovered, “Older gay and lesbian teachers might recall police incidents and laws from 30 and 40 years ago that initiated their fear” (p. 72). Lecky (2009) gathered data on four K–12 lesbian and gay educators using qualitative phenomenological methods. According to Lecky (2009), “Participants cited [fear] as the reason for not being out. . . . However, participants were unable to cite recent justification for their fear;” (p. 53) thus, leading teachers to feel that remaining closeted was the only way to ensure they would not be dismissed from their jobs, even though, as Orlov and Allen (2014) observed, “Teaching from within the classroom closet can lead to feeling inauthentic, disingenuous, dishonest, encumbered, and stressed” (p. 1026). Lecky (2009) found that by remaining closeted “in the heteronormative context of schools,” (p. 53) homosexual teachers would guarantee that administration, colleagues, or students would not retaliate against them.

The Genesis of the LGBTQ Movement

Following the anti-communist and anti-homosexual mentalities of the 1950s, the second half of the 20th century ushered in some advances for queer people. In 1966 and 1967, patrons of San Francisco’s Compton’s Cafeteria and Los Angeles’s Black Cat Tavern, respectively, made history when self-identifying LGBTQ patrons protested unsolicited and un-warranted police raids (Bruce, 2016; Stein, 2012). Then, on June 28, 1969, the Stonewall Riots sparked the modern gay liberation movement when the New York City gay community retaliated after the police raided the Stonewall Inn bar, arresting the bar’s patrons for either being or suspected of being homosexual. The difference between the two preceding riots and the Stonewall Riot: “The ability of [the Stonewall] activists to turn the riot into a catalyst for change” (Bruce, 2016, p. 43). The Stonewall Riots motivated homosexuals to invest more in the lesbian and gay civil rights cause rather than simply mourn the oppression they faced (Armstrong & Crage, 2006; Carter,

2004; Davis & Heilbroner, 2010). The riots would later be memorialized at a national level. Beginning in 1970, the annual Pride Parade was held in June in cities around the United States to remember and celebrate what most consider being the first gay riot in United States' history; Pride is still celebrated annually around the world (Adair & Adair, 1978; Carter, 2004; D'Emilio, 1983; Eaklor, 2008; Kinsman, 2010). Carter (2004) stresses,

> The Stonewall Riots are the critical turning point in the movement for the rights of gay men and lesbians as well as for bisexual and transgendered [sic] people. This six-day struggle by gay people with the police for control of a gay ghetto constitutes an important event in American and world history, for it ultimately led to the inclusion of sexual orientation as a protected category in the civil and human rights movements. This was a significant broadening of these important historic movements and the beginning of the reversal of millennia of oppression. (p. 267)

Paralleling the Stonewall Riots, the Supreme Court case *Morrison v. State Board of Education* (1969) advanced the lesbian and gay movement when a California court ruled that the power of the state does not possess the authority to regulate an individual's right to her or his private life outside the classroom (Morrison v. State Board of Education; The Supreme Court of California, 1969). *Morrison* galvanized the rights for minority individuals in the United States. In fact, the court decided: "The status of being a homosexual was insufficient grounds for dismissal unless coupled with some related misbehavior" (Harbeck, 1992b, p. 126).

Later, *Acanfora v. Board of Education of Montgomery County* (Acanfora v. Board of Education, 1973) summoned much media attention when Joseph Acanfora, a self-identifying gay teacher, filed charges against the Montgomery County School District for what he suspected was retaliation by the school district because of his admitted homosexuality. Acanfora believed the

school district transferred him from a full-time teaching position to a non-teaching position without due cause; thus, infringing upon his civil rights. Although Acanfora lost his teaching position at the school, the case did find that homosexual teachers have no impact on the sexual orientation of their students (Acanfora v. Board of Education, 1973). The court case also concluded, "Most children's gender identity and sexual orientation identity were clearly established by the age of five or six" (Harbeck, 1997, p. 115). The impact this controversial case has had on queer history still reverberates through professional teaching organizations today. For example, the National Education Association (NEA) includes sexual orientation and supported domestic partner language in its nondiscrimination policy (Statement of the NEA, n.d.).

Then, in 1975, a rural high school teacher in Oregon, Peggy Burton, filed for legal assistance with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). In *Burton v. Cascade School District* (Burton v. Cascade School District Union High School, 1975), Burton claimed her principal confronted her at school with rumors of her being a lesbian. Burton, who had witnessed other teachers confronted with the same allegation, was aware that if found to be a lesbian, she faced harsh punishment: dismissal from her job or, worse, admittance into a state-controlled treatment program. She neither confirmed nor denied the allegation against her; as a result, the school district terminated Burton (Burton v. Cascade School District, 1975; Jay & Young, 1979). Ultimately, Burton filed a lawsuit against the school district. Blount (2005) explains, "The ACLU supported her case so it could establish the larger precedent that homosexuals as a class were entitled to civil rights" (p. 113). While Burton's case precipitated a shift in lesbian and gay rights, Blount (2005) points out,

> Burton eventually won some minor concessions like the remainder of her salary for the year she was fired, pay for an additional six months, a few hundred dollars for attorney fees, and the right to have the school district expunge records of her case from her employment file. However, she would not be allowed to resume her teaching duties in the district. (p. 114)

Following the social and political advancements engendered by *Burton*, the progression of homosexuals' rights experienced backlash. For instance, the perception of lesbian and gay educators as perverts, deviants, and child molesters dominated the American consciousness and, unquestionably, incited animosity toward sexual minorities (Blount, 2003; Eisenmanger, 2002; Stader & Graca, 2007). Landmark court cases like *Gaylord v. Tacoma School District No. 10* (Gaylord v. Tacoma School District No. 10, 1971) and *Gish v. Board of Education of Paramus* (Gish v. Board of Education of Paramus, 1976) further intensified the homophobic repercussions that teachers (both formally out of the closet or those suspected of homosexuality) would endure when conservative society's desire to protect children overrides their freedom. Graves (2009) explains,

> Although teachers have been dismissed on the grounds of alleged moral transgressions throughout the history of the profession, public officials in the United States did not concern themselves with teachers' sexuality *explicitly* [author's emphasis] until the mid-twentieth century. Then, as a matter of common practice across the nation, gay and lesbian teachers caught in homosexual raids or otherwise exposed were fired . . . [or] were expelled from the profession. (p. 21)

A gay teacher at Wilson High School in Tacoma, Washington, James Gaylord never disclosed his homosexuality to faculty or students. A student (who struggled with his own

sexual orientation) sought help and advice from Gaylord. According to Gaylord, he never revealed his own sexual orientation to the teen; however, after attempting suicide, the student confessed that he had, in fact, talked with Gaylord, who he had suspected of being homosexual. Not wanting his peers to suspect him of being gay, the teen attempted suicide (Gaylord v. Tacoma School District, 1971; Harbeck, 1995, 1997). The authorities contacted Gaylord's vice principal; the vice principal, in turn, located Gaylord at his home and accused him of recruiting children toward homosexuality. From here, the Tacoma School District terminated Gaylord's employment based on him "occupying a public status that is incompatible with the conduct required of teachers in this district. Specifically, [for] . . . being a publicly known homosexual" (Gaylord v. Tacoma School District, 1971). Even though he fought tirelessly for the return of his job and for his unsullied reputation (the court case was eventually brought to and dismissed by the Supreme Court), Gaylord would never return to the field of teaching (Shilts, 1982).

Like Gaylord's lived experience, in 1976, John Gish, a gay New Jersey teacher, found his teaching position thrown into question when a New Jersey school board declared him as "having acted inappropriately in the classroom" (McGill, 1981) due to his affiliation with New Jersey's Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). Gish's professional and personal reputations came under scrutiny when his supervisor heard about Gish belonging to the GAA. His administrator's homophobia, cobbled with a psychiatrist's findings that Gish was unfit to teach, eventually cost Gish his job (Gish v. Board of Education of Paramus, 1976; Harbeck, 1997; McGill, 1981). Outspoken and recalcitrant, Gish challenged these findings, believing "that his public support of homosexuals was immaterial to his fitness as a teacher;" (McGill, 1981) nevertheless, the school board dismissed Gish from his teaching position. Gish, like James Gaylord before him, never returned to the classroom. Future studies, such as Garfinkle and Morin's (1978) and Nickeson's

(1980), contend, “Results of the present study [on homosexual teachers] do not show that gay teachers are out to convert [or molest] their students” (Nickeson, 1980, p. 107) and that “psychologists and psychiatrists indicate that there are far more attempts to convert gays to a heterosexual orientation than vice versa” (Nickeson, 1980, p. 108).

Homosexual rights. Following the now-famous 1969 Stonewall Riots and the groundbreaking court cases of *Morrison, Acanfora, Burton, Gaylord,* and *Gish*, all of which thrusted homosexual teachers into the media, Miami, Florida, found itself at the epicenter of a great gay diaspora. The burgeoning gay community had found its home in the liberal and iconic Floridian metropolis. Fejes (2008) notes, “Miami had a thriving ‘gay night life,’ with a number of bars catering to both local and visiting homosexuals” (p. 62). The queer community, comprising mostly of men and women from New York City, found refuge in Miami’s “paradise of laid-back sophistication and weather,” (Faderman, 2015, p. 322) blaming New York City’s “few indications of progress” (Carter, 2004, p. 115) as a motivating factor for their geographical exodus. Miami’s Dade County attracted lesbian and gay transplants, especially those who craved the city’s cultural and societal progression.

Despite the community’s cultural welcoming of the homosexual community, however, the gay community could not escape ongoing police intimidation. While gay establishments and bars flourished, police harassment of the patrons who frequented those bars escalated, bringing with it hatred and homophobia. To maintain control over and to bully Miami’s gays and lesbians, the police arrested patrons at homosexual bars, then printed their names, home addresses, and places of employment in local newspapers; thus, creating a repressive climate that encouraged the mistreatment of homosexuals. Faderman (2015) acknowledges,

> Miami police kept trying to 'clean up the perverts.' In 1972 the Gay Activists Alliance decided to take them on . . . [by filing] a class-action suit. They complained to the US District Court that in Miami Beach's gay neighborhood during the previous month four hundred homosexuals had been hauled off to jail for no substantial reason. Police officers who prowled the area hurled verbal abuse at gay people, calling them animals, faggots, fairies. (p. 323)

In response to unlawful and unsolicited arresting and harassing of gays and lesbians, a small coalition, the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was formed, which helped gays and lesbians emerge from the metaphorical closet.

Coming out. Coming out, or *coming out of the closet*, is when a self-identifying LGBTQ individual decides to reveal her or his sexual orientation to others (Kissen, 1996a). Leaving the closet is difficult for anyone not comfortable disclosing her or his sexuality; it is especially hard for self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers due to oppressive discourses surrounding homophobia. Melillo (2003) points out, "While few would question the positive influence of skilled educators on their students, many do question what kind of influence is exerted [by homosexual teachers]." To come out of the closet, LGBTQ "educators need to feel safe and accepted" (Wright & Smith, 2015, p. 395) in a self-affirming, positive environment where trust, personal growth, and acceptance are fostered (Sergiovanni, 2009). Bucher and Manning (2005) define such a school as "one in which the . . . school climate allows students, teachers, administrators, staff and visitors to interact in a positive, non-threatening manner that reflects the mission of the school" (p. 56).

Coming out is especially hard for self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators because they run the risk of being fired, being discriminated against, or enduring homophobic

retaliation from students, administrators, parents, and families (Juul & Repa, 1993). Turner (2010) argues, "When LGBT[Q] teacher educators come out . . . the pedagogical implications will vary according to the educator's community and circumstances" (pp. 297–298). For self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, emerging from the closet publicly and professionally are major intersections that may negatively influence their professional and working relationships with colleagues, administration, the community, and students (Burgess, 2011; Capper, 1998; Jackson, 2007). For instance, DeJean (2007) interviewed 10 lesbian and gay California elementary and secondary teachers. The researcher found that homosexual teachers (both in and out of the closet) often received various forms of backlash, including public harassment on campus, slurs written on their classroom doors, and accusations by administration and parents claiming they are recruiting children toward a homosexual lifestyle (DeJean, 2007). Jackson (2007) interviewed nine homosexual teachers who found that administrative support in their schools made it safer for them to be out of the metaphorical closet. Jackson (2007) found, "The principal's attitude about homosexuality does much to make the school a welcoming or discouraging workplace for gay and lesbian teachers" (p. 9).

Like the studies conducted by DeJean (2007) and Jackson (2007), the findings of Wright (2010) and Smith et al., (2008) provide readers with a more profound understanding of the effects of workplace climate on lesbian and gay teachers. According to their research, bullying prevention (on behalf of teachers and administrators toward self-identifying or otherwise homosexual teachers), administrative support, and homosexual-sensitivity training are pivotal to ensure that teachers feel safe at work (Smith et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2008; Wright, 2010). Wright and Smith's findings strengthen what Juul and Repa (1993) found in their job satisfaction survey. Juul and Repa's (1993) survey concluded that when lesbian and gay educators can be

out of the closet, experienced greater occupational satisfaction. The same survey yielded the following results: out homosexual teachers were more willing to accept praise for their performance; out homosexual teachers possessed greater self-images and felt more engaged in their jobs.

Melillo (2003) argues that homosexual teachers battle *heteronormativity,* or the idea that any other sexual orientation aside from heterosexual is deviant, on a daily basis. To research the impact of heteronormativity on lesbian teachers and their instructional style, Melillo interviewed nine lesbian K–12 educators. Melillo's findings suggest that "the coming out process . . . will guide her [the lesbian teacher] . . . to an understanding and acceptance of her own culture" (2003, p. 18). Melillo explains, however, "This does not imply that a lesbian teacher who is closeted cannot be a good teacher;" (2003, p. 18) what it does mean is that "students . . . will not be given the chance to realize that they know a good teacher who just happens to be lesbian" (2003, p. 18).

Woog (1995) found that "teachers who have come out of the classroom closet describe the effects as exciting, liberating, almost intoxicating" (p. 23). Woog's (1995) research suggests, "In ever-increasing numbers, gay men and lesbians are choosing to be out about their sexuality—open, out, and free" (p. 24). As the 1970s continued, religious and political conservatives, like Anita Bryant and John Briggs, began campaigning against homosexual rights, the campaign being "something that is being camouflaged under Christian faith, Christian love that is one of the most vicious hate campaigns this nation has ever seen" (Cowen, 2015).

Save Our Children: The Anita Bryant Campaign. A former Oklahoma beauty pageant winner and spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission, Anita Bryant emerged on the scene to implore Dade County to reconsider a recently adopted ordinance that granted

homosexual citizens the right to housing and employment without fear of discrimination. According to the 1977 Dade County ordinance,

> Dade County declare[d] itself 'sensitive to the fact that many persons who have homosexual preferences often experience great difficulty in finding suitable employment and housing accommodations,' and they'd [the people of Dade County in favor of the ordinance] ask the commission to add the words 'affectional or sexual preference' to the existing Dade County nondiscrimination ordinance. (Dade County Coalition agenda as cited in Faderman, 2015, p. 327)

Dade County's decision to implement the ordinance upset Bryant. Declaring "not to rest till Dade ceased coddling homosexuals," (Faderman, 2015, p. 333) Bryant captured the city's attention with the creation of her campaign, Save Our Children, which was considered the beginning of a "war [where] America's schools [served as] the battleground" (Kissen, 1996b, pp. 223–224). Hirshman (2012) recalls:

> Once on the political scene, the [Anita Bryant and her supporters] . . . found many things not to like: abortion, the curtailment of school prayer, and the handful of gay antidiscrimination ordinances passed in liberal cities of college town where . . . [homosexuals] had gotten a little traction [toward civil rights]. (p. 79)

Born out of a Christian crusade to save Florida's public school students from what she perceived as homosexual pedophiles, Bryant's Save Our Children campaign represented the first of two attacks (Proposition 6) on the rights of American homosexuals. The Save Our Children Campaign "helped foment a frothy backlash across the country" (France, 2016, p. 124) against the LGBTQ communities. Indeed, Bryant's campaign, designed to preserve and reinforce the social and religious mores of heterosexual, normative America, arrived at the same time other

prevalent issues appeared in the media: the use of contraception, civil rights for African Americans, and prayer in schools. Bronski (2011) recognizes Bryant's mission as the "beginning of the rise of religious right . . . [and that] the outpouring of religious rhetorical fervor and conservative political activity was largely . . . a direct response to progressive social changes" (p. 221).

Many attest that Bryant and the Religious Right wanted to take advantage of the fact that Florida voters could express their concerns with homosexuality at the ballot box, whereas, the legislative and executive branches of the United States government decided upon the former issues (Harbeck, 1992b). Stone (2012) argues that Bryant's antihomosexual campaign "persuaded voters with language about religious rights . . . implying that all gay men were pedophiles and looking to recruit children" (p. 13). To gain momentum in nullifying the referendum, Bryant used her famous name and pop-culture status to amass supporters. Harbeck (1997) writes,

> Save Our Children immediately gathered signatures to petition for a referendum to repeal the ordinance. Financial support for the organization poured in from all over the country, as it did for the groups supporting the ordinance. Dade County became the setting for the head-to-head conflict between the fundamentalist religious movement, with Anita Bryant as its nationally prominent spokesperson and the as-yet rather closeted but increasingly militant GLBT population. (p. 42)

Additionally, Bryant wanted two things to emerge from her campaign: first, for Dade County to prohibit homosexuals from procuring public jobs—specifically teaching positions; and second, for employed teachers (either self-identified as gay or lesbian or those who were perceived as homosexual) to lose their current position based on "the possibility of

[homosexuals] . . . recruit[ing] and corrupt[ing]. . . impressionable children [where they] gathered to learn under the instruction of a trusted adult role model" (Harbeck, 1997, p. 47). To compound matters, homosexuals feared they would be professionally blacklisted. Fearing gays and lesbians were pied-piping innocent children toward the homosexual lifestyle, Bryant compared homosexuals to child molesters, purporting that "she spent agonizing hours . . . crying because she did not want . . . [the citizens of Dade County to protect] the ordinance" (Faderman, 2015, p. 332). While Bryant and the Save Our Children campaign did not overtly promote violence against homosexuals, neither did they attempt to stop it. For instance, Bryant did not censor her hatred of gays and lesbians in the media, an, she never responded to the reactions and homophobia unleashed toward the LGBTQ communities across the country. Harbeck (1997) states,

> Evidence of violence included the bombing of a gay activist's car after he participated in a radio talk show about the ordinance and the shooting of a gay man as he left a pro-ordinance fundraising dance. Coalition members offered rewards for the conviction of perpetrators. They repeatedly called upon the Save Our Children leadership to discourage violence and hatred, although without apparent success. In San Francisco . . . a gay man [Robert Hillsborough, also known as 'Mr. Green Jeans' because of his job as a gardener] was [stabbed fifteen times to death] . . . by four young men shouting 'Here's one for Anita!' (p. 50)

These antigay attacks perpetuated by Bryant supporters did not sway Florida voters: on June 7, 1977, the Save Our Children campaign garnered 65,000 of 10,000 signatures needed to repeal the ordinance (Faderman, 2015; Khayatt, 1992). Horrified and feeling disrespected by their government, Miami's LGBTQ communities protested the modern-day witch-hunt via

picketing and marching in the streets. The recalcitrance on the part of panic-induced LGBTQ communities, however, did not contain itself within the boundaries of Florida. Other cities, including New Orleans and New York, viewed Bryant's well-orchestrated assault on homosexuals' personal and private lives as an ideologically driven attack on their civil rights, resulting in more anti-Bryant demonstrations. In fact, in an attempt to thwart Anita Bryant's attack and to dismantle Save Our Children, LGBTQ individuals across the country implemented a successful boycott of Florida Orange Juice. Accordingly, gay bars across the United States removed orange juice from its menus, replacing it with apple juice (Carter, 2004; Cordova, 2015; D'Emilio, 1983; Faderman, 2015). Cities like San Francisco compared Bryant's anti-gay crusade to influential leaders and murderers in history to amplify their rebellion against Save Our Children. Cordova (2015) remembers:

> Gays and lesbians from fifteen cities across American took to the streets. Then thousand marched in Los Angeles. Five thousand angry San Franciscans protested. Activist Harvey Milk, a newly elected city councilman, was the main rally speaker. Lesbians in Los Angeles marched under a banner proclaiming, 'Hitler. McCarthy. Anita.' (p. 122).

While the Florida Orange Juice boycott was effective, it was not enough to eradicate Save Our Children from the heels of the gay rights movement. Bryant used her celebrity to expand her anti-homosexual cause and to repeal anti-discrimination ordinances in four major cities: St. Paul, Minnesota; Seattle, Washington; Wichita, Kansas; and Eugene, Oregon (each of which was successfully repealed). In an attempt to augment the campaign, Bryant invited Protestant minister Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority to join Save Our Children. Collectively, Bryant and Falwell expounded their views to eager listeners, stressing that homosexuals were scheming to get the nondiscrimination measure passed. The LGBTQ

communities soon realized that their "inchoate movement . . . was on a precipitous downhill slide, and . . . were unable to figure out how to apply the brakes" (Faderman, 2015, p. 359).

Proposition 6: The Briggs Initiative. After witnessing a win for Bryant's Save Our Children campaign in Florida, Republican senator John Briggs intensified the debate over homosexual rights when he started a campaign of his own in California. Briggs, who had worked closely with Save Our Children in its infancy, did not tolerate the burgeoning civil rights movement for homosexuals. He considered Bryant's antigay effort as one of the hottest social issues of the 20th century (Faderman, 2015; Graves, 2009). To attract voter interest, he stressed that since homosexuals cannot birth their own children, they must prey on children as recruitment to advance the homosexual cause (Faderman, 2015; Harbeck, 1992b, 1997). A one-time hopeful for California's governorship, Briggs wanted to devastate the professional lives of gays and lesbians, leaving them without work. To do so, he channeled Bryant by petitioning to remove not only perceived or self-identified gays and lesbians from California classrooms, "but anyone presenting homosexuality in a positive way" (Eaklor, 2008, p. 170).

The Briggs Initiative, also known as Proposition 6, would prevent homosexual teachers, administrators, and staff personnel (self-identified as homosexual or otherwise) from either entering the profession or continuing to practice in the state's classrooms. Like Save Our Children, Proposition 6 invited California residents to vote on whether they supported gays and lesbians as teachers (California Proposition 6, 1978; Eaklor, 2008; Stone, 2012). The language of the initiative defined the roles of lesbian and gay educators as "advocating, soliciting, imposing, encouraging or promoting private or public homosexual activity directed at, or likely to come to the attention of school children and / or other employees" (Harbeck, 1997, p. 64). For Harbeck (1997), the wording of the homophobic measure stressed "the evils of homosexuality.

His [Briggs's] main argument was that gay and lesbian individuals intentionally entered the teaching profession to seduce young students into a homosexual lifestyle. Thus, Proposition 6 was necessary to curb this conspiracy of corruption" (p. 61).

Media exposure allowed Proposition 6 to take center stage for Briggs's and Bryant's morality movement within Orange County, California. Liberals, including the California Teachers Association (CTA), along with administrators, education and political stakeholders, and gay rights activists fought against the impending petition. The now-famous San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, among others, was one of the activists fighting to dismantle and abolish Briggs's Proposition 6. Jones (2016) remembers, "Harvey genuinely liked people, all different kinds of people. . . . He could find common interests . . . and if you met Harvey, you wanted to tell him your story" (p. 129). Often credited for spearheading grassroots activists to challenge the initiative, Milk would eventually help Californians in defeating Proposition 6. Shilts (1982) writes that Milk was "eagerly accept[ing] invitations from around California" to challenge Brigg's initiative (p. 245). Using his influence within the San Francisco government, Milk elicited help from a cadre of mixed-age gays, lesbians, and their allies, all of whom worked to fight for and protect the rights of California's lesbian and gay educators through media exposure, pamphlet handling, and street marches. Wanting to strike down the initiative, Milk publically debated with Briggs two months before California voters took to the polls (Aretha, 2010; Cloud, 1999; Krakow & Gardner, 2001). Harvey Milk (Milk & Emery, 2012) implored the audience by saying,

> If this is allowed to pass, it could become part of an epidemic which will spread to other individuals who are minorities by virtue of their race, religion, sex, political beliefs, or national origin. The Constitution of the United States is meant to protect minorities, not

> the majority. And that's why it's been changed from time to time to protect groups which were not included—such as blacks, and now women. The senator has come up with his usual arguments referring to Dade County tonight. In each case, as we repudiate argument after argument that use the same McCarthyian tactics: Throw down the lie, over and over again, hoping that you believe it, trying to get through to you. (p. 262)

On November 7, 1978, it was announced that California voters did not support Proposition 6; it was defeated 59% to 41% (Biegel, 2010; Brooks, 2015; Shilts, 1982). Although the Briggs Initiative never found its grounding, the initiative would influence the future professional and private lives of gays and lesbians, nevertheless. In fact, Connell (2015) insists that even with the overturning of Proposition 6 "the climate of . . . schools remained dangerous places for openly gay and lesbian employees" (p. 47).

The HIV/AIDS Outbreak

As the final decades of the 20th century approached, the American public welcomed Ronald Reagan as their nation's 40th president and witnessed as a stigmatizing contagion and "an unfathomable killer" (Blount, 2005, p. 165) descended upon the United States: HIV/AIDS. At the onset of the disease's outbreak in the summer of 1981, a "*New York Times* article . . . announced the sudden appearance of this 'gay cancer'" (Faderman, 2015, p. 415). Doctors referred to this rare illness as a *gay* cancer because each of the 26 patients infected with the enigmatic and deadly disease were, indeed, homosexual. "By the summer of 1982," Jones (2016) writes, "almost five hundred cases of what was being called GRID (gay-related immune deficiency) had been reported to the CDC [the Center for Disease Control] in two dozen states" (p. 201). The CDC quickly questioned the disease as gay related because "cases of the new

disease were identified among hemophiliacs, Haitian immigrant communities in Florida, and users of injectable drugs" (Jones, 2016, p. 201).

Eventually, Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), as it was later less prejudicially termed, would reveal new concerns about the homosexual community and its affiliation with high-risk sexual behaviors (Gauthier & Forsyth, 1999; Greene, 2007; Miller, 1995). "This misperception had two immediate implications," argues Lugg (2012, p. 63). First, HIV/AIDS as a public policy issue was largely ignored by politicians until the late 1990s out of fear, misunderstanding, and ignorance. Second, American politicians refused to fund any research on the viral plague because they did not want to appear pro-gay or want to be seen as endorsing, supporting, or encouraging the homosexual lifestyle (Altman, 1981; Lugg, 2012; Plummer, 2001b; Shilts, 1987). The HIV/AIDS contagion terminated scores of homosexual men's lives in the United States and there was "a 'blame the victim' mentality that [was] . . . not applied to other groups" (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988, p. 392). Because doctors could not diagnose what was causing the virus to infect homosexual men, a great number of medical professionals blamed the infections on sexual promiscuity; some felt rampant drug use was responsible; others attributed the death of gays by HIV/AIDS on divine intervention (Altman, 1981; Faderman, 2015; Miller, 1995; Simon, 1998). Further, because the virus was infecting large numbers of gay men in New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, all of which had played a major part in the gay revolution years earlier, "public fear of the contagion" (Engel, 2006, p. 26) exacerbated the already-burgeoning fear of the homosexual community that had begun almost a decade earlier with the Lavender Scare.

With such homophobic discourses intact, it was not surprising that the biological catastrophe brought on by the HIV/AIDS contagion affected "dozens and then hundreds of

previously healthy gay men . . . [who were] suddenly being diagnosed with mysterious and rare diseases that indicated a breakdown in their immune systems" (Gould, 2009, p. 59). For homosexuals, the HIV/AIDS outbreak triggered emotional and passionate responses. Homosexuals and HIV/AIDS activists across the nation, for instance, painstakingly solicited funding for scientific research to be performed on the treatment and elimination of the epidemic. Others mobilized to distribute literature, which explained the suspected causes and telltale signs of the disease. This literature, according to activists, worked to spread awareness of the disease, inform the public and the United States government of its impact on society, and aim to gain public action to fight HIV/AIDS. Kramer (1994) writes,

> The men who have been stricken [with HIV/AIDS] don't appear to have done anything that many New York gay men haven't done at one time or another. We're appalled that this is happening to them and terrified that it could happen to us. It's easy to become frightened that one of the many things we've done may be all that it takes for a cancer to grow. (p. 8)

From here, Bronski (2011) recalls, the idea of gay men as the carriers of the disease eventually swelled throughout the nation and "became associated with gay men in the public imagination" (p. 225). On one level, "By repeatedly stressing that AIDS was God's wrath visited upon the immoral [gays]," (Lugg, 2012, p. 64) the anti-HIV/AIDS supporters did very little to help further the homosexual cause that began with the riots of the early 1970s and continued with the defeat of Proposition 6. On a deeper level, Andriote (1999) reflects,

> Everyone was puzzled by the deaths of formerly healthy young gay men who were showing up with the unusually swollen lymph nodes, malaise, weight loss, fevers, thrush, rare tumors, and bizarre infections that would come to be associated with AIDS. . . . [Yet]

> the CDC's first report on the AIDS epidemic was published on page two of the June 5, 1981, issue of its *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* . . . [and] reprinted and circulated in gay newspapers throughout the country. (pp. 48–49)

Even with newspaper headlines warning gay men of these unexplained maladies, the lack of knowledge surrounding the transmission, containment, and eradication of the virus propagated hysteria and paranoia to engulf America. So many gay men began losing their lives to the virus that a "community-wide bereavement process began as the number of AIDS-related deaths increased" (Blumenfeld, 2012, pp. 77–78). According to news reports shared shortly after the outbreak, 50% of concerned Americans favored the idea of placing those infected in quarantine; 48% wanted those HIV/AIDS-positive to be issued special identification, even branded with tattoos (Epstein & Friedman, 1989; Schulman & Wentzy, 2012; Weissman & Weber, 2011). HIV/AIDS-research supporters and those infected with the virus argued that this World War II-mentality toward HIV/AIDS by conservatives was ushering in new ways of stigmatizing those affected even more.

Lugg (2012) explains that the emergence of the Religious Right's influence on 1980s public education and discourse caused scrutiny over school politics—especially, homosexual teachers' suspected influence on students. Driven by fear and misinformation, "Parents expressed concern that their children would be placed near AIDS-infected classmates, [resulting in] . . . rallies and protests to force school officials to remove infected children from classrooms" (Engel, 2006, p. 26). This mindset did not do well to quell the anxiety homosexual teachers felt, fearing they would be forced out of the classroom. With this in mind, Lugg (2012) recognizes, "Although this focus is not surprising given pubic education's prominent role within American society, what is astonishing are some of the conclusions drawn by members of the Religious

Right" (p. 61). For example, fundamentalist Christians believed America was suffering from secular and hostile takeovers that would eventually lead to economic and religious ruin (Bennett, 1995; Lugg, 1996a, 1996b, 2006). Fundamentalists also blamed the homosexual movement for providing lesbian and gay educators the opportunity to leave the closet and publicly, even proudly, declare their sexual orientation to the world (Gross, 1993; Lugg, 2012; Schneider, 1987). Since "many Americans were deeply uncomfortable with the notion of gays and lesbians 'coming out' [of the closet]," (Lugg, 2012, p. 62) the Religious Right felt America was removing itself from traditional morality, most notably with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This stigmatization eventually found its focus in the classroom:

> For the Religious Right, injecting homophobia into debates over public education policy has been an effective means of hijacking the agenda and reframing the terms of discourse according to their own paranoid rhetoric. . . . [T]he politics of homophobia [and HIV/AIDS-phobia] played a significant role in shaping the debate over educational change. (Lugg, 2012, p. 68)

Shortly before the HIV/AIDS outbreak, the nation's Secretary of Education, William Bennett, authored an article for *The American Educator* titled, "The Homosexual Teacher" (Blount, 2005). In the article published shortly after the outbreak of HIV/AIDS, Bennett supported the idea of homosexual teachers remaining in the closet, refraining from disclosing their sexual orientation, or leaving the profession altogether, even though in 1980, Nickeson (1980) found, "Gay teachers can offer a different sort of role model to young people . . . [and by] . . . keeping . . . gay teachers silent about their sexual preference fails to serve society at large" (pp. 110–111). Bennet insisted, "Communities should determine what values are conveyed in

schools" (as cited in Blount, 2005. p. 161). Armed with this information, society was further misinformed about the lived experiences of lesbian and gay teachers (Woog, 1995).

By 1983, evidence had concluded that "HIV/AIDS was an infectious disease transferred by bodily fluids and by exposure to contaminated blood" (Greene, 2007, p. 95). Silin (1995) maintains, "HIV/AIDS brings together the especially potent symbols of blood, sperm and sex . . . [as well as] identity and behavior [all of which] are confounded in the rush to designate specific populations—gay men, injection drug users, prostitutes, minorities" (p. 13). That same year, "The CDC documented heterosexual transmission of AIDS" (Greene, 2007, p. 96). This finding meant that the perception of HIV/AIDS solely as a disease found in the homosexual community was no longer accepted. Miller (1995) reports,

> When it was revealed that members of other groups—hemophiliacs, Haitian immigrants, recipients of blood transfusions, intravenous drug users, the sex partner (and sometimes children) of those carrying the virus, and millions of heterosexual men and women in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—were also infected, it was clear that the disease wasn't necessarily 'gay' after all. (p. 440).

Evidently, because homosexuals were exiting the metaphorical closet at greater numbers shortly before the HIV/AIDS crisis (Herdt, 1997), the "old social contract about sexual deviance [on the part of homosexuals and homosexual teachers] . . . was . . . starting to erode at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s" (Hunter, 1997, p. 39). As such, the HIV/AIDS explosion forever changed any positive movement for the homosexual cause; whereby, the disease "simultaneously elevat[ed] and demoniz[ed] homosexuality as an issue [nationally]" (Hunter, 1997, p. 39). "In the absence of self-identifying speech, most persons are assumed to be heterosexual" (Hunter, 1997, p. 39), and, because medical professionals at large suspected only

homosexual man to be the carriers of the HIV/AIDS virus, "AIDS transformed American discourse about sexuality" (Hunter, 1997, p. 39). Media, political, medicinal, and religious discourses surrounding the epidemic stressed for those personally or indirectly affected by HIV/AIDS to remain outside the morally acceptable mainstream.

By doing so, public health authorities and medical professionals exacerbated the already growing discrimination toward the homosexual community; also, this discrimination against the homosexual community further demonstrated the ignorance surrounding not only the disease but also homosexuality in general. Such paranoia and misunderstanding of the HIV/AIDS virus led to 13-year-old Ryan White's expulsion from public school in 1985. A hemophiliac who caught the disease through a blood transfusion, White "could not return to school because of fears that other students and school staff might contract the virus through skin contact . . . or other means" (Blount, 2005, p. 166). By the miseducation surrounding Ryan White's blood transfusion, it became clear to the homosexual community that public schools and "the Religious Right [were] unwilling to marshal federal resources on social issues, [and that] the Reagan administration stubbornly refused to allocate any significant research or education money toward AIDS" (Miller, 1995, p. 452).

In terms of HIV/AIDS research, actions were put into effect to stop the allocations. For instance, in October 1987, Senator Jesse Helms attempted to stop the CDC from allocating any funding toward HIV/AIDS prevention and research. Helms did not want the government "to provide AIDS education, information, or prevention materials and activities that promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual sexual activities;" (Hunter, 1997, p. 45) likewise, others argued that heterosexuals do not want their tax dollars aimed at a supposed gay disease (Herek & Capitanio, 1999). In the end, Congress did not agree with Helms's antigay rhetoric,

and by the end of the 1980s, “Dozens of AIDS service organizations . . . received millions of dollars of government funding for education and other prevention efforts” (Hunter, 1997, p. 47). When it came to marketing the prevention of the disease, however, the United States government took a different stance.

Shortly after Helms’s unsuccessful attempt to prohibit HIV/AIDs funding, the American congress enacted a policy, which stated if HIV/AIDS materials are distributed to the public, the materials need to focus only on prevention and treatment and should not encourage or justify homosexual sexual activity in any way. HIV/AIDS education and discourse, therefore, became more about promoting what society deemed healthy and normal (heterosexual lifestyles) and vilifying any unhealthy and deviant (homosexual) lifestyle. Consequently, gay and lesbian teachers were forced to remain silent and secretive about their sexuality (Blount, 2000), and, in words similar to that of Foucault’s theory on societal and cultural discourse, Hunter (1997) writes, “The politics of speech profoundly shaped AIDS policy. AIDS policies, in turn, transformed public discourse on homosexuality, more so than any other event, including Stonewall, Briggs or the battle over . . . civil rights” (p. 47).

In fact, in 1983, West Virginia kindergarten teacher Linda Conway found herself dismissed from her job because her “clothing provoked rumors” (Blount, 2005, p. 164) of her being a lesbian; thus, according to the plaintiffs, Conway was threating the well-being of the children she taught because of her suspected homosexual lifestyle. According to the lawsuit *Conway v. Hampshire County Board of Education* (1983), Conway needed to dress (or costume herself, in a Butlerian sense) in female appropriate attire as not to confuse her students about her gender identity/expression. By wearing pants to school, the Hampshire County parents stressed, Linda was sending the message to students that gender-nonconformity was acceptable and an

undeniable deviation from the prescribed male/female binary (Blount, 2005). The State Supreme Court of West Virginia ruled in favor of the school board firing Conway from her teaching position, "because the community perceived her as a lesbian" (Blount, 2005, p. 164). According to Blount (2005),

> Conway's case offers another example of the [troubled] link between gender nonconformity and same-sex desire [and public education]. Persons who display gender qualities that do not align with their biological sex often feel the sting of oppression purportedly aimed at persons who desire others of the same sex. (p. 164)

Queer Emergence and Visibility

The 1990s experienced a slight upswing in terms of homosexual advancement. For instance, Khayatt (1992) released her seminal study, whose research uncovered the lived experiences of homosexual female educators. Khayatt notes, "Nowhere in the school system do teachers and students interact in a more concerted and intensive way than in the classroom situation" (1992, p. 173). For Khayatt and the women she interviewed, the classroom is where teachers not only "practice their pedagogical skills" (1992, p. 173) but it is where relationships are manifested and where "teachers . . . reveal most about themselves as individuals" (Khayatt, 1992, p. 173). Khayatt's research also stresses that the women were afraid to disclose their sexual orientation to administration, colleagues, or students out of fear of persecution or retaliation. Khayatt (1992) reflects,

> A teacher's private life is ostensibly invisible in the classroom, and yet there is an ease with which many heterosexual teachers are able to include personal details into a discussion or give information about their male and/or child(ren). This is . . . absent with

homosexual teachers. Heterosexuality [in the classroom] is normative, . . . institutionally sanctioned, ideologically affirmed, and socially encouraged and expected. (p. 205)

Following Khayatt's study, Juul and Repa (1993) set out "to improve and enrich . . . [the public's] understanding of how the disclosure or non-disclosure of a lesbian, gay male, or bisexual teacher's sexual orientation at work influences her or his perceptions of job satisfaction and job stress" (Juul & Repa, 1993, p. 6). Juul and Repa's findings revealed that teachers who were *out* of the closet felt more comfortable in their jobs and garnered greater success in terms of overall professional performance (Juul & Repa, 1993). Later, Juul (1995a, 1995b) examined the experiences of gay males, lesbians, and bisexuals (once again) in the academic setting. The quantitative study found 60% of rural lesbians showed greater job satisfaction than gay men and bisexuals; rural and suburban homosexual teachers are more fearful of being outed; and rural homosexual teachers experienced depersonalization from their students, "emotional exhaustion . . . and a lower sense of accomplishment" (Lecky, 2009, p. 23).

Kissen (1996a) captures the essence of the lesbian and gay experience in education. Of those teachers surveyed, all agreed that "teachers who come out [of the closet] in school still risk harassment, dismissal, and physical violence" (p. 3). The teachers in her study were either totally closeted (in hopes of being perceived by colleagues as heterosexual) or out of the closet (Kissen, 1996a). Kissen explains, "Being implicitly or explicitly out . . . does not remove the pressure to be a model teacher" (1996a, p. 42). To add, Kissen contends that the anxiety (about being or being perceived as homosexual) coupled with the pressures of homophobia tends to leave lesbian and gay teachers reluctant to share—or be happy about—who they truly are (Kissen, 1996a).

Acknowledging that homophobia toward educators does not stop at the secondary level of American public education, McNaron (1997) reports her discoveries of 300 lesbian and gay working academics at the collegiate level. In doing so, McNaron's mission through her qualitative work was to shed light on the stories of those "who [have felt] . . . ignored, discounted, and at risk because . . . [they] do not conform to heterosexual patterns of behavior" (McNaron, 1997, p. 7). McNaron's qualitative data recapitulated the findings of Kissen (1996a) and Khayatt (1992) in that homophobia and fear greatly affected the educators she interviewed, keeping them afraid, silenced, and closeted. Indeed, McNaron found that even at the postsecondary level, the themes of fear, homophobia, and leaving the closet impeded the educators' pedagogical effectiveness and relationships with students. To illustrate, McNaron (1997) asserts,

> Lesbian and gay faculty often find ourselves in a pedagogical double-bind: our students can attack us if we are closeted but they suspect, and they can also attack us if we are open. In this regard, our students merely reflect the society in which they live and, in many cases, the academic world in which they learn. (p. 40)

Additionally, McNaron's (1997) findings demonstrate that the intersections of fear and homophobia have caused "gay and lesbian faculty [to] . . . remain closeted at work" (p. 70) to protect their jobs, as well as to foster any hope for career advancement. It was around this time that students began using the word *gay* as the ultimate insult; suddenly, according to Sears (2005), students used the antigay term as "the epithet of choice to denote something bad, undesirable, or just different" (p. 67). This Foucauldian manner of using language to manipulate and reproduce the ideals of heterosexuality and gender expression underscores the unpleasant ways self-identifying LGBTQ teachers must navigate the troubled waters of education.

Furthermore, McNaron's study closes by zeroing in on the effects on the professional lives of closeted teachers; by remaining silent about their sexuality, according to McNaron, lesbian and gay teachers are at risk of never engendering or sharing any kernel of professional teacher-to-student, teacher-to-parent, or teacher-to-community relationships. On this issue, McNaron (1997) notes that when teaches are closeted their

> teaching is muted at best and seriously distorted at worst. While most attributed their remaining closeted in classes to hostile campus environments, some criticized themselves for not being out in class, feeling that they would not only serve as role models for any lesbian or gay students in their courses but also might open up classrooms to a variety of diversities. (p. 49)

Although great political strides had swelled to help the homosexual community, including as the 1990s waned, hate crimes escalated against the LGBTQ communities. In fact, from 1988 to 1996, hate-crimes against the homosexual community increased by almost 400%, and of those hate-crimes, "50% of all victims sustained some injury, 25% received serious injuries, and two percent were killed" (Stewart, 2001, p. 133). Case in point: The 1994 shooting of Brandon Teena, a transgender male living in rural Nebraska, and the murder of transgender teen Gwen Araujo brought awareness to the discrimination enacted upon transgender persons (Blount, 2005). In California, unknown assailants savagely beat 17-year-old gay student, Adam Colton, on two separate occasions after Colton declared he was gay. Due to non-supportive attitudes on behalf of administrators following the attacks, Colton felt he had to relocate to and enroll at another school. As such, Meyer (2012) points out that fiercely homophobic and heteronormative American public schools were sending "the message that schools do not value, welcome, or even tolerate these borderland identities" (pp. 12–13).

Two years later, Wisconsin's Jamie Nabozny, a gay high school student, claimed administrators "did nothing to stop years of antigay verbal and physical abuse" (Blount, 2005, p. 174). According to the case *Nabozny v. M. Podlesny, et al.*(1996), school administrators "claimed Nabozny brought it [verbal and physical harassment by peers] on himself for being 'too gay'" (Jackson, 2007, p. 7). According to the U.S. Department of Education, school administration, by not protecting Nabozny from verbal and physical harassment, had infringed upon his Title IX rights of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Stewart, 2001). Nabozny's court case, as well as the murder of gay college student Matthew Shepard, activated national attention as well as public discourse to the importance of protecting lesbian and gay youth (Jackson, 2007).

At this point in history, it seemed as though the only experiences the homosexual community saw reflected by these studies and even the media were negative. Case in point: The brutal beating and death of gay college student Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming, in 1998 drew the greatest media attention and sparked major discourse surrounding anti-homosexual violence. Matthew Shepard's murder not only raised even greater awareness of the plight for the LGBTQ communities in the United States, but also exposed the ignoring of the hatred aimed at these communities (McNiff & Josue, 2013). Valdes (1998) further elucidates,

> Matt's life was robbed by the homophobia of our laws and lawmakers who, in his case, had refused several times to enact state and federal statues designed to help protect Matt from his eventual fate. Because the majoritarian governing elites of Matt's state and country decline to include sexual orientation in their hate crime statues, they not only refused to protect the vulnerable among their people specifically from hateful murder and other bodily harm, they also indirectly signaled approval for the practice of sexual orientation bias in civil society. (p. 1426)

By 1999, conversations and discourses around homosexuality, including hate crimes and homophobia, inundated the nation, and, for Sanlo (1999), "more need[ed] to be known about the professional work experiences of lesbian and gay teachers" (p. xvii). Sanlo, familiar with Harbeck's (1992a, 1992b, 1995, 1997), Khayatt's (1992), and McNaron's (1997) informative research on the homosexual teacher's lived experience, elected to interview 16 lesbian and gay public school teachers in northeast Florida; of the 16, Sanlo selected five stories because "they touched me deeply, and informed this work—as well as my future work—in dramatic ways" (Sanlo, 1999, p. 35). Like Kissen's (1996a) research, Sanlo's qualitative findings reveal lesbian and gay teachers are reluctant to leave the closet and refrain from reaching out to parents in fear of parents realizing their child's teacher is homosexual; thus, compromising any promise of building the much-needed trust and relationships (Mayo, 2008). Most importantly, "These five empathically declared their desire to assist at the great risk of identity discovery," points out Sanlo (1999, p. 35).

Sanlo (1999) opened the qualitative study by acknowledging, "Lesbian and gay people who are teachers in the public school system must live with the added stress of identity management and fear of discover just to remain employed" (p. xv). Like the researchers before her, Sanlo discovered, "The results of this study are remarkable in that the participants' perceptions and fears as lesbian and gay teachers sound so similar to one another. . . . The fear of job loss was consistently in the forefront of each participant's concerns" (p. 124). Sanlo recommends that more professional development and interventions need to be implemented to ensure that self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers feel safe, protected, and respected at work. At the time of its publication, Sanlo's (1999) study found that self-identifying non-heterosexual educators

> may have the same everyday professional encounters as their heterosexual colleagues, but there is a significant difference: They enter their classrooms and interact with students and colleagues daily with the overwhelming fear that their sexual orientation will be discovered and ultimately they will be terminated from employment" (p. 129). Sanlo also found that gay and lesbian teachers, even though they often work in fear, enjoy their jobs and "remain in teaching . . . in spite of those difficulties. (p. 129)

Homosexual Issues at the Millennium and Beyond

Following these influential studies, by 2000, the world of academic research allowed for more exposure of the lived experiences of homosexual educators (Blount, 2005). For example, Conley and Colabucci's (2001) phenomenological research stresses how important it is to gain a richer understanding of the lived experiences of lesbian and gay teachers; they found, "Because of the personal nature of education, it is important that stakeholders recall, retell, and rethink who they are and what informs their experience" (Conley & Colabucci, 2001, p. 16). Driven by the mission to "explore further the role of narrative in education" (Conley& Colabucci, 2001, p. 17), the researchers concluded that due to the lack of common discourse "results in gay men and lesbians failing to embrace the power of stories and thus limits their ability to reflect critically on their experiences" (Conley & Colabucci, 2001, pp. 13–14) related to the intersections of their personal and professional lives.

Other court cases, like Wisconsin's *Schroeder v. Hamilton School District* (2002), highlighted the need for more understanding, compassion, and sensitivity trainings on the part of public schools. After Tommy R. Schroeder, a gay elementary public school teacher, revealed his sexuality to students, "Some students began to call him 'faggot' and suggested he had AIDS;" (Walsh, 2002, p. 28) other homophobic actions were visited upon Schroeder, specifically

parental harassment and slashed vehicle tires. Shortly before suffering from a nervous breakdown due to the emotional toil brought on by the harassment, Schroeder "reported the incidents to administrators, but most of the harassment was anonymous and went unpunished" (Walsh, 2002, p. 28). The U.S. Court of Appeals found, "The district had a rational reason for limiting its response to harassment of a gay teacher because" in revealing his sexuality to his students, Schroeder, in turn, caused the students to become "prematurely preoccupied with issues of sexuality" (Walsh, 2002, p. 28). Jackson (2007) contends that the climate of 21st-century American public schools "have been improving in fits and starts as more gay and lesbian teachers come out" (p. 7) of the closet; however, even with these positive movements toward LGBTQ teacher acceptance, Lugg (2008) highlights,

> Queer public school employees, though unlikely to be beaten or assaulted at work, still face incurring the wrath of their communities and school boards. . . . [T]here is enormous pressure on queer school personnel to remain closeted for fear of igniting a local political backlash. (p. 188)

Fraynd and Capper (2003) echo this sentiment when they report, "While the majority [of Americans] may permit the existence of LG [lesbian and gay] individuals, most do not want them around their children" (p. 87). Consequently, most LGBTQ teachers feel the need to remain closeted out of fear of becoming "targets of discrimination, [and] physical violence . . . because of their sexuality" (Connell, 1997, p. 8). Nixon (2006) argued school districts need to purposely seek out and employ homosexual teachers because their presence "forces schools and other educational institutions to face reality in terms of continuing discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexuality" (p. 280).

Like Nixon, Pinar's (1998) earlier research maintains, "We [as education stakeholders] remain in a defensive position: trying to teach tolerance, trying to teach truth, trying to find ways to decenter and destabilize the heterosexual normalization that so constructs . . . the public world we inhibit" (p. 6). Studies as early as 1990 indicate that some believe homosexuality is not a choice, rather it is natural (Furnham & Taylor, 1990; Wright & Smith, 2013). Likewise, Mayo's (2008) qualitative analysis of seven gay teachers recapitulates the importance of supportive administration quelling workplace anxiety within lesbian and gay teachers. Mayo encourages school administrators to "promote professional, inclusive work environments where *all* faculty members can perform at their best, free from unnecessary, peer-relationship issues" (2005, p. 9). The six individuals interviewed in Endo, Reece-Miller, and Santavicca's (2010) study extends the importance of administrative support because homosexual teachers will often "not disclose their sexual identity . . . in order to appease the school community" (p. 1029). When all teachers feel safe, respected, and affirmed in schools, they will, in turn, "make . . . better teachers for *all* [author's emphasis] students" (Mayo, 2008).

Lugg (2006) recognizes that sodomy laws, drawing on *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), have done much to strip queers of their identities—especially those who work in professions like education. In fact, not only are the suspected individuals charged with violating strict sodomy laws and are faced with potential jail time, but, often, their "teaching and administrative licenses" (Lugg, 2006, p. 36) are revoked. In *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), Harris County police officers arrested interracial gay couple John Lawrence and Tyrone Garner, charging them with violating a Texas criminal code that "criminalizes all same-sex consensual sexual activity" (Lugg, 2006, p. 47). On June 26, 2003, the Texas Supreme Court adjudicated, "The State cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime"

(Lawrence v. Texas, 2003). Lugg then goes on to relate this critical legal case to the idea of American public schools as gender police.

Historically, as Blount (2003, 2005), D'Emilio (1989, 2014), and Kissen (1996) have addressed, schools construct, maintain, and regulate rules about what it means to be male and female, leaving those who transgress "at risk of dismissal or expulsion" (Lugg, 2006, p. 37). "Although the *Lawrence* decision open the door . . . for queer people . . . given the historic roots of various stigmas concerning queers, [schools] will for the time being retain their problematic panopticon," observes Lugg (2006, p. 50). This panopticon—the system through which gender is policed and regulated during the school day—is indeed shaped by a particular "gender regime . . . [that] constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity" (Kessler, Ashenden, Connell, & Dowsett, 1985, p. 42). This contemporary court case, in particular, serves as the ultimate paradox in which queer and non-queer issues still haunt the American public school landscape (Lugg, 2006).

Jackson (2007) used a qualitative phenomenological approach to interview nine lesbian and gay teachers. Jackson addresses the often-misguided notion that "coming out as a clear-cut 'in' or 'out'" (p. 9) is not true. Jackson's study yields information "that being open about sexual orientation often occurs on a case-by-case basis" (p. 9) based on the climate of the school, as well as the homosexual's perception of her or his safety. Put simply: Coming out of the closet does not mean leaving it forever; instead, as Jackson points out, the closet acts as a placeholder, into which a homosexual can enter and leave depending upon the situation. Given "the current representation of homosexual in US schools," (Endo, et. al, 2010) Jackson's findings reveal, "Gay and lesbian teachers are still treated with suspicion and hatred" (2007, p. 4). Lugg (2016) found, "Contemporary queer public school personnel are terribly isolated" (p. 106) from their

heterosexual counterparts, students, and community. Both Lugg and Jackson implore public schools "to stop erasing and start embracing queer identity" (p. 110).

More recent studies, like Jones's (2014) survey of school climate animated further discussion about the ways in which heteronormativity "control[s] the belief systems about sexuality and perpetuate[s] a larger societal belief about sexuality and sexual identity" (2014, p. 1). Jones's qualitative approach invited educators (Jones never discloses the actual number; he merely uses seven educators' stories) to share their thoughts on how 21st century schools "dictate our belief systems about" (Jones, 2014, p. 58) hetero- and homosexuality. The qualitative data of Brockenbrough's (2012) interviews suggest that, like Jones's (2007) data, the closet plays a major role in the work lives of homosexual teachers. Furthermore, Turner's (2010) findings suggest, "Gay teachers and prospective teachers who are gay or lesbian have made a very bad bargain, tacitly agreeing to [remain] . . . closeted" (p. 287) to protect their jobs.

Brockenbrough's (2012) findings, however, expand on the idea of the closet by indicating the closet's paradoxical ability to enable teachers to fight homophobia to guarantee no one else suffers the anxiety and fear they once experienced in "the homophobic milieus of . . . educational settings" (p. 761). Given this, Lipkin (2004) cites, "Most teachers worry less about vicious harassment or termination than they do about damaged relationships with colleagues and students" (p. 97). Even with this in mind, Duke (2007), whose qualitative study "examined the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers," (p. 19) contends, "The political, cultural, and religious discourse in the United States has become quite hostile to gays and lesbians," (p. 20) and, in all likelihood, has negatively affected "the voices and experiences of gay and lesbian educators" (p. 34). Consequently, Duke notes, "Gay and lesbian educators remain hidden, invisible, marginalized, [and] ignored" (2007, p. 34). Given this, Blount (2005) reminds us,

> Just as they were 100 years ago, school workers today are hired in part to model and preserve normative sexuality and gender. When parents, community members, and school workers plead for more men in schools so that youth will be exposed to 'strong male role models,' really this often means that they want heterosexual men who will regulate the sexuality and gender of students and school personnel. Men who pursue traditionally female-associated jobs, display gender-nonconformity, remain unmarried or openly identify as gay . . . typically are not hired . . . or, if hired, endure heightened scrutiny. In much the same manner, women who seek male-associated educational positions . . . tend to face internal resistance, if not over employment discrimination. (p. 182)

Consequently, individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ within the public school context are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, as well as to show increased risk of teacher burnout, drug abuse, self-harm, and alcoholism. A safe school is an environment where administrators, faculty, staff, and students interact with one another in non-threatening and positive fashions; a safe public school campus is also where education and safety are modeled, fostered, and expected by all stakeholders (Bishop, Carraway & Stader, 2010; Rottmann, 2006; Sears, 1991, 1993, 2005; Wright & Smith, 2011, 2013, 2015). Additionally, the numbers of teachers who self-identify as non-heterosexual are growing incrementally. In fact, over 75% of teachers who responded to a national study conducted by Smith, Wright, Reilly, and Esposito (2008) documented experiencing some form of homophobia in the work environment.

Additionally, and perhaps not surprisingly, self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers often face oppressive structures, like heteronormative education policies, thinking, discourses, leadership, and other structures that perpetuate a culture of homophobia. These

factors, to a graver extent, engender a school climate fraught with hostility, intolerance, and unsafe working conditions for administration, faculty, staff, and students alike (Bishop, et al., 2010; Hibbard, 2012; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Smith, et al., 2008).

Critique of and Gaps within Previous Research

While the literature surrounding the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators does afford the qualitative researcher with a wealth of information, most of the studies discussed in the literature review used quantitative approaches to reveal these individuals' stories. Rather than using a quantitative approach like most of the major studies, the researcher of this study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture "the multiple realities represented in participant perspectives, and that context is critical in providing an understanding of the phenomenon being investigated" (McMillan, 2012, p. 273).

While valuable and applicable in many areas, the quantitative method does not provide enough rich narrative description to accomplish the goal of reflecting on "the complexity of human behavior" (McMillan, 2012, p. 273). For instance, Juul (1995a, 1995b) studied the experiences of 904 gay, lesbian, and bisexual public school teachers using quantitative means. Clearly, this study did not arrive at any essence of the teachers' lived experiences because, in all probability, there was no way Juul (1995a, 1995b) "could know how and why behavior occurs" (McMillan, 2012, p. 275) in these teachers' lives at such a deep, meaningful level. Likewise, Kissen (1996) uncovered the nuances of 105 teaching professions. Large participant numbers, such as these, cannot allow the quantitative researcher to perform "an in-depth interview study . . . to understand the experience of those who are interviewed" (Seidman, 2013, p. 54). Qualitative researchers seek to interview subjects whose stories are worth documenting, sharing, and validating. Seidman continues, "The job of an in-depth interviewer is to go to such depth in the

interviews that surface considerations of representativeness and generalizability are replaced by a compelling evocation of an individual experience" (2013, p. 55).

The quantitative methods that use a smaller number of co-researchers are outdated. For example, Woog's (1995) study of 12 self-identifying lesbian and gay K-12 public school teachers and Sanlo's (1999) study are over outdated by over a decade. Other studies, including Harbeck (1992b, 1997), Jackson (2007), and Lecky (2009), do a thorough job of exposing and explaining the lived experiences of non-heterosexual American public school teacher. These particular studies, however, do not include the stories of bisexual, transgender, or queer individuals, all of which need to be appreciated, recognized, mined, and analyzed through a phenomenological approach.

Even the most recent and perhaps most popular of collections of stories, Jennings (2005, 2015) fails to perform a qualitative analysis of the individual authors' stories. Jennings (2015) admits, "My greatest joy in editing this collection was its diversity" (xii). In this context, Jennings's collection of personal accounts of LGBT educators, while it does add to the burgeoning body of self-identifying LGBT pubic educators' stories, the collection does not highlight the teachers' poignant histories, does not welcome narrative richness with reflection, does not utilize a theoretical framework to ground the lived experiences, or render the deep, descriptive "quality of lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 25) that a phenomenological study would. Other studies, like Jackson (2007) and Harbeck (1992a, 1992b, 1997), do not bare the "plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9) because of the lack of authentic, individual, and historied lived experiences.

Perhaps what the research is greatly lacking is diversity in its sexual orientations. None of the research studies discovered through the literature search, for instance, used the terms

bisexual, *transgender*, or *queer* as categories for co-researchers. Without these terms, one could argue that the lived experiences of these individuals is not being shared, honored, or respected. With new and ongoing conversations about the spectrum of sexuality and gender identity, it is even more crucial for researchers to investigate these issues. Due to the ways in which individuals have adopted these terms to label their sexual orientations, it is critical that more research is conducted to capture the lived experiences of not only self-identifying gay and lesbian public school teachers, but also capture the lived experiences of those whose identities are not always recognized. Further research on these sexual identities is needed to add to the growing body of literature surrounding self-identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer teachers' storied experiences.

Summary

Since its inception, the American public education system, in large part, has fostered social and cultural gender norms, shaped the way society views those norms, and controlled and reproduced the discourses surrounding views on homosexuality in American culture and society. Beginning with the early colonists, the policing and appropriating of gender roles set forth by the dominant, religious heteronormative society made it virtually impossible for LGBTQ individuals to express themselves without fear of persecution in its various forms—especially within the environs of the schools. The strict binary paradigms of masculinity and femininity set forth, accepted, and then imitated by Western society constructed and codified the roles of gender in American society, culture, and politics, as well as in its public schools. Such discourses made it criminal for anyone to deviate from these norms—especially those who worked in public education (D'Emilio, 1982; Lugg, 2003a).

Within these aggressively heteronormative and homophobic frameworks, the self-identifying LGBTQ public school educator has had to traverse the discriminating, troubled, and heteronormative landscape of education, either by remaining closeted to survive or quitting her or his job altogether. Research has shown that historically the individuals with the discursive powers (the heteronormative culture) define the socially constructed ideals of gender while imbuing the education system both with heteronormative thinking and with narrowly defined gender norms. With ongoing violence aimed at the LGBTQ community in recent years, it is only fitting that self-identifying non-heterosexual public school teachers to feel unsafe, unprotected, and discriminated against in while at work. With the help of burgeoning research on the lived experiences of these educators, as well as with the aid of queer theory, intersectionality, and phenomenology, the researcher will seek to imbue this research study with the much-more-needed meaningful, robust, and relevant conversations to add to a pre-existing corpus of qualitative research.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology and procedures that will be implemented to investigate and unpack the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

> [The] starting point of phenomenological investigating is largely a matter of identifying what it is that deeply interests you or me and of identifying this interest as a true phenomenon, i.e., as some experience that human beings live through. (van Manen, 1990, p. 40)

This study utilized qualitative methodology to examine and explore the lived experiences of six self-identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) public school teachers. The following conceptual frameworks were used to ground this study: queer theory/criticism, intersectionality, phenomenology, as well as the social, cultural, and political signatures of LGBTQ history. These specific theoretical frameworks worked simultaneously to systematically study, interpret, unpack, and reveal individual stories, lived experiences, and histories of a particular group of individuals (Creswell, 2007; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2007).

Wanting to broadly and deeply investigate the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, the researcher designed the central research question and illustrative ancillary sub-questions to elicit an engaging discourse around a "puzzle that shaped [the teachers' narratives] . . . into a deeper understanding of the multiplicity of plotlines and contexts" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 230). In doing so, the researcher invited the readers of this study not only to enter the lives of everyday self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, but also the researcher attempted to supply a humanized voice to a community whose words are often disempowered, not recognized, or silenced while navigating the heteronormative and homophobic work environment (Blumenfeld, 1992; D'Emilio, 1985; Elia, 1993).

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) found these stories crucial to explore because "the inability of the outside to know the frustration, the anger, the joy, and the feelings of accomplishment

teachers," (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 102) especially those in the LGBTQ communities, is pivotal to understanding any human's lived experience. Through this phenomenological approach, the researcher showed that LGBTQ individuals' experiences within the structure of education need to be looked at—not in isolation—but examined through their interactions with and by others. Additionally, through rich phenomenological conversations, the researcher widened the scope of and contribution to the small, yet burgeoning body of research in this particular field, specifically for those self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers whose stories have not been heard, recognized, honored, or affirmed.

Research Questions

This research study delved into the lived experiences of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers: three lesbians; one gay male; and two transgender males. The researcher's findings revealed their successes and failures, their frustrations and celebrations, as well as their reflections and recommendations within their often highly heteronormative and homophobic professional work environments. The following research questions and ancillary sub-questions drove, illustrated, and undergirded this phenomenological study:

- Central question: What are the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators?
- Sub-question 1: How has being LGBTQ shaped the lived experience of educators?
- Sub-question 2: How have the intersections of personal life, professional life, and formal policies and laws impacted the overall lives of LGBTQ public school teachers?

- Sub-question 3: How have the intersectional interactions with administration, faculty, students, and students' families shaped the experiences of LGBTQ public school teachers?
- Sub-question 4: What supports do LGBTQ public school teachers need in place to promote their safety while at work?

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators, using a phenomenological framework as well as narrative inquiry to undergird the study. Because its "method of data collection has been advocated as being particularly well suited to the collection of data on sensitive topics," (Hewitt, 2007, p. 1149) phenomenology works well within social science fields, particularly education, because its main approach is to capture the essence of an individuals' lifeworld or lived experience. To add to the burgeoning body of research on this topic, the researcher, through this qualitative study, showed the "indissoluble unity between a person and the world" (Laverty, 2003, p. 8) and how she or he perceives and experiences it.

By braiding phenomenology with narrative inquiry, the researcher endeavored to render stronger, deeper interpretations of the stories that each self-identifying LGBTQ co-researcher shared. For these reasons, the researcher used these specific approaches to interview each of the six co-researchers, a term applied to the individuals being researched as a means of illustrating a researcher/researched relationship; thus, by referencing each teacher as a co-researcher, the researcher was able to foster a relationship that enriched the interviews, helping to capture the essence of the co-researchers' lived, complex, and nuanced experiences (Ellett, 2011; Given, 2008; Guba, 1981).

Research Design

Phenomenology. Phenomenology, in a Foucauldian sense, worked much like the theory of discourse in that this qualitative approach to interviewing is "the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, [and] the internal meaning structures of lived experiences" (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Likewise, phenomenology explored the ways in which prolonged descriptions of an experience helped the researcher and the co-researcher arrive at "what is considered reasonable and true," (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 106) or the very essence of any endeavor. This research, underscored by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is important both within the field of education and for educational professionals because a teacher's "[lived experiences in] their classrooms, their schools, and their communities" (p. 64) are full of rich, nuanced stories waiting to be shared.

Pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in revealing universal truths, phenomenological research focuses on and fosters an increased understanding of events through the rich and thick description offered by the co-researcher. Phenomenology provided a philosophical foundation, as well as a methodological base, for this study. This researcher employed a phenomenological approach to afford himself and each of the six co-researchers the opportunity for great depth of understanding of the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators. Primarily, this research juxtaposed phenomenology with narrative inquiry as a means to "conceptualize the inquiry experience as a storied" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71) and multi-faceted narrative used to characterize several individuals' experiences, as well as aid in capturing the essence of those experiences.

Naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry is a theory of knowledge that contends no single version of reality exists within the lived experiences of people; instead, reality is

predicated upon and transformed by an individual's own perceptions of reality, including the intersections (sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) acting upon them (Crenshaw, 1996; Hancock, 2016); thus, rendering their lived experience quite different from any other person's (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry, to add, lends itself to phenomenology because both have a "way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17). Clandinin (2007), for instance, urged the use of this social science approach to help both the researcher and co-researcher understand her or his knowledge of their lived stories by pointing out, "Working closely with practitioners to understand their experience" (p. 371) is vital to understanding the ways in which teachers interact within the confines of their professional environment. Both methods served as a "reflexive approach to understanding the human condition through critical and engaged analysis of one's own experiences" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 24)—namely, through in-depth interviews "with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.18). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that an individual's lived experience "grow[s] out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences" (p. 2).

Equally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued phenomenology and naturalistic inquiry honor the multiple realities that are possible due to the lived experiences of many individuals and, hence, a qualitative method "is more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered" (p. 40). Perhaps more greatly, van Manen (2014) added, "For the researcher it is important to realize that experience, as we live it from moment to moment, is always more complex, more nuanced, more richly layered than we can fathom, and meanings emerging from reflecting on lived experience are always ambiguous,

enigmatic, and ultimately unfathomable" (p. 42). Moustakas (1994) wrote that qualitative analysis in general

> is a difficult task and requires that we allow a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and to come to know it as it presents itself. One's whole life of thinking, valuing, and experiencing flows on, but what captures us in any moment and has validity for us is simply what is there before us as a compelling thing, viewed in an entirely new way. (p. 86)

To aid in the researcher capturing the essence of the co-researchers' lived experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) viewed the naturalistic inquiry process as "inquiry in narrative terms [that] allows us [both the researcher and co-researcher] to conceptualize the . . . reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story and reliving a life story" (p. 71). Clandinin (2013) stressed the importance of using a narrative approach with educators, because "the institutional stories of school profoundly shape us all" (p. 22). In a sense, because the researcher and co-researcher have, at one point, been "shaped by their living stories of school. [These] stories of school are powerful shapers of these stories we live in and by" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23). Based on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Ellett (2011) posited, "Narrative [inquiry] is considered both the phenomenon and the method" (p. 7), and "central to narrative inquiry are the beliefs that stories give meaning to people's lives, and the stores are treated as data" (2011, p. 7). Likewise, Creswell (2013) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) argued narrative inquiry must portray an individual's lived experience as a rich, complex, and robust picture, which, in turn, helped the researcher to arrive at the essence of each of the six co-researchers' lived experiences while addressing the four sub-questions and central research question.

Phenomenological research, according to van Manen (2001), "remains oriented to asking the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon . . . as an essentially human experience" (p. 67). Van Manen (1990) insisted that written responses, participant observation, and conversational interviews need to be used as "a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience" (p. 66) and these interviews act as "an interactive, dialogic that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher [to] encourage reciprocity" (Lather, 1991, p. 60). Even greater, phenomenology is an approach that works well to document the essence of a group's shared experiences with the primary focus being on the rich, nuanced description of events, not the cause or explanation of it. Creswell's phenomenological approach uses interviews as the primary source of information, and those interviews are then written as a narrative and realized to examine the essence of the shared experience (Creswell, 2007; Merleau-Ponty, 2012).

Research Setting and Population Size

Research setting. The city in which this research study was conducted was located west of a major metropolitan city. This location was famous for its strong-rooted support of education, its cultural background, its more than 20 parks, and its affinity with the National Register of Historic Places. This city's school district served just over 20,000 pre-K–12 students and maintained numerous campuses. Furthermore, at the time of this study, the school district did not offer explicit trainings aimed at instructing faculty, staff, or students on LGBTQ awareness or sensitivity dialogues. In terms of resources and support for the student populations, fewer than half of the secondary schools within this district offered Gay/Straight Alliances (GSA) for students; overall, none of the elementary schools offered any GSA support for its staff or students.

To increase awareness of the student LGBTQ population, the researcher worked with the other district GSA advisors to create a nexus of communication between students across the district, as well as with the leaders at the school district's district office. The GSA advisors met yearly with district leaders to problem-solve issues that arose, to concentrate on the safety of and inclusion for LGBTQ students and staff, and to adopt LGBTQ-themed curriculum. While the researcher acknowledged that LGBTQ individuals, especially the LGBTQ co-researchers in this study, were vulnerable, "mortal and subject to fears and dangers," (van Manen, 2015, p. 202), the researcher stressed that it was important for their stories to be told and shared so that others may learn from their lived experiences.

Population size. This purposive sampling of individuals for this phenomenological study consisted of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators; the number of co-researchers was kept to a manageable size to increase trustworthiness. In fact, Creswell (2013) recommended "studying 3 to 10 subjects;" (p. 157) likewise, Connelly (2010) added that the fewer number of co-researchers the better. For instance, Connelly (2010) stressed that qualitative research works best when the manageable size of co-researchers are fewer than 10 so that the researcher can reach the essence of the co-researchers' stories that ultimately "produce rich and thick descriptions" (p. 127). As a result, the researcher and co-researcher "become deeply involved in the data" (Connelly, 2010, p. 127). More so, Seidman (2013) stressed that researchers working in the qualitative medium do not need to worry about a large number of co-researchers; the researcher, rather, needs to seek and focus on two criteria: sufficiency and data saturation of information. On one hand, sufficiency means to interview a "population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it" (Seidman, 2013, p. 58). On the other hand, data saturation means to analyze the raw interview

data to the point where no new categories can be teased out (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 1995) and when "the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported" (Seidman, 2013, p. 58) and is "no longer learning anything new" (Seidman, 2013, p. 58).

The researcher was confident that the co-researchers' stories would provide "enormous power to the stories of a relatively" (Seidman, 2013, p. 59) marginalized community, as well as supply voice to an underrepresented group in professional literature. This method, most strikingly, worked well because phenomenology permits its researchers to listen "to participants [as they] tell their stories" and, as Clandinin (2013) found, "we [the researchers] become part of the participants' lives and they part of ours" (p. 24).

Sampling Methods

The sample for this particular study involved six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers: three lesbians; one gay male; and two transgender males. The researcher anticipated that the public school educators participating in this study would work in different schools, elementary through high school. To establish feasibility of the purposed study, the researcher shared a preliminary informal conversation with the district administrator in charge of granting permission for such research to be conducted within the school district. The administrator provided the researcher with the appropriate paperwork needed for gaining permission to conduct the research. Given the available resources, time, and past research, the following sampling methods were used.

Purposive criterion sampling. The co-researcher population in this particular qualitative study involved six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Perhaps the most common example of sampling approaches within the qualitative realm, purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select co-researchers based on pre-determined criteria. Savenye and

Robinson (1996) observed qualitative research "becomes not random but purposive" (p. 1055) in its methods and recruitment procedures. Clandinin (2013) also reminded readers that teachers and the schools in which they work possess richly nuanced stories waiting to be discovered and shared. Van Manen (1990) wrote, "The phenomenological attitude towards the concerns of our daily occupation compels us to constantly . . . question: what is it like to be an educator? What is it like to be a teacher?" (p. 45). For this specific study, the researcher set two criteria: first, each of the co-researchers needed to be licensed and be currently employed as public school teachers; and, second, each public school educator needed to self-identify as LGBTQ. Furthermore, the co-researchers did need to be out of the closet to participate in this study. Because the researcher wanted to meet each of the six co-researchers at her or his comfort level as a means of reaching the essence of her or his lived experience, the researcher wanted each to be comfortable sharing their experiences simply as they self-identify (Seidman, 2006; van Manen, 1990, 2014, 2015).

As stated previously, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) found that educators are the best co-researchers for this type of study because "teachers . . . are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories" (p. 2). Van Manen (1990) wrote, "The phenomenological attitude towards the concerns of our daily occupation compels us to constantly . . . question: what is it like to be an educator? What is it like to be a teacher?" (p. 45). This study not only strived to address these questions but also attempted to capture the lived experience of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators.

The purposeful sampling within the confines of this study consisted of "people and sites from which the sample is selected [to] . . . be fair to the larger population" (Seidman, 2013, p. 56). In other words, the co-researchers' sexualities varied among the LGBTQ continuum, allowing the researcher to "explore the experience of minority teachers" (Seidman, 2013, p. 56).

The most crucial criteria: each participant needed to self-identify as LGBTQ. Clandinin stressed researchers "are interested in the storied experiences of teachers. . . . Understanding [teachers' lives] . . . in this way sets the research context and research puzzle [as] . . . part of the process of thinking narratively" (2013, p. 42).

Intensive sampling. Intensive sampling, a subgrouping of purposeful criterion sampling, "consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely" (Patton, 1987, p. 171). This meant that the researcher sought "excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 1987, p. 171). Intensive sampling, in the vein of Heuristic research, "draws explicitly on the intense personal experiences of the researcher" (Patton, 1987, p. 171). In terms of the phenomenological interviews, taking a descriptive approach to this particular study allowed the researcher to couple phenomenology with narrative inquiry to "understand the research participant's words as expressing a meaningful temporal unfolding of life in situations with other people" (Wertz, 2011, p. 29).

Relationships. To form meaningful relationships with each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, the researcher needed to foster what Palmer (2004) termed a *circle of trust*. A circle of trust, according to Palmer (2004), is when individuals (in this case, the researcher and each of the six co-researchers) "share . . . a strong culture of soul-honoring relationships" (p. 74) that are intentional and affirming. Because the researcher had previously formed a circle of trust with each of the six co-researchers prior to this study, the researcher and each of the co-researchers found "common ground on which people of diverse" lived experiences, histories, and stories could "explore issues of the inner life" (Palmer, 2004, p. 80). By a qualitative researcher relating to the lived experience of the co-researchers and establishing a prior circle of trust, the researcher examined the lived experience more intensely "to elucidate

the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 1987, p. 171). Establishing a trusting and meaningful relationships with each of the co-researchers allowed the researcher to "create common ground that is both open and focused by framing our exploration" (Palmer, 2004, p. 81) around the shared lived experience of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers.

Just as crucial, the researcher, in addition, anticipated that the longstanding relationships he shared with each of the six co-researchers would illicit rich, deep, and comfortable conversations. Van Manen (1990) mentioned that such candid conversations "may start off as a mere chat . . . but then, when gradually a certain topic of mutual interest emerges, and the speakers become in a sense animated by the notion . . . a true conversation comes into being;" (p. 98) thus, allowing the essence of the co-researcher's lived experience to materialize. Rogers (2007) advised researchers to enhance the researcher-researched intersectional relationship by respecting "the voices of the participants in research" (p. 101). This approach not only respected the actual discourses emerging from the interviews, but also situated both parties "in a linguistic community . . . [where] patterns of . . . social, ideological, and political interests" (Rogers, 2007, p. 101) can enhance and make easier the thematic coding of the raw interview data; the patterns Rogers (2007) mentioned reflected and described the central research and ancillary sub-questions of this study.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior approval. Prior approval was obtained to begin the formal phenomenological interviews from the designated school district. To establish feasibility and relevancy of this purposed study, the researcher shared a preliminary informal conversation with the district administrator charged with granting permission for such research to be conducted within the

school district. The administrator provided the researcher with the appropriate paperwork needed for gaining permission to conduct the research.

Recruitment. The researcher directly recruited and interviewed six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Rather than using gatekeepers, the researcher used professional connections with a number of prospective co-researchers, all of whom the researcher knew professionally. The already-established circle of trust that the researcher shared with each of the six co-researchers added credibility to this qualitative study. "Establishing trust, credibility, and rapport within qualitative research engagements have frequently been cited as central mechanisms that support research relationships," explained Clark (2010, p. 402). To add, engaging in the qualitative research framework with individuals the researcher already knew, the researcher, in effect, underpinned and constructed "a frame within which participants shape their accounts of their experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 110) in a safe, trusting environment.

Additionally, the researcher had no supervisory role in relationship to the co-researchers. The researcher knew each the co-researchers professionally and contacted each participant via a non-recorded telephone call. Each of the co-researchers had self-identified themselves as LGBTQ to the researcher at one point prior to this phenomenological study. The co-researchers were aware of the study and discussed it informally with the researcher. Once each of the co-researchers were recruited by the researcher, had agreed to enrolling into the study, the researcher then provided each of six co-researchers with an Informed Consent Form (Appendix A).

Informed consent. The researcher wrote the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A) and submitted it to be read and approved by the researcher's dissertation committee and adopted by

Concordia University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Informed Consent Form included the researcher's contact information, a description of the study's purpose and design, as well as outlined the co-researchers' rights and role within the phenomenological study. After each of the six co-researchers returned a signed copy of the Informed Consent Form to the researcher, the researcher welcomed her or him to the study. From this point, the researcher informed each co-researcher of the purposed time and date for the first formal, prolonged interview.

Interviewing the Co-researchers

Interview protocols. The formal, individual phenomenological interviews occurred in a private study room located in a public library within Washington County. To promote confidentiality for this qualitative study's co-researchers, the researcher reserved a private conference room within a designated Washington County library, remembering that Palmer (2004) alerted the researcher to the fact that "we seem to have forgotten that the environment in which we meet has an impact on the quality of what happens within us and between us" (p. 85), especially in the context of this study where relationships and interviews are instrumental to capturing the essence of these six co-researchers' lived experience. More so, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "The conditions under which the interview takes place also shape the interview," (p. 110) due to the sensitivity and importance of this study.

To shape the interview within an "intimate participatory relationship," (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 110) the researcher arrived at the designated conference room 10 minutes prior to each interview and then exited 10 minutes after each interview; this helped to reduce any chances of co-researchers being inadvertently identified as being associated with the research study. To increase confidentiality, the researcher elected not to contact the co-researchers using email, only by non-audio recorded telephone conversations.

Sequence of interview. Following approval by both Concordia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and by the researcher's school district site, the study occurred in the following sequence. Once approved, the researcher made initial contact with potential co-researchers in the form a contact visit, as indicated by Seidman (2013). The researcher wanted to make "a contact visit before the actual interview [to aid] . . . in selecting participants . . . [and to help] build a foundation for the interview relationship" (Seidman, 2013, p. 50).

A preliminary meeting with each of the potential co-researchers was scheduled during a time of convenience for both the researcher and each of the six co-researcher. During this meeting, the researcher supplied the co-researchers with the researcher's contact information, as well as with the Informed Consent Letter (Appendix A), requiring the co-researcher's signature to show understanding of and their involvement in the study. The researcher ensured that each of the six co-researchers felt safe participating in the study, was made aware of her or his right not to participate in the study, and that each would feel comfortable meeting the researcher at the selected interview location. From here, the researcher and the co-researchers started the next step of data collection: interviews.

Interviews. To ensure that each participant received similar interview structures, the researcher began each of the formal interviews by orally reading the Interview Protocol script (Appendix B). The same questions were used during each of the formal qualitative interviews. The Interview Questions (Appendix C) consisted of a series of semi-structured interview questions to stimulate and enhance the "questioning-answering . . . dialogue" (van Manen, 1990, p. 98) between the researcher and each of the six co-researchers. The researcher used Seidman's (2013) interview process, as mentioned above, to stimulate conversation, remembering that flexibility would be key in this process. Given this, the researcher was mindful to design

interview questions that would produce the data necessary to answer the central and sub-questions without disrupting the flow of the interview due to having to answer *every* interview question. In other words, the openness and flexibility of each of the phenomenological questions yielded a deeper, richer, and prolonged answer that justified the phenomenon itself.

Given Seidman's (2013) rigorous method of interviewing, the researcher also anticipated that the pre-existing relationships he shared with the co-researchers would allow for some natural, candid conversation to occur, which not only provided deeper insight into the co-researchers' lived experiences, but also welcomed the emergence of "deeper meanings or themes" (van Manen, 1990, p. 99). The researcher predicted that these co-researchers would feel comfortable enough to engage in an "interpersonal or collective ground that brings the significance of the phenomenological question into view" (van Manen, 1990, p. 99). To engender a relaxing atmosphere, the interviews occurred in a neutral, comfortable location where the co-researchers enjoyed non-alcoholic beverages and food. The researcher communicated with each of the six co-researchers to organize a place and time to conduct the interviews. The interviews were then recorded digitally. As stated earlier, the researcher maintained fieldnotes following each of the formal interviews, taking note of vocal tones, facial expressions, demeanors, and emotional reactions.

In-depth personal, prolonged, and semi-structured interviews were used to document the perceptions of six self-identifying LGBTQ teachers, allowing the researcher to enter into a "textual expression of [these self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers'] essence" (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). Each of the six co-researchers participated in one in-depth semi-structured interview with the researcher and two of the co-researchers participated in one follow-up interview. The researcher selected this method of data collection because it was an effective

approach to gaining insight, knowledge, and candid responses from the subjects' lived experiences, perceptions, actions, and feelings around being an LGBTQ educator in public schools. The central research question and four ancillary sub-questions were designed in such a way that they stimulated conversations that fully reflected and captured the lived experience of these individuals. "If you conduct your research in a systematic and rigorous way and develop trust, you soon will become privy to certain information . . . which even all insiders might not be aware," as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 98).

Creswell (2013) argued that interviews serve as the primary method for qualitative research. The researcher conducted one formal interview with each of the co-researchers, with an additional follow-up formal interview with two of the co-researchers. The interview questions were designed to enable co-researchers to share as much poignant and candid detail about their personal and professional lives. Creswell (2013) stressed that formal phenomenological questions that start broad and eventually narrow to answering the interview sub-questions evoke greater, more concentrated data. If the questions did this, then, according to Creswell (2013), the data should reveal the very essence of the co-researchers' lived experiences.

Furthermore, this approach to interviewing worked well with phenomenological research, argued Gall, Borg, and Gall (2007), because the researcher needed to be flexible during the formal interview so he could ask follow-up questions or ask the co-researchers to expand on an event. The questions asked during the formal, prolonged interviews endeavored to address each of the four sub-questions and, in turn, addressed the central research question of this qualitative study.

At the genesis of each interview, the researcher read the Interview Protocol (Appendix B) in its entirety. This served as a reminder of the participant's role within the study, informing

each co-researcher of the time limit, the flexibility with the questions, and the chance to end the interview at any time. The researcher informed each participant that the formal interview would be audio recorded. By doing so, the researcher wanted to supply each co-researcher with the "assurance that private information they share . . . will not be revealed to others at their expense," (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 112).

The researcher took the opportunity to revisit the Informed Consent Letter (Appendix A) with each co-researcher prior to each formal interview. After each participant agreed to participate in the study, the researcher asked co-researcher to sign the consent form. The researcher allowed for the requisite time for the co-researcher to ask any questions or express concerns. The researcher opened the interview by reading from the opening script of the Interview Protocol sheet (Appendix B) and then asked the same 10 open-ended questions, allowing for additional questions or information as needed throughout the interview (Appendix C). The phenomenological interview questions were written as a means to stimulate each participant's description of their lived experience as an LGBTQ public school teacher. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher structured each formal interview so that the co-researcher could "bring forth the voice and spirit within a life-as-a-whole personal narrative" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 224).

Seidman (2012) believed that co-researchers can explore the meanings of their lived experience within the context of deep, prolonged discussion. "Watch for an ebb and flow in interviews," Seidman (2013, p. 91) suggested. During the first stage of the interview process, "They [the co-researcher] may become so engrossed in the first interview that they say things that they are . . . surprised they have shared" (Seidman, 2013, p. 91). Based on this, according to Seidman, the second round may cause the co-researcher to "pull back and [not want] to share as

much as before;" (2013, p. 91) subsequently, the researcher has to be cautious "not to press too hard" (Seidman, 2013, p. 91) for more material. Doing this may cause the co-researcher unexpected anxiety. The second and "third interview[s] allow participants to find a zone of sharing within which they are comfortable," Seidman maintains, and "they resolve the issue for themselves" (Seidman, 2013, p. 91).

Additionally, to maintain the integrity of the interviews and to capture non-recordable reactions to the questions, the researcher maintained fieldnotes and a reflexive journal during the data-collection process. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined fieldnotes as "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (pp. 118–119). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) viewed fieldnotes as "a small fragment of the notes used in a narrative study" (p. 5) and can be used to explore further meanings of the co-researcher's lived experience.

Bias and emotion. Due to phenomenology's nature of being "often difficult since it requires sensitive interpretive skills and creative talents from the researcher," van Manen (2014) admitted, "it can be argued that its methods of inquiry constantly has to be invented anew and cannot be reduced to a general set of strategies or research techniques" (p. 41). More crucially, because of the descriptive nature of phenomenology, it is important that "the phenomenologist . . . be reflectively aware of certain [biases and feelings]" (van Manen, 1990, p. 57) that could somehow affect the lived-experience descriptions of the co-researcher.

The researcher accepted a Heideggerian approach when interviewing each of the co-researchers. For instance, the researcher understood that there is no absolute way to completely excise bias from one's mind. Heideggerian phenomenologists advise researchers to reflect on their biases since "consciousness is not separate from the world, in Heidegger's view," (Laverty,

2003, p. 8) and that this pre-understanding of the world "becomes part of our historicality and background" (Laverty, 2003, p. 8). Like the lived experience itself, an individual's experiences, much like discourses and intersections, are what construct a person's background and her or his understanding of it. As a result, one needs to be aware of these influences and account for them through the coding analysis following each of the formal interviews (Kvale, 1996).

As a self-identifying LGBTQ educator, the researcher was aware of this bias within the paradigms of this study. "There are times when an interviewer's experience may connect to that of the participant," acknowledged Seidman (2013, p. 91). This bias was acceptable; Jansen and Peshkin (1992) believed that like the intersections acting upon each of the co-researchers, the same intersections, like "one's sex, social class, and ethnicity," (p. 705) unquestionably acted upon the researcher. Even more, Hewitt (2007) emphasized, "To understand how reality is constructed and interpreted, the researcher's inherent subjectivities, including values, beliefs, and emotions should be accepted as centrally involved in the research process" (p. 1149). "By being conscious of these influences and thereby identifying the sources of their bias, researchers can enhance the quality of their studies" (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p. 706) and share in a more meaningful and unique relationship with the subjects of the study.

Ginsberg and Mathews (1992), as cited by Jansen and Peshkin (1992, p. 707), also argued that bias is something that cannot be excised from the researcher's mind. In fact, they advised the researcher not to attempt to remove her or his preconceived notions, "and the notion of objectivity rejected as neither necessary, nor even desirable" (Hewitt, 2007, p 1149). Ginsberg and Mathews (1992), instead, called for the researcher to reflect on her or his pre-established bias "both for the purpose of making better decisions and discovering if the [biases she or he

possesses] . . . themselves are important sources of data for understanding what is happening in a particular setting" (p. 13).

Additionally, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) honored the use of bias and emotions in qualitative analysis when they "encourage[d] narrative inquirers to establish" (p. 73) a circle of trust with the co-researchers. In doing so, the researcher and the researched engaged in a discourse that helped "transform the cramped sense of time that keeps us from taking community seriously," (Palmer, 2004, p. 75) meaning that what emerges from this interaction is the essence of the lived experience. Even though the phenomenological interview process, like building a circle of trust, takes times, the time itself "becomes more abundant as we [the researcher and the researched] learn to live more responsively to the wisdom of the soul" (Palmer, 2004, p. 75).

More so, the researcher worked with both interpretive and descriptive approaches to phenomenology, as well as with narrative inquiry, to "resist formalizing a common 'method' and . . . [in turn, situate] emphasis on the interpretive power of stories to bring meanings of lived experience to light" (Wertz, 2011, p. 29). For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), this allowed for "good narrative working relationships" (p. 72). The authors suggested that the researcher and co-researcher remain friendly "once the researcher is ensconced" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 73) in the study itself and thereafter. "In everyday life, the idea of friendship implies a sharing, an interpenetration of two or more persons' spheres of experience," pointed out Connelly and Clandinin (1988, p. 281) and the same is true in this study: both parties worked relationally to understand the co-researchers' lived, storied experiences.

Giles, Smythe, and Spence (2012) found that when it came to phenomenological endeavors, relationships, indeed, do matter. "Narrative inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship with co-researchers' lives. They cannot subtract themselves from [their]

relationship," noted Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 69). In terms of the interviews, taking a descriptive approach to this particular study allowed the researcher to marry phenomenology and narrative inquiry to "understand the research participant's words as expressing a meaningful temporal unfolding of life in situations with other people" (Wertz, 2011, p. 29). Most importantly, qualitative and narrative inquiry allowed the co-researcher to expand her or his lived experiences in "the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 70). In fact, when the relationship between researcher and co-researcher was strong the "relational experiences are engaged, connected and respectful of the other" (Patton, 2015, p. 220). Wertz (2011), largely, related narrative inquiry to phenomenology because each method views "human science research . . . [as] valuable knowledge through words" (p. 29).

Furthermore, to enrich and deepen the phenomenological interviews between the researcher and each of the six co-researchers, as well as to draw the reader into the phenomenological narration, Seidman (2013) recommended the researcher avoid asking yes/no questions at all costs because such questions would not elicit deep, prolonged, or rich responses. Instead, Patton (2015) and Seidman (2013) advised the researcher to ask open-ended questions that would invite the six co-researchers to describe their experiences within the confines of their personal and professional lives; these types of questions, in turn, prompted the researcher "to think about the thinking process involved" (Patton, 2015, pp. 252–253) in answering such questions. Patton (2015) reinforced this idea by stating that the rich, thick descriptions surrendered by such interviewing methods is the crux of qualitative reporting. This "fluid and emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry makes the distinction between data gathering and analysis," pointed out Mondale and Patton (2001, p. 436).

Fieldwork. Fieldwork laid the groundwork for both the researcher and the phenomenological research being conducted. With this in mind, the researcher entered the realm of fieldwork, which "refers to being out in the subjects' world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 82). Similar to the relational theory of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Bogdan and Biklen (2007) advocated for the researcher to establish a trusting, meaningful relationship with the research subjects instead of one based on author, control, and dominance. In doing so, both the fieldwork and the interviews yielded poignant material that encapsulated the very essence of the co-researchers' lived experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as well as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stressed that the affinity between the researcher and co-researcher is what drives, informs, and strengthens the interviews.

Interview time limit. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) asked researchers to interview a co-researcher no longer than one hour per interview session. The authors contended, "Limit the sessions to an hour or less [because] . . . there is a tendency to . . . [interview] longer than you should. Fieldwork takes discipline. Practice restraint" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 102). With Patton's (2015) and Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) findings of the importance of the researcher and co-researchers establishing a relationship prior to the formal interviews occurring, this study concerned itself with fostering the already-established relationship between the researcher and co-researchers. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), furthermore, emphasized that prior relationships allow both the researcher and the researched to experience a "wholeness of an individual's life experience" (p. 17).

Data Analysis Procedures

This study relied on the following to analyze the raw phenomenological data: a series of audio recorded then transcribed interviews of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators'

lived stories, as well as the fieldnotes and a reflexive journal maintained by the researcher. The data from these sources, primarily the transcribed audio recordings, was coded and recoded for the sole purpose of labeling the emerging themes and insights.

The processing of the raw interview data analysis occurred after each interview cycle of the phenomenological process. Merriam (2009) defined data analysis as "a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). Fieldnotes will be "collected through . . . observation in a shared practical setting" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5).

Following each formal interview, the researcher transcribed each interview, yielding the raw interview data. Each transcript was assigned a de-identifying pseudonym, maximizing confidentiality for each of the six co-researchers. The researcher then coded and recoded, each time looking for significant themes and insights described by each participant. The researcher viewed the coded data following each interview cycle; thus, allowing the researcher to view the data with a fresh perspective at each cycle (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Audio recordings. A digital voice recorder was used for the individual, face-to-face interviews to capture every word of the co-researcher's lived experience. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) alerted any qualitative researcher to "never record without permission" (p. 112). The audio recordings served as a vocal enhancement to the fieldnotes. Following each interview transcription, the researcher immediately destroyed all audio-recorded interviews to maximize and promote confidentiality.

Transcription of audio-recorded interviews. Following each of the formal, qualitative interviews, the co-researchers' answers were transcribed verbatim; that data was then

systematically analyzed and coded using the leading qualitative computer software, ATLAS.ti (2015). To maintain confidentiality, the researcher removed all recordings and de-identified all personal information—namely, the co-researchers' names and places of employment. All audio files were destroyed immediately following transcription. Each co-researcher granted permission to record interviews. Paper records were shredded; electronic files were erased.

Coding. In phenomenological research, coding "is the process of combing the data for themes, ideas and categories" (Online QDA, 2016). Saldańa (2013) suggests, "Keep[ing] yourself open during [the] initial [stages] . . . of data collection" (p. 65) so that both the expected and unexpected codes materialize, allowing for meaningful and underpinning themes and concepts to surface, as well. The goal of the researcher was to take the transcribed interviews of the six co-researchers, then code each of those interviews. In doing so, the researcher identified and developed new theories about a phenomenon.

After each interview cycle, the researcher transcribed the actual audio-recorded descriptions, yielding the raw data. Each participant's transcript was assigned a de-identifying pseudonym. This maximized confidentiality for each co-researcher. From here, linguistic and social patterns evolved, as each co-researcher's audio-recorded interviews were transcribed then uploaded into the ATLAS.ti (2015) system. These codes drove and informed the phenomenological study in its mission to arrive at the essence of the co-researchers' lived experience. Subsequently, the researcher began "marking similar passages of text with a code label so that they [the themes, topics, concepts, etc.] can easily be retrieved at a later state for further . . . analysis" (Online QDA—How and what to code, n.d.). From this point, the codes were compared visually through electronic means. This guaranteed that the actual analysis of the

codes were expanded, exhausted, and interpreted to arrive at the essence of each of the six co-researchers' lived experiences.

When it came to the actual process of coding the data, the researcher was flexible. That is, the researcher "explore[d] [the] variations of coding based on hunch-driven queries" (Saldańa, 2013, p. 66). Qualitative data required that the data was not only coded; "they're *re*coded" (Saldańa, 2013, p. 66). The researcher, in addition, maintained analytical fieldnotes while analyzing the raw interview data. The fieldnotes allowed the researcher to organize new themes and navigate the themes into categories.

Validation and Triangulation of Data

Member checking. The validity, credibility, and dependability on which this study was based was reinforced in several ways through triangulation, a way to cross-validate the data being collected. Triangulation, most importantly, was used to decrease subjectivity on the part of the researcher in the context of this study. First, member checking, or "when the researcher asks the co-researchers to review interpretations and conclusions, and the co-researchers confirm the findings" (McMillan, 2012, p. 303) was used to affirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Following the transcription of each formal interview, the researcher requested each of the co-researchers to read the transcribed interviews to make sure that what was transcribed was fair, accurate, and complete (McMillan, 2012). Following this, the researcher asked each of the co-researches to sign the transcript review form (Appendix D) to ensure that each co-researcher agreed with the transcription of her or his formal interview.

External audit. An external audit was another way the researcher capitalized on triangulation. In performing an external audit of the coding process, the researcher initially asked one individual who was unfamiliar with the study to "examine all aspects of the study to

look for coherence, reasonableness, accuracy, data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions" (McMillan, 2012, p. 304). The external auditor, most importantly, examined the study for weaknesses in credibility.

To further enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the emergent, salient themes, the researcher contacted a second person (not connected to this study) trained in phenomenological research to perform an additional coding audit upon the data, or an *audit trail* (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). An audit trail occurs when the qualitative researcher "allows others to assess the significance of the research" (Rice & Ezzy, 2000, p. 36). The audit trail is a way for the researcher to authenticate the data and assess it for possible errors. According to Sandelowski (1986), a third-person audit is most beneficial and

> auditable when another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail used by the investigator [the researcher] in the study. In addition, another researcher could arrive at the same or comparable but not contradictory conclusions given the researcher's data, perspective, and situation. (p. 28)

From this point, the researcher was able to unpack and mine the data for its emergent themes.

Reflexive journal. The third way the researcher employed triangulation was by keeping a reflexive journal and reflective fieldnotes. To augment the validation and credibility of the purposed research study, the researcher used a reflexive journal to capture "how his or her own perspectives, shaped by gender, socioeconomic status, or position, will influence his or her expectations, interpretations, and conclusions" (McMillan, 2012, p. 304). According to Watts (2007), keeping and returning to reflexive fieldnotes throughout and after each qualitative interview allows the qualitative researcher to write reflective notes "to discover things in their heads that they did not know were there" (p. 83). For the researcher, reflective fieldnotes served

as a way for the researcher to reflect on each of the interviews, as well as to recall the researcher's own perceptions, feelings, and reactions before, during, and after of the six formal interviews.

Ortlipp (2008) further maintained that reflexive journals "make visible to the reader the constructed nature of research" (2008, p. 695) and its outcomes. Instead of "attempting to control researcher values . . . by bracketing assumptions, the aim" of reflexive journaling "is to consciously acknowledge those values" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 695). For Mruck and Breuer (2003), qualitative researchers used reflexive journals to consider and acknowledge "their presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions," (p. 3) before, during, and after the phenomenological research process. Such biases, as those possessed of the researcher, promoted the critical self-reflection needed to understand the "research methodologies . . . about gathering (or generating) data" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 699). Such biases, posited van Manen (2014), "are not only unavoidable, they are necessary, as long as . . . [the researcher] [is] . . . self-reflectively aware" (p. 354) of her or his own thoughts, feelings, reactions, experiences, and opinions.

Just as crucial, the researcher paid special attention to personal mistakes, prejudices, likes, dislikes, speculations, and questions. The researcher "must be extremely aware of your own relationship to the setting and of the evolution of the design and analysis" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 122). Using reflective fieldnotes, the researcher wrote down any new questions or thoughts that occurred during those interviews to help in studying the co-researchers' lived experiences. The reflective fieldnotes served as a reflective tool measuring the validity of the qualitative interview process; for recording any dilemmas or conflicts experienced prior, during, or following each interview, and, perhaps most crucially, to re-center the researcher's frame of mind after each interview (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). A researcher practices reflexivity in a study

when she or he "refer back and critically examine their own . . . assumptions and actions through being self-conscious and self-aware about the research process and their own role within it" (Hewitt, 2007, p. 1156).

Fieldnotes. Descriptive in nature, fieldnotes made it possible for the researcher to "objectively record the details of what has occurred in the field[work]" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 120). The contents of the fieldnotes included the researcher's notes, descriptions, comments, and impressions during each of the formal interviews. The researcher avoided simply summarizing the goings-on of the interview. The researcher, rather, used fieldnotes to describe the vocal tone, the emotional reactions, and to write down any words worth mentioning in a subsequent question or clarification. The researcher's fieldnotes included the following: hand-drawn portraits of the co-researchers to capture their mannerisms, behaviors, affectations, and/or style of talking; specific words, phrases, or coinages that are identifiable to that particular co-researcher's story; summaries of the conversations; and pencil drawings of the setting of the interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

To keep abreast of engrained emotions and pre-conceived biases, the researcher recorded and monitored his feelings and presuppositions as the primary method of identifying, explaining, reflecting upon, and controlling bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Emotional reactions on the part of the researcher "are an important vehicle for establishing rapport and for gauging subjects' perspective" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 101) on the phenomena being investigated. Bogdan and Biklen added that such reactions and biases can augment the creating of strong, more-reflective questions, whereby supporting "research hunches" (2007, p. 102) to drive the actual research.

The fieldnotes, most importantly, aided in providing evidence to address the research questions and to reach the essence of the co-researchers' lived experiences. To enhance the interviewing process, the researcher used fieldnotes to record "harmless [yet incredibly beneficial] information . . . [that] will contain quotations from people, as well as your own personal reflections" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 99) throughout each co-researcher's interview. The researcher made the fieldnotes of each co-researcher available only to that particular person to ensure that she or he did not suspect the researcher was recording secrets.

Ethics of the Qualitative Study

Ethical issues. The main ethical issue in this proposed study was promoting and maximizing the confidentiality of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators. "Ethical decisions, like all other decisions in qualitative evaluation, are ongoing," highlighted Pitman and Maxwell (1992, p. 756). The main way to ensure this is to follow the interviewing protocol outlined by Seidman (2013), to disguise each participant's identity and place of employment with the use of pseudonyms, and to maintain the one-on-one interviewing approach. Pitman and Maxwell stressed, "No harm should come to any of its members as a direct result of the study" (1992, p. 757). Creating and fostering a trusting relationship with each of the teachers maintained a safe, confidential, and anonymous study.

The researcher did not anticipate any ethical concerns around the self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers sharing their lived experiences. The ethical considerations, in fact, that were used in this study called for sensitivity due to working with a vulnerable population. These decisions were predicated on the "action-oriented partnership [that] is essential to constructing" (Pitman & Maxwell, 1992, p. 757) this study at all. Given the historical, societal, political, and cultural oppressions faced by the LGBTQ communities, the

researcher exercised great awareness to maintain the dignity and confidentiality of this study's six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers.

Pitman and Maxwell (1992) reminded phenomenological researchers to always be aware of breeching confidentiality because all material contained within the study "will need to be layered in confidentiality to prevent threat, manipulation or some other form of harm to those who have engaged in a relationship of trust with the evaluator" (p. 756). The researcher was committed to ensuring that none of the co-researchers was subjected to any risk or experience of discomfort during the formal phenomenological interviews. Safeguards were implemented to reduce or eliminate psychological distress, social disadvantages, or invasion of personal and professional privacy. Each participant was reminded that her or his formal, semi-structured interviews were being audio recorded and that audio recordings would "not be revealed to others at their expense" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 112). The audio recordings were destroyed subsequent to each transcription.

None of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers worked at the same school; however, there was the possibility that they would be able to identify the other co-researchers due to the small size of the school district. Josselson (2007) pointed out that if this were the case, then the researcher needed "to take great care to collaborate with co-researchers about what will be published and to be ready to rescind any material the participant feels might be injurious" (p. 554). The researcher recognized and understood how important honesty and transparency were between the researcher and the co-researcher; that said, the researcher was prepared to follow the steps set into place by Concordia University's Institutional Review Board should this scenario have occurred. In the end, this was not the case, and confidentiality

measures were implemented to guarantee the protection of the co-researchers' identities and locations of employment.

Additionally, the researcher found it crucial to ensure that the self-identifying LGBTQ co-researchers do not suffer any social or employment repercussions for participating in this study. The researcher considered how to address any sensitive discussions, issues, or conflicts that may arise during the interviews. The researcher informed each of the six co-researchers of their option to contact a therapist should she or he require care after the interviews. To eliminate these factors, the researcher met with and interviewed the co-researchers individually, allowing no one to listen to their audio-recorded stories. The audio recordings were immediately destroyed following the interviews; the consent forms and transcribed interviews have been securely stored in a locked file cabinet in a secure office for the next 3 years. After 3 years, the consent forms and transcribed interviews will be destroyed to assure the protection and anonymity of the co-researchers.

Vulnerable populations. To reduce the risk of possible psychological distress, invasion of privacy, or social disadvantages, the researcher promoted confidentiality. Given this, each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public educators were, however, interviewed at some level of vulnerability, so the researcher was attentive to possible signs of psychological or social distress, social disadvantage, invasion of privacy, or any other arena of concern. Lying at the crux of this phenomenological study was the idea of ethically sound research in terms of the researcher seeking out and responding "to personal, social, and contextual constructions" (Hewitt, 2007, p. 1151) within the research framework. That is, the research used "ethically sound research . . . [to] guarantee the protection of human rights" (Hewitt, 2007, p. 1151). To maximize and capitalize on ethically sound research protocols, the researcher attended to each of the co-

researchers' personal disclosures "concerning the study, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, fair treatment, protection from discomfort and harm, and self-determination" (Hewitt, 2007, p. 1151). The researcher also reminded each of the co-researchers they could extinguish an interview and/or decline to participate further at any time during the study.

Compensation. None of the self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators who participated in this study received money compensation or reimbursement for their participation in this phenomenological study.

Consent. Consent was required of all co-researchers and was obtained prior to the study; the researcher revisited the Research Consent Form before each interview and obtained each participant's signature on said document.

Confidentiality

To protect the confidentiality of each co-researcher, the researcher provided an Informed Consent Letter (Appendix A) required through Concordia University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher is aware of the sensitivity of this project and guarantees to provide the support necessitated to conduct this study. All documents associated with this project were secured for the entirety of the research study; the co-researchers' identities were kept confidential through pseudonyms used to protect identification outside the confines of this qualitative study. Furthermore, due to the emotional and sensitive nature of this phenomenological study and the in-depth discussions about potentially personal and private information, the researcher provided information to each co-researcher, which explained how to contact an on-call therapist should they require it.

Data protection and security plan. Safeguards were implemented to reduce the risk of possible psychological distress, invasion of privacy, and to maximize anonymity. All co-

researchers had the freedom to withdraw themselves and their data from the study at any time. Should a participant elect to stop participation in the study, the participant was allowed to withdraw from the study by informing the researcher through email, phone, or in person.

This study relied on interviews, surveys, and observations. Since each of the co-researchers disclosed personal and private information, it was imperative that the researcher developed a trusting and supportive relationship with each of the study's co-researchers. All data (fieldnotes and audio-recorded interviews) was kept in a locked cabinet when not in use by the researcher. The researcher ensured each of the six co-researchers that all conversations were held within the formal interview framework, including her or his actual participation in the study. Paper records and electronic audio records were destroyed immediately following transcription.

It was anticipated that the results of this study would be shared with others through published thesis, articles, the World Wide Web, public meetings, and other means as available. Data from this study was erased immediately following each transcription. Similarly, paper records were shredded.

Withdrawal of Co-researcher Identity and Data

The co-researchers could withdrawal themselves from the research study at any time and for any types of concerns, including personal concerns about their social and/or emotional health, their well-being as advised by the on-call licensed professional counselor, and/or personal concerns of self-harm or harm to others.

Although a participant is not obligated to give his or her reasons for withdrawing prematurely from the study, the primary researcher made a reasonable effort to ascertain the reason, while fully respecting the participant's rights. Immediately upon being notified of a co-researcher's participation, the researcher terminated the co-researcher's participation in the

research as well as withdrew and destroyed their data from the research study.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The researcher did not experience any conflicts of interest with any of the six co-researchers.

Research Credibility

The researcher's role and voice within this study is that of a passionate one, actively committed to listening to, engaging, and protecting the multiple self-identifying LGBTQ educators' stories. The researcher's personal and professional lives are what drove the researcher to select this topic. The researcher's role in this study was twofold: the researcher is a teacher who has worked with each of these individual teachers in various capacities throughout the researcher's tenure in the district; the researcher is also a self-identifying LGBTQ educator who, like the co-researchers, has a lived experience within the same school district. Because the researcher has no power or authority over any of the six co-researchers, the co-researchers did not feel intimidated or afraid to share their candid stories. Resultantly, the data was neither adversely affected nor were the personal stories limited or impacted by apprehension.

With the researcher's professional position being a colleague to these teachers, the researcher is aware of how vital confidentiality is to this particular group. The researcher may be privy to sensitive information; the researcher was aware of this and therefore guaranteed that any information shared during each of the formal interviews remained confidential, both within and outside the formal interview framework.

Last, the account of each story was transcribed verbatim and the data yielded from the interviews supported and revealed the lived experiences of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Actual quotes from the co-researchers were used to add and augment

credibility and voice in the data. Member checking, in a phenomenological study, is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) because it invites co-researchers to ensure that their personal stories are depicted accurately.

Risks and Discomforts

When it comes to qualitative research and naturalistic inquiry, some existence of physical, emotional, and psychological distress may potentially be expected—specifically, for those research topics that were viewed as sensitive. The researcher made each of the co-researchers aware of these potential risks during the primary recruitment process; therefore, the welfare of each co-researcher guided all stages of this phenomenological study. The researcher explained the scope and depth of the project and reminded each participant that her or his involvement was not mandatory; they could cease the interview at any time without fear of recourse. Since each of the co-researchers were adults, the researcher expected each of the co-researchers to know when she or he reached their emotional toll. The researcher, nonetheless, routinely checked in with each participant to make sure that she or he was comfortable, safe, and feeling good about continuing with the interview and its process.

The confidentiality of the co-researchers was maintained through anonymization (pseudonyms), and tapes and transcripts were secured in a locking box. The researcher only knew the actual identities of the co-researchers. Records were available only to the researcher. Electronic records were held on a computer used only by the researcher; backups of electronic records were kept on compact disc and stored with the paper records. All audio-recorded interviews were destroyed immediately following transcription.

An on-call licensed professional counselor was available to work with the co-researchers if they required self-care after a semi-structured interview. At the beginning of the interview

cycle, the researcher provided each participant with an informed consent letter from the licensed professional counselor should they need a licensed therapist to talk to; the on-call license professional counselor was made aware that she might be contacted during the interview process. She was not made aware of the co-researchers' personal or professional identities.

The researcher also reminded each of the six co-researchers of their right to discontinue their participation at any time during the interview should they encounter research-induced stress. The researcher welcomed each subject to practice self-reflection or any other restorative practice that invited relaxation and replenishment to counter any stress they endured throughout or following an interview.

When pursuing results from qualitative research and naturalistic inquiry, emotional and psychological discomfort is a possibility, especially when the subject matter concerned sensitive issues. Researcher sensitivity to emotions during the formal interview process were met through either shifting the questioning strategy or moving to a different topic, as needed.

There was a risk of accidental disclosure of the co-researchers' participation in the study should a person outside of the study recognize either of the co-researchers or the researcher at the interview site. The researcher minimized the risk of confidentiality by securing a private room for interviewing and planning for the interviewee and interviewer arrival and departure times to be separated by at least 10 minutes.

Benefits

The researcher anticipated that the benefits of this study would outweigh the risks. For instance, the researcher hoped that by reflecting on their lives, each of the co-researchers would leave each formal interview feeling self-reflective. Perhaps, the co-researchers would leave feeling stronger about who they were as human beings and public school educators. The

researcher believed that by allowing each of the co-researchers time to reflect on their lived stories, each would trust that the researcher has her or his best interest at heart, strengthening the researcher-researched relationship. Additionally, the researcher hoped the findings of this study would support public school stakeholders in future efforts to make, adjust, or extinguish institutional barriers and practices related to self-identifying LGBTQ students and public school teachers. To the body of LGBTQ academic literature, this study supported further investigations into and support for the equality of the LGBTQ communities locally, nationally, and globally.

The researcher and each of the six co-researchers anticipated that the results of this study would be shared with others through published thesis, articles, the World Wide Web, public meetings, and other means as available.

Expected Findings and Themes

The researcher found that each of the self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher's stories brought an emotional, moving, poignant, and candid humanness to the issue at hand. Each story possessed instances of discrimination and stigmatization; moreover, the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers offered great insight into improving the lived experiences for other and future teachers like them.

Summary

This chapter explored the purpose, procedures, interviewing models, ethics, and data analysis behind analyzing the lived experiences of self-identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) public school educators. Using phenomenology and narrative inquiry, the researcher conducted deep, prolonged, and formal qualitative interviews with six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers and how they navigate the heteronormative school environment. Qualitative studies continue to show that a majority of self-identifying

LGBTQ public school teachers experience bullying, harassment, and discrimination while at work. The researcher strived to shed light on the issues that self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers endure on a daily basis, while realizing the lived experiences of a highly marginalized, oppressed group of teachers in American schools.

Chapter 4 will present the qualitative findings that surfaced from the qualitative interviews, share portraitures of each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, and will intersect the emergent themes with the each of the co-researchers' lived experiences.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

> To analyze narratives is to examine the creative agency of individuals as they make sense of their lives and form their identities, tailoring the telling of their life-stories to the audience and constantly rewriting it throughout their day-to-day lives. The narrative requires an audience by definition, whether that audience is the internalized Other, a conversational partner, or the reader of this report. (Mattsson, 2013, p. 11)

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of six self-identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) public school teachers. In part, the research was motivated to pursue this topic after finding limited qualitative research discussing the lived experiences of this marginalized group of educators. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 established the framework of this study. Chapter 1, for example, introduced the historical groundwork of the American education system and then explained the entrenched societal discourses surrounding the performative expectations of gender within the social makeup of the school building. Chapter 2 then detailed major historic accounts of homophobia throughout the United States as informed by the review of literature, while thoroughly deconstructing queer theory and the concept of intersectionality.

Based on the literature review performed by the researcher in Chapter 2, the purpose of this qualitative study was to fill the significant lack of conversations and awareness surrounding the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators. This study used a phenomenological approach to assist in revealing and capturing the essence of the detailed, poignant, and complex stories of these individuals' lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). From here, Chapter 3 outlined the concrete procedures of the purposive sampling of the co-researchers, explained the use of descriptive phenomenology, as well as narrative inquiry, while addressing

the ethical implications of this qualitative study, issuing "precise instructions or a formula to plan your work from beginning to end" (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007).

Chapter 4 will present the qualitative findings that developed from data collected through phenomenological interviewing; the researcher interviewed a total sample of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. At the time of this qualitative study, none of the six interviewed co-researchers were asked by their school administration or by colleagues to share their concerns, misgivings, or experiences as self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. To understand and explore these individuals' lives, stories, and histories, the researcher used the following central question and four subsequent ancillary questions to drive and inform the research:

- Central question: What are the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators?
- Sub-question 1: How has being LGBTQ shaped the lived experience of educators?
- Sub-question 2: How have the intersections of personal life, professional life, and formal policies and laws impacted the overall lives of LGBTQ public school teachers?
- Sub-question 3: How have the intersectional interactions with administration, faculty, students, and students' families shaped the experiences of LGBTQ public school teachers?
- Sub-question 4: What supports do LGBTQ public school teachers need in place to promote their safety while at work?

Given that "there are no absolutes in the world of interviewing . . . and [that qualitative interviewing] is not a perfect world," (Seidman, 2013, p. 25) the sub-questions did not lend

themselves to being answered in numerical order. The questions, however, were answered through the phenomenological questions asked by the researcher. Following Seidman's (2013) approach, the researcher fostered "a delicate balance between providing enough openness for the co-researchers to tell their stories" (p. 23) while retaining "a delicate balance between respecting what the co-researchers [were] saying and taking advantage of opportunities to ask difficult questions" (p. 99), in order to reach and reveal the essence of the co-researcher' lived experiences. Furthermore, Beach (1992) recognized that researchers can gain insight from researching and analyzing "data-based descriptions . . . [that] focus on phenomena without attempting to manipulate the effects of the variables" (p. 221) through qualitative research.

Description of the Purpose

Prior to Chapter 4, the researcher referred to the six individuals of this study as co-researchers (Quantz, 1992). This was done as a general method to "suggest multiple perspectives . . . and diverse views" (Creswell, 2013, p. 47) on the topic being studied. From here, the researcher will refer to each of the six co-researchers by a pseudonym. Given the sensitivity and intricacies of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher elected to adopt pseudonyms for the six co-researchers to maximize confidentiality as "qualitative researchers face a conflict between conveying detailed, accurate accounts of the social world and protecting the identities of the individuals who participated in the research" (Kaiser, 2009, p. 163).

Description of the Sample

The lived experiences of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, ranging in age from late 20s to mid-50s, served as the co-researchers for this study: three lesbians; one gay male; and two transgender males. The researcher elected to study the lives of this diverse sample of teachers in "an attempt to deal with inner experiences unprobed in everyday life" (Merriam,

2002, p. 7) and to provide these teachers the opportunity to reflect on how their experiences have shaped their lives. Moreover, the researcher wanted these individuals' stories to be shared to expand and deepen the conversations surrounding the significant lack of LGBTQ understanding in American schools.

The researcher interviewed six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers as they reconstructed and shared their lived experiences the phenomenological framework. For the following six co-researchers, this was the first time they were asked to talk about incidents or to share their lived experiences based on their sexual orientations "outside the school day" (Lindsey, 2013, p. 62). The following descriptions of each co-researcher were designed to humanize the experiences and to help the reader understand and feel the essence of their storied lives. For this qualitative study, the researcher first assigned each of the six co-researchers a pseudonym and then preserved each of the six co-researcher's self-identified sexual orientations for the purpose of this study. From this point forward in the chapter, the researcher will refer to each of the six co-researchers by her or his pseudonym: Laila; Stephanie; Josh; Sam; Cassandra; and Chris.

Portraitures of the Six Co-researchers

Laila. Laila was raised in the northwestern region of the United States. A mother of two adult children, a public school teacher for over a decade, and outdoor enthusiast, Laila self-identified as a lesbian. At the time of this qualitative study, she revealed having been out of the metaphorical closet for a few years, shortly following the dissolution of her 30-year marriage. This recent disclosure of her newly self-identified sexual orientation arrived with much hesitation on her part. Reared in a religiously strict household, she remembered great stress about not conforming to her family's heteronormative ways of thinking at an early age,

especially when it came to dressing like a girl. She recalled, "I was a tomboy through and through. I never . . . [wore] dresses, [never played with] dolls . . . nothing girly ever." This way of thinking on the part of her parents echoed Butler's (1999, 2004) theory of gender as performance. Because "my parents are super controlling," it made it hard for her to express herself aesthetically due to homophobic comments made by her parents. She recollected watching television with her parents; according to her, "Something'll come on and my dad'll make some comment about gays . . . or make some disgusted noise" to make her inadvertently aware of his disfavoring of homosexuality. For as long as she remembered, Laila ignored the homosexual thoughts she had about other females or prayed that the feelings would somehow disappear. She recollected that when she would acknowledge her homosexual feelings she would "feel guilty." She even found herself "doing . . . [my] prayers at night—I won't do it again; I won't think it again. I promise." She tried "just ignoring it;" nevertheless, the thoughts would eventually rematerialize, causing her to "feel like a horrible person."

These implied messages juxtaposed with her parents' disapproval of her wearing boys' clothes made her "feel like there's something wrong with you or that you are just *off* in some way." Laila's family told her that being homosexual "is a one-way ticket to hell." With such homophobic discourse being supported in her household, Laila was made aware from a young age that her parents would never approve of a homosexual lifestyle for their children. Her parents, she related, "are very image driven" and, without question, this idea of having "to be perfect" affected Laila's relationship with her own sexual orientation, resulting in the policing of her thoughts and actions. As far as she is aware, "There's nobody who identifies other than heterosexual in my family," so being the lesbian daughter is not easy.

During her teenage years, she wanted to be like “a normal person,” so she became involved in heterosexual relationships. Even though she dated men, she never felt “any connection to a guy ever.” She secretly wished she “were a boy . . . [to find] the connections with girls” she so desperately craved. That way, her relationship would have been “legal and acceptable.” Due to her family’s religious and homophobic mindsets, not to mention her family’s constant pressure for her to marry, Laila confessed, “I just got married.”

Immediately after marrying her boyfriend, Laila recalled, “I was miserable from the minute I married him . . . because I never connected with him.” Following her marriage, she “had a couple kids” and before she knew it, “he started getting nutty and abusive.” The emotional turmoil she endured from her abusive husband lasted until her divorce. Laila recollected sitting in church over a decade ago, reflecting on her decisions and asking herself if there was no God or eternal punishment for being homosexual (as ascribed by her religious upbringing), would she feel comfortable and brave enough to disclose her sexuality? “I guess that’s what people call ‘coming out to yourself,’” she testified; she also admitted, “I probably could have stayed in the marriage” but “I did try everything I could” to preserve the marriage.

Even though she acknowledged her homosexuality, Laila reminded herself, “You’re married. You’re just fine. Keep this [the marriage] going until you die, and then you don’t have to worry about anything.” She then revealed that she kept her homosexual thoughts clandestine for the “last 12 years of [her] marriage.” Eventually, she and her husband “were living like roommates. I mean, he would come home three or four hours late from work; there was hardly any communication . . . so instead of lying to myself to make myself okay,” she divorced him, with “no intention of acting on it [her homosexual indulges] whatsoever.” Following her divorce, Laila initially planned to “live alone and then . . . I thought, ‘No. Wait a minute. I’m

free; I can do what I want.' So I started . . . kind of pursuing and kind of looking into things." Then one thing led to another and she found herself in a same-sex relationship.

Stephanie. Raised in the Pacific Northwest, Stephanie had worked as a public school educator for nearly 20 years at the time of this study. Passionate about teaching and driven to effect change, Stephanie opened the interview by saying, "I am a daughter; I am a wife; I am a godmother; I am part of the gay and lesbian community." She self-identified as a lesbian who realized from an early age she wanted to be an educator. Stephanie shared, "I . . . remember pretending to be a teacher when I was a little kid, and I had my own chalkboard, and I'd make my brother be my student, even though he was 3.5 years older than I was. . . . I was just naturally drawn to it I think." Additionally, Stephanie knew that entering the field of education "was the right decision." She continued, "I don't want any other job, even though it's incredibly difficult being a teacher, and it gets even more difficult every year I feel." Stephanie described more about what makes her great teacher,

> I think part of it comes from the psychology background. I am more of a listener than a talker so this interview is . . . difficult for me, but . . . I like to listen to people share what they're thinking and how they're feeling and that makes me feel good because that makes me feel like I am helping them in a way. . . . I feel kind of proud I guess that they choose me to talk to as opposed to anyone else. It makes me feel important and special.

In terms of her school district helping her become a stronger teacher, she added,

> Every year something new comes down from the top that is going to magically fix everything to . . . close the achievement gap. . . . They push, push, push, and then they don't see the results they want to see right away, and so then we move on to something else, and so it's always this . . . constant barrage of, 'Here, let's try this for a year; here,

let's try that for a year,' and it doesn't work. . . . I get extremely frustrated. At our school, and I'm sure at other schools, the morale is down significantly because everyone is frustrated. And we're working our butts off to help our kids, but with the lack of support and all of the other things that I mentioned, it's incredibly difficult to be happy in our job.

Chris. Athletic and "fairly unique," Chris grew up in the western United States and self-identified as a transgender male going through a recent transition of female-to-male. As such, Chris declared he does not fit into the prescribed gender dichotomy; in terms of his self-identifying gender, he positioned himself "in the middle [and] in the gray area of . . . the [female/male] binary. . . . I am . . . a mix of feminine and masculine, fairly androgynous to the look at." Donning "dresses and skirts just made me feel really uncomfortable" while growing up, he uncovered. When Chris's mom "found out she [was having] . . . a girl, oh, my gosh, she went all out. She bought me the frilliest dresses; they were expensive, too. She bought me all these different types of things and she put me through modeling. I actually was a model . . . and she put me through beauty pageants. She would curl my hair and put on makeup."

Reared in the western region of the United States, Chris remembered that around the age of six he "realized that I just really didn't want to do this anymore." Chris's strong attachment to his father caused him to want to be just his dad. For instance, Chris "wanted to be like a mini him. I dressed like him; I walked like him; I acted like him." Chris contended he did not fit into society's prescribed binary paradigm, even from an early age. Chris remembered, "The dysphoria of my body really began . . . when I began middle school." It was while attending middle school that Chris lamented he "felt more comfortable in baggier clothes, essentially boy clothes. . . . I got really uncomfortable with all that frilly stuff so I decided that I'd . . . push that

away and dress the way I wanted to." Chris even joined his middle school's wrestling team, which meant exploding the gender paradigm. Chris recalled,

> I joined the wrestling team; . . . there were no girls on this team, no girls whatsoever. However the few males that were on the team accepted me as their own. It was fun. . . . I competed in a huge tournament towards the end of 7th grade, and I didn't do so hot. Then my eighth grade year [he] competed in the same tournament and won second. And I wrestled not a single female. . . . I had a couple of boyfriends in middle school and it was fine, it was great. And every once in a while I would get in a dress and, you know, put on some makeup and some nice clothes so that I can show . . . my boyfriend that I care . . . but it was still uncomfortable, I mean, especially heels. I could not walk in heels. Dresses, you sat down—how do you sit? . . . It was just very uncomfortable.

Chris talked about his memories of "coming out as gay" while living as a cisgender female. Chris shared that although coming out helped him to feel more confident at the time, "I still had that feeling that I was not quite whole." In fact, Chris would clandestinely watch testimonials of transgender individuals on YouTube, hoping to understand their stories. Chris admitted that he was aware of being a transgender male since childhood, but he never shared this intimate part of his life until recently. Chris reflected, "My senior year of college I began a lesbian relationships with a cisgender female, and we were infatuated with each other." Chris continued by saying that his recent transition took its toll on his lesbian relationship. Chris also shared that he was incredibly happy being in a lesbian relationships and

> we spent 5 years happy and together; one of those years was spent engaged. I am an individual that has been reluctant [to] . . . getting intimate with [my] . . . partners because of . . . my body dysphoria. . . . About 80 days from our wedding, I could tell that my

> partner was distancing herself from me and changing. I did not grow to match who she was. As she put it, I was 'unfortunately, someone that was no longer who she needed nor wanted to be with.' In being single and on my own for the first time ever, I have done a lot of self-reflecting and thought about who I was in my relationship. . . . I even reflected on my life; I realized that I was not truly living my life as someone who was whole nor confident or truly happy. As an individual, it dawned on me that I was not a woman, nor a lesbian . . . I was and am transgender man. I am in my very early stages of coming out and transitioning from female to male. I have a long journey ahead of me in terms of my transition, but at least I will be working towards becoming who I am supposed to be.

Josh. Raised in the western portion of the United States, Josh self-identified as gay at an early age. As an effeminate boy growing up in a conservative small town, Josh experienced bullying from his peers who would often tease him "for being different;" Josh disclosed, "I spent a lot of my childhood being called 'faggot.'" The relentless teasing and harassment made him "avoid sports. It made me avoid other things, like Boy Scouts and other typical boy-bonding things," all of which he feels he "was never meant to be in anyway."

Josh remembered unkind classmates asking "me if I was a boy or a girl." "From a young age, most of my friends were female," Josh stated. He claimed that there were other "gay boys" at his school; however, "none of us talk[ed] about that" because the other boys were "better at *passing*," a term referring to a person who can belong to or position themselves within a major group without suspicion or question. In Josh's case, he felt that he could never *pass* as a straight male because of his effeminate, female-like affectations.

After graduating high school with honors, Josh matriculated to a private university in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States where he found his appreciation for theatre; he

graduated and was accepted into a Master's program to procure his teaching credentials. According to Josh, it was while finishing his graduate-level coursework for his teaching credential when he experienced his first realization of how homophobic public education can be. In one particular graduate-level course, Josh "felt discriminated against because of being gay" and felt that he had to defend his sexuality to a "room full of heterosexuals." According to Josh,

> One of the other students in my cohort said I would have to, as a gay man, come up with . . . how I would deal with, number one: teaching students. How I would communicate to parents. How I would talk to administrators. How I would get a job. And the professor said, "Yeah, that's going to happen to you." And never in my whole education career did I think that one of the last classes in my graduate program would I be discriminated against. . . . I was like, how dare you think I have to do something different than the rest of everybody else, just because I am gay, . . . so, I vowed, from that point on, as a teacher and in my classroom, that I . . . wouldn't make anyone feel that way, feel left out, feel different than, and when I felt open enough to share with [the] people of my cohort who I really was, it really sucked.

Sam. Newly married and somewhat new to teaching, Sam, like Josh and Chris, was raised in the western portion of the United States; Sam remembered living "in the middle of freaking nowhere." Although Sam was assigned female at birth and now self-identifies as a transgender male, Sam expressed his lived experience is not made of the "traditional trans-narrative;" Sam explained, "I was super into princesses. I also spent a lot of my time with guy friends who were . . . into killer robots." In other words, Sam's childhood did not offer any hints as to his eventual gender transition. Just as crucial, however, Sam remembered not conforming to society's prescribed gender binary as early as elementary school. For instance, Sam

mentioned he "tried to lead a revolt to have the girls sit at the boys table . . . which wasn't enforced by the teachers," but by society's entrenched expectations of gender (Butler, 1990). Sam posits, "I'd sit at the boys' table and they'd be like, 'You can't be here,' and I would be like, 'Says who?'"

In his terms, the princess and robots toys, conventionally gendered as girls' and boys' toys, respectively, "were *all* for me." It was not until high school, however, that Sam succumbed to his transgender identity. Sam admitted, "I had a friend who came out as trans[gender] . . . and I got really, really invested in her transition." Sam did not experience the typical symptoms of gender dysphoria, as Chris did, as one might experience prior to entering the transition phase of gender expression/identity. Gender dysphoria, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Black, Grant, & American Psychological Association, 2014), "refers to the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender" (p. 451). In contrast, Sam experienced what he terms *gender euphoria*. From this point forward, Sam elucidated:

> [G]ender euphoria . . . [occurred the] first time I bound [the act of bandaging or wrapping the breasts to appear more masculine-like] my chest; [it] was the most intense sense of euphoria—of just this feels right, this looks right—something went right here. But everything was shit, 'cause I was growing up, and that's hard, and my parents were separated for a time, and that was hard. And, I . . . was depressed and anxious because that's how I am . . . so I did nothing more about that [transitioning], besides try changing clothes late at night in my bedroom, but I stayed super active in our high school GSA [Gay Straight Alliance] as our president.

Cassandra. Born in the southern territory United States, Cassandra self-identified as a lesbian. Laid back and a self-proclaimed nature lover, Cassandra proudly stated, "I am a third-generation American. I am a strong, independent, intelligent female." Cassandra was excited to share her story. She detailed,

> In a way some people when they tell a story actually finally listen to themselves, and then it's a healing process. Maybe that's part of it too—that I talk to heal myself; talk to connect with others; tell a story to entertain; to bring healing. There are different reasons, but when people tell their story, they are being very vulnerable and brave because you never know if the other person is actually listening or how they'll react. If you're opening up yourself for that, that's bravery.

As one would suspect, according to Cassandra, the culture of the southern United States in which she was raised was "very conservative . . . and by conservative I mean politically and culturally." Raised in a family who followed the teachings of the Catholic Church, she, like Laila, confessed that before leaving her hometown, she "didn't know anything else other than" her familial and religious environments, which, upon reflection, "was very male dominated, homophobic, and great if you were [a] white heterosexual Christian."

Athletic and gregarious, she enjoyed playing sports throughout high school and college, and because at the time her high school "didn't always have female teams . . . I didn't mind joining the male teams; they didn't intimidate me." During this time, Cassandra, also like Laila, did not self-identify as lesbian, even though "I knew that I was gay, and I knew that I was different." The conservative values upheld by her family caused her to remain closeted "because my family . . . and my church . . . had told me that [being homosexual] was a choice," a choice she was certainly "not going to choose." Resultantly, Cassandra found herself involved in a

heterosexual relationship and, “feeling pressured . . . by my parents . . . and by Catholicism, I married him.” Reflecting on this experience, Cassandra argued she should have seen the warning signs of future emotional and physical turmoil and should have “kick[ed] him to the curb immediately.”

For Cassandra, the first “red flag . . . I choose not to see” was when she wanted to remain at the church following her wedding. “I didn’t want to leave the church, because I knew that if I did, I was going to have to have sex [with him], and I wasn’t looking forward to it at all.” That night when she consummated her marriage, Cassandra relayed, “There was no warmth, no love, no compassion. . . . I felt nothing and I woke up the next morning and realized I’d made a *huge* mistake.”

Due to her religious upbringing and feelings of low self-esteem, Cassandra felt that going through a divorce would be horrible, “so I’m going to stay married.” Unfortunately, the marriage was plagued by physical and emotional violence. Cassandra explained, “He was a mental manipulator; he was a sexual manipulator,” even going as far as molesting her in her sleep, she disclosed. Because of the abuse’s turmoil on her life, Cassandra sought counseling; however, “because I was taught that when you get married you’re supposed to have sex,” she felt too embarrassed to share her dilemma. Because Cassandra believed she somehow deserved this mistreatment brought on by her husband, “an almost helpless feeling” started to torment her.

Meanwhile, Cassandra had accepted a teaching position and met “a bunch of gay women.” She remembered the group of lesbians immediately sensing “that I was gay.” Cassandra denied her lesbianism, saying “No. I’m married.” Soon after, Cassandra was celebrating a friend’s birthday. Some of the people at the party who she met “were gay . . . and they were fun and they understood me.” Because of the repressive and abusive environment

engendered by her former husband, Cassandra remained at home and "didn't do much—I wasn't allowed to have friends." Once she entered the teaching profession, however, she realized, "I can hang out with these gay people, and this is neat; this is fun, and they get me. I'm making friends."

Even though she was developing fresh and healthy relationships at work, depression soon took over, and Cassandra knew she "was gay and didn't know what to do." She admitted that by remaining in her heterosexual marriage she was, to a degree, trying to prove "I wasn't gay." Eventually, after 4.5 years of marriage, Cassandra decided to divorce her husband. "The day I decided to leave felt so empowering. . . . The day I got my divorce, I was stoked! I got my new license; my smile in the picture [in her driver's license photograph] was huge and . . . I was so excited!" she recalled. She remembered just feeling "free for the first time."

Coding and Reducing of the Data

Perhaps the most critical part of this phenomenological study, the coding and reducing of the data offered ways for the researcher to negotiate, sift through, and reduce the data, ultimately arriving at the essence of these six co-researchers' lived experiences. To begin reducing the coded information into valid a reliable categories, the researcher first read over the transcribed interviews to interact with the data in "a complex process that involve[ed] moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts . . . between description and interpretation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 176).

Second, the researcher mined, organized, and refined the data through iterative coding cycles, involving manual coding. Miles and Huberman (1984) termed this critical step in the phenomenological process, *data reduction*. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), data reduction "refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming

the raw data" (p. 22) into manageable groups that will be subsequently analyzed and interpreted. By interacting and dissecting the raw data in this fashion, the researcher immersed himself in the data, to make sense of emerging themes, and to pattern the raw data into coded clusters, categories, and storied moments from the multi-dimensional experiences.

Following this, the researcher then began synthesizing or, as Saldańa (2008) terms, "theming the data" (p. 183) for meaning, significance, and frequency. After a second and third effort at re-examining and recoding the raw interview data, the researcher manually coded and unearthed 250 statements from all interview transcripts. From this point, the researcher used the ATLAS.ti (2015) computer software (Kato & Rudes, 2008; Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007) to uncover, locate, weigh, organize, evaluate and assign codes to the raw interview data that would otherwise appear disorganized, unstructured, disconnected, bulky, and un-themed (Creswell, 2008). The researcher uploaded each of 250 coded statements into the computer software program and used ATLAS.ti (2015) to systematically reduce, measure, and analyze the frequency of words within the 250 statements to render a deeper, more organized and robust categorization of the 250 statements; thus, allowing the researcher to display the data in a visual medium. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggested analyzing the data in this fashion as a "major avenue to improving qualitative data analysis" (p. 25).

Following the initial upload of the interview data done by the researcher, ATLAS.ti (2015) categorized the 250 statements under 43 categories, such as *The Need for Safe Spaces*. Each of these 43 categories consisted of the 250 separated statements. For instance, the cluster heading *The Need for Safe Spaces* contained 35 statements; the cluster heading *The Need for District Inclusiveness and Safe Spaces* contained seven statements; the cluster heading *Disclosure of Sexual Orientation at Work* contained 12 statements; and *Closeted at Work*

contained 34 statements. From here, the researcher reexamined the 43 categories to further distill, separate, negotiate, and coordinate the statements into more adaptable subcategories and themes. The researcher, after numerous re-examinations of the coded statements, decided to combine and negotiate the 43 categories (along with their respective statements); thus, condensing them into more manageable, meaningful categories.

Saturation of the Data

According to Morse (1995), data saturation in the context of qualitative research "is defined as 'data adequacy' and operationalized as collecting data until no new information is obtained" (p. 147). The researcher was able to reach saturation of the raw interview data after numerous coding efforts; thus, the researcher was able "to extend and advance knowledge" (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012, p. 195). By coding and recoding the raw data, the researcher became aware of the themes as they emerged and was cognizant of these themes as "the central key to understanding the data and for developing the . . . a comprehensive theoretical model," (Morse, 1995, pp. 148-149) which works to reach data saturation. Moreover, data saturation afforded the researcher the ability to deduce whether any of the themes supported what the researcher was looking for in terms of answering the four sub-questions, and, in turn, the central question, of this phenomenological study.

Emergent Themes and Intersections

The researcher repeatedly refined and specified the qualitative data through numerous coding efforts. The emerging code categories led to the following five common-core themes:

The Five Intersecting Themes

- Relationships with Students
- The Passion to Teach

- The Decision to Self-disclose at Work
- Fear
- The Need for District Inclusiveness and Safe Spaces

The intersectional matrix. Once the researcher teased out the five aforementioned intersecting themes from the coded interview data, the researcher created and used an intersectional matrix to capture the essence of these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers' lived experiences. A tool used to display the networking systems of the data, the matrix used the five emergent themes (located on the X-axis) and the four sub-questions (the Y-axis) as its variables. By designating the themes and the sub-questions as the two opposing variables, the researcher was able to visually highlight the variables' individuality, importance, and relevance to this study, as well as to reveal the variables' intersections, or the essence of their lived experiences. In utilizing this type of matrix design, the researcher was allowing the matrix to serve two important functions:

> First, [the matrix is] . . . a verification device by which the reader can track down the procedures used to arrive the same findings. Second, the reporting procedures furnish details . . . that secondary analysts can use to double-check the findings using other analytic techniques, to intergrade these findings into another study, or to synthesize several studies on the same topic. (Miles & Huberman, 1984, pp. 22–23)

Most crucially, the researcher employed the matrix to further reduce, verify, negotiate, and display the intersecting points of the data, at which point the essence of the lived experience was truly revealed. That is, the point at which the two variables intersect and overlap is where the essence of the lived experience existed. For instance, where the theme of *relationship formation and maintenance* (on the X-axis) intersected with sub-question 2 (on the Y-axis) yielded the

result of answering that sub-question; thus, not only answering the sub-question but also allowing the researcher to draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Because narrative data is often cumbersome and "lend[s] itself well to graphic representation," (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 25) using a matrix of this type helped the researcher to "understand what is happening, and to conduct further analysis or take action based on that understanding" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 24). Miles and Huberman underscored that "the creation and use of displays is not something separate from analysis; it is a *part* of the analysis" (1984, p. 24) of qualitative data reduction. This portion of the analysis, in addition, is perhaps the greatest method to use by a phenomenological researcher to render a deeper, more robust reduction of the data, especially, because, reported Miles and Huberman, "organized display modes are a major avenue to improving qualitative data analysis," (1984, p. 25) the results of which will appear in Chapter 5.

The Five Intersecting Themes Explained

Theme 1: Relationships with Students

It makes me feel . . . proud to be who I am as an adult role model for these students.

–Chris

Each of the six co-researchers' shared candid and generous experiences about how crucial these relationships were in their professional lives and in their classrooms. The co-researchers shared observations and robust descriptions of these relationships while also commenting on how impactful these relationships can be. Echoing this, Stephanie admitted when it comes to her students,

> The connections I make with my kids is what keeps me coming back. . . . [W]hen someone will ask 'How's your year going?' and I'll say 'Well, if it weren't for the kids,

> I wouldn't be here' and there's a part of me that's like, 'Well, it's going to get better, it's going to get better. I can stay one more year, two more years.' There's that aspect of it and, like I said earlier, I don't know what else I would do. I can't imagine sitting at a desk job all day. I like that interaction.

Stephanie believed that teaching is such "an important job, and not everyone can do it. It's a select few who cannot only teach, but teach for more than five years." Even though she remained closeted at work, Stephanie stressed that being a self-identifying lesbian has indirectly been good for her students, because she can identify with kids who do not always fit the stereotypical mold (in terms of gender expression and sexual orientation) as constructed by heteronormative society. She pointed out,

> I think that it has been good for number of kids and the kids who may be struggling with their own sexual identities seems to gravitate towards me. . . . I don't want to say I take them under my wing, but, in that sense, yes, I probably do, and I just make it comfortable for them. I provide a safe space for them. . . . I talk to them as real human beings, and I think that goes a long way in relationships, especially for those are struggling with their own. They feel comfortable to be honest with me.

Stephanie went on to venture:

> I think being a teacher is one of the most important jobs in our society. I don't think that society views it that way, but we are the ones who are shaping our kids and turning them into the adults they grow into. And you know there are a lot of kids who spend more time with us than with their parents. They learn more from us than the people that are supposed to be raising them. And you know I feel . . . I can turn them into decent human beings, and, yes, if they learn to be great writers and love to read that's great but,

> ultimately, I feel my job as a teacher is to make sure they have open minds, to make sure that they have empathy, to try to get them to use their imagination and tap into their creativity.

Chris, who had never talked explicitly about her sexuality with his students, acknowledged, "I teach in a way that makes them understand who I am." Chris admitted teaching students "to look at those types of gender roles that society has establish[ed] in the past and how they have created our society and how, today, we can possibly, maybe, break those gender barrier" by being who they want to be. He revealed going "against the . . . sort of the conditioned expectations of society." In breaking the traditional gender roles, Chris was "showing students that you shouldn't be afraid of being who you are." Most importantly, Chris pointed out,

> I'm . . . proving to them that I'm educated as an LGBTQ-identified person and teacher. I can have the success like anybody else in their lives. I can have a good home; I can have a successful marriage. I can have kids if I wanted to. I can even get my doctorate [and by doing so] . . . I am . . . showing students that they can do anything, be anything. Yes, it's going to be difficult, but showing them that you were successful, and still working to be successful, that they have chance . . . is my job.

Chris strived not only to see his students holistically, but he worked to see them as individuals who need strong mentoring. Chris loved working with and teaching students because it "makes me feel so good." Chris believed, "Even though it is a struggle for a good while, it's those little tiny things, like a note that a student slips you that says, 'Thank you for being there" that makes her often-stressful job worthwhile." Chris continued,

> It's very comforting to see that these kids are . . . wanting to come into their own and wanting to be their own selves, and be proud of who they are. . . . I have a young man; he's transgender. He was born a female, but he takes on male pronouns. He *loves* to be himself. He loves to dance; he loves to sing; he loves to be involved in everything. And he is not afraid to be himself . . . and it just makes me feel hopeful for our future youth. Helps me feel better and proud to be who I am, as an adult role model for these students. They look kind of past that and just see me for me.

Cassandra understood that building relationships with her students was fundamental to her job, as well, because, to her, "teaching is an adventure." Like Chris and Stephanie, Cassandra stressed that she is "trying to make" the world of education and her students' lives in general "a little easier for everyone . . . [while] also enjoying myself." Cassandra could not believe "they pay me to do this! This is really fun!" What made Cassandra feel even more celebratory about her current position was that "I feel accepted; I feel validated. I feel like I have back up . . . and [when students look at her] they don't see a gay teacher—they see a teacher, which is awesome." Assuming that her students do not want her to place labels on them, Cassandra disclosed, "I just want to be *me*—don't put a label on me." Cassandra wanted to "be an example to the kids and, perhaps, to other adults." Cassandra shared,

> I really do love teaching and . . . the fact that I get emotional talking about the kids [makes me] want to be a better teacher; I want to be there for these kids. . . . I don't want my students to feel alone. I felt so alone when I was a teenager. . . . I think we build rapport and relationships, and they'll share something, and then we find more connections, and they can find connections with each other through stories. If we can build a safe, amazingly positive classroom, then we can change the whole ways to be like

> that and the classrooms. I want to build a world where my students don't have the fear that I have. And want any kid who is gay to know that I accept him or her.

Cassandra viewed her role in the classroom as not only to provide a safe space for and to make connections with her students, but also she needed to "feel comfortable being me, in the sense that I don't mind being stupid or crazy or silly, because I have confidence in me. I think I'm a better teacher . . . because of that confidence."

Laila mentioned she "enjoys working with the kids. I love teaching. I think you have a heart for it or you don't, and it's kind of a hard thing to explain in words—what it does for you." Laila stated that "for me, [teaching] just gives me a feeling of purpose, and it's just meaningful for me and I'm happy . . . when I teach." The connections she created with students were what brought her back to her classroom each year. "Watching them get something or becoming excited in something that they first of all weren't excited in or didn't like and showing them . . . creates greater depth and understanding," Laila admitted. Laila shared that if self-identifying as a lesbian has "affected anything at work, it's made me a little more empathetic without kids who are going through some things in that area."

Although she was not out of the metaphorical closet at work, Laila asserted that self-identifying as a lesbian in her private life has not "affected the way I teach." She did, however, suspect that some kids may have figured out she was a lesbian and "it makes me a little nervous in that way as far as how . . . I deal with the kids." She did not want something like her sexual orientation to affect the work she did in her classroom.

Theme 2: The Passion to Teach

> I want to be the one to be there for all my minorities and all people who don't fit the boxes.
>
> –Sam

At the genesis of each semi-structured formal interview, the researcher asked each of the six co-researchers to describe what led them to the occupation of teaching. This particular question was crucial to this qualitative study because it revealed the passion these teachers possess for working in an often-homophobic and heteronormative environment. The following formal answers made it evident that each of the public school teachers "must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives" (Palmer, 2007, p. 12). For instance, Josh, whose mother recently retired after 40 years of teaching, found that teaching "was something I knew I could do. I am good with people. I'm good with education and . . . I thought I could do it well." Stephanie, who grew up playing the game of school with her brother, remembered the exact moment when she knew she wanted to be a teacher. According to Stephanie,

> I had this one particular experience one day. I was in one of the buildings on the [college] campus and I was walking through the hallway, and I passed by this empty classroom, and it had these old wooden chairs and a chalkboard like something back in the 1950s. I stopped, and I walked into the classroom and the sun was shining through the windows and the dust from the chalk was floating around in the sunbeams, and I just sort of had this . . . moment where I was, like, 'I have to be a teacher,' and I don't know what it was but . . . I can picture it in my mind right now. It was definitely a moment where it was, like, 'Oh! Okay, I have to be a teacher . . . and I feel like as a teacher I have a huge impact on this world because of all the human beings their lives that I've touched. I don't take that lightly you know? That's something that I could potentially ruin a kid or I could make a kid super successful.

Like Stephanie, Chris decided that teaching "just makes me feel so good." Growing up believing he could be anything, Chris revealed he "wanted to be a superhero." Chris equated the talents of a superhero with those of a teacher because, like superheroes, teachers "constantly seek out new knowledge" to better their students, themselves, and the world at large. Chris explained,

> I wanted to help people in a way that made a big impact on their lives for the better. I have an affinity for children. I love being around children . . . they just make me extremely happy. And if I can make a change in those young people's lives, then I will. That brought me to education.

Chris offered even greater commentary on education and its power in his life. Chris described education as

> a perfect kind of fit for my affinity for knowledge and constantly learning and sharing knowledge. My affinity for youth and helping them come into their own, you know, helping them become their own individual . . . not to mention education is a very . . . selfless vocation. You are essentially putting in—you are agreeing to put in— extra hours, time, and dedication to even just see the slightest . . . improvement in someone else's life.

Sam's journey toward education came after being accepted into and then dropping out of law school. Sam felt that law school did not provide him the satisfaction he was needing to fulfill his dreams of making a difference in people's lives. Sam decided to enter the teaching profession because "I had lots of books [growing up], and I had my imagination and . . . those were the most important things to me." Sam recognized his father for instilling the love of learning while growing up. "He . . . taught me poetry . . . when I was 3. He'd read me

Shakespeare at the breakfast table when I was six. I have always been reading and writing," so Sam felt that teaching "was kind of the obvious direction for me."

Sam applied to a Master's program but, understandably, was hesitant to reveal his new gender expression/identity since he was in the throes of transitioning from female to male. Prior to the beginning of his graduate-level coursework in education, Sam contacted his college advisor and engaged in "good conversations with her" in terms of expressing his concerns about "the pronouns I'm using now." Sam, a now self-identified transgender queer male, wanted to ensure that his professors would address him by the correct male pronoun. The advisor, much to Sam's enthusiasm, explained that she would inform Sam's professors and to "make sure the right name and pronoun went on my . . . name tag." Sam "got to start the program being myself, and it was the first time I had been in a situation where everyone . . . knew me that way. And that was amazing."

Unlike Sam's lived experience, Cassandra believed God inspired her to become a teacher. Cassandra explained,

> I can remember being home . . . and I can remember sitting there, and . . . in this quiet moment of just saying a prayer of thanks and just kind of thinking, God, thank you so much that I am here. . . . I feel like I owe you. I feel like I am here for a reason. What's that reason? How can I thank you? And literally, I'm not crazy, God was telling me to be a teacher. [Following this epiphany,] I applied . . . into a teaching program and immediately took to it like a duck to water and have been having the time of my life ever since. Even on tough days, I mean teaching is not easy, in so many ways, but my life has changed because of teaching . . . ,which has also helped me strengthen myself and self-esteem. You have to have thick skin to be a teacher.

Laila knew from an early age she wanted to be an educator. For her, it was during the later years of her elementary education that she realized her passion for working with students. Laila had worked as a counselor for a state program that helped students develop leadership, critical thinking, and social skills outside of the traditional classroom setting. While working at this program, recalled Laila, "I was working with kids and that was just when I knew I wanted to be a teacher." Although she was aware of "my love of teaching" from an early age, Laila did not immediately pursue an education degree following high school graduation "because the economy was kind of tanking . . . so I went to nursing school for a couple of years." Nursing school did not offer opportunities to work directly with children, so Laila decided to go "back into education."

Theme 3: The Decision to Self-Disclose at Work

I don't believe in coming out; I think that coming out is another way to oppress LGBTQ people.

–Josh

For most self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, the mere thought of disclosing their sexual orientations at work was fraught with anxiety and fear. Resultantly, the development of strong, meaningful relationships with students, their students' families, colleagues, and administration suffers (Capper, 1998; Casey, 2007). Griffin (1992) reminded readers, "Lesbian and gay educators constitute a large, but often invisible minority" (p. 167) presence in American public schools. Although self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers are present, they often fear revealing their sexual orientations out of fear of being perceived as "child molesters or recruiters to an immoral lifestyle" (Griffin, 1992, p. 167). Historically, self-identifying LGBTQ educators have witnessed teachers lose their jobs because of such allegations, even experiencing

threats of wrongful termination or removal of students from their classrooms due to homophobia. The following stories reinforce the homophobia these six teachers have endured.

Stephanie disclosed that she "has never come out [of the metaphorical closet] to my kids." Even though she did not feel comfortable disclosing her sexual orientation to her students, "I am out to . . . staff and colleagues." On one hand, Stephanie felt that sharing her sexual orientation with staff might possibly help other staff members. For instance, "Just this year I had two different women come to me and tell me about their love of other women, even though they are married to men." Moreover, by revealing her sexual orientation, Stephanie celebrated she "would be a role model to kids;" thus, normalizing non-heterosexual lifestyles while also securing the idea that homosexuality is "more common . . . and it won't be a big deal eventually." On the other hand, when it comes to telling her own students, Stephanie explained that she continues to "struggle with that [decision not to come out to her students] every year." Stephanie often found herself asking, "Are you going to do it [come out], or are you not going to do it?" Chapter 2 presented examples of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers who either disclosed or kept secret their sexual orientations and the effects of each decision. Stephanie's experience mirrored these examples, and she affirmed, "There's pros and cons" to coming out.

Married to her wife for nearly six years, Stephanie was "really sort of raring to come out" to her students and to share and celebrate her personal life with them without fear, much like her heterosexual colleagues can share their lives openly and without concern. She confessed, "It's hard to hide such a significant part of your life." One particular incident at school, however, reinforced her anxiety toward coming out. Stephanie found herself bracing for a potential catastrophe if a student asked her if she was involved in a heterosexual relationships or marriage.

“What are some responses I could say?” she asked herself. Guarded and stressed about how she should answer this hypothetical question from a student, Stephanie seemed defensive at the answers she gave herself. She declared she would want to ask the student, “Why do you want to know about who I sleep with at night? I’m not asking if you have a boyfriend or girlfriend.” The fact that she was being asked such a “personal question” by a student made her an object of inquiry that her heterosexual colleagues “wouldn’t find themselves” as due to the heteronormative beliefs engrained in “her students’ minds.” Moreover, Stephanie asserted that this micro-aggressive way of reinforcing heteronormativity or “the notion that heterosexuality is normal and natural” (Polleck, 2016, p. 245) made her feel “intimidated and sad.”

Stephanie wanted to be honest with her students, specifically because she believed “they’re not just my students; they’re my kids. And there’s a whole aspect of my life that they don’t know about.” The most difficult part about remaining closeted at work is the self-policing. For instance, Stephanie realized, “I don’t have a picture of my wife [at work]. . . . [T]here are so many instances where I need to think in my brain how . . . to respond [to students’ questions] . . . or reword it so that it gets rid of the female pronoun or, you know, even the fact that I’m married.” The one time Stephanie divulged her sexual orientation was to two students. She remembered,

> A couple of years ago I had 2 boys who were best friends and 1 [of the boys] . . . identified himself as bisexual, and he would talk a lot about it and throughout the year we created a relationship. I had them the last period of the day and they would always stay after the bell rang to chat . . . and so that became kind of a common thing every day and probably about half way through the year they’d always ask me about my life and what was going on, and one day they flat out asked if I was married to a woman. And I said,

> ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘This is the first time that I’ve ever come out to a student, and I’d appreciate if you didn’t spread this around. I’m telling you because I trust you and you’ve trusted me.’ [T]hat was a really good experience for me.

Like Stephanie’s experience with remaining closeted at work, Cassandra is not out to her students, either. Paradoxically, Cassandra revealed she “wishes I could say I’m gay . . . but it’s also not the . . . kids’ business.” Cassandra blamed this feeling on not being there, or ready to disclose her sexual orientation, yet to students. Cassandra revealed, “I guess it’s the thing that we [she and her students] just don’t talk about.” She did address, however, the statistics about self-identifying LGBTQ Americans on the first days of school. “We go over statistics about . . . how 1 out of 10 Americans is gay. And I say, ‘If you’re gay, you’re fine with me,’” she said. To personalize the statistics she discussed with her students about bullying and homophobia, Cassandra revealed she drew a scenario about her cousin Sandy, who she reveals as a lesbian. In reality, Cassandra confessed, “I don’t have a cousin Sandy . . . but I think it’s easier, especially for very conservative children, to have a teacher who has a cousin who is gay, rather than a teacher who is gay.” It was easier for Cassandra to navigate the world of homophobia by misdirecting attention toward her own sexual orientation through a fabricated cousin than address the issue face on. She remembered, “I had a teacher who I knew was gay, and I was a horrible student to that guy . . . and I treated him badly.”

Cassandra told, “For the first couple years of teaching,” she would have never had the courage to disclose her sexual orientation to colleagues. She uncovered she “wanted to look as girly as possible” to avoid any judgments from colleagues, even going as far as not cutting her hair “to look straight.” She confessed that appearing heterosexual “was a legit[imate] concern for my career.” “If I looked gay, I wouldn’t get a job,” Cassandra revealed. Even when a

colleague would ask her a question relating to her love life, Cassandra found herself making excuses as to why she was single to conceal the fact that she was a lesbian. "I would just say that I'm single, or that I didn't want to get married, or that I was going through something and I didn't want, or I just needed time for myself." Today, she elected to come out with colleagues and, for her, "I can be me, and that's *really* nice."

According to Josh, his own self-identification as a gay man "is still such . . . a taboo subject." "I guess I conform . . . by hiding who I really am all the time" while at work, he bared. Josh confessed, "I am not being 100% open with my students, avoiding saying I'm gay." Josh believed that not telling his students about his homosexuality was caused by spending "so much of my life thinking . . . that I was different" based on his sexual orientation, specifically the incident from graduate school, in which case it was suggested by the members of his cohort to "make a plan to come out" to his students. Resultantly, Josh confessed he had to "lie to myself [and] lie to people" to keep his sexuality a secret, "which makes me feel bad." Josh, also, feels that he does not feel comfortable honoring his homosexuality at work because of his previous administrator's decision not to expose his own homosexuality. Josh explained,

> When I first started teaching, I had a closeted gay administrator, and I was open to him about my own homosexuality; he was open to me. But he wasn't explicitly, or really implicitly, out to anyone else at work—maybe a few staff members. It was really interesting being in that situation and seeing how he navigated the world of remaining closeted. . . . So, I guess I . . . didn't feel safe being out with my students or with most of the staff because he wasn't. At times . . . he just kind of shit on me.

Throughout elementary, middle, and high school, Josh felt the need to conform to society's expectations surrounding gender and sexual orientation to avoid any discussion about

his homosexuality. Fitting into groups and not being perceived as abnormal "makes me feel like I'm part of a group. Fitting in makes me feel like I'm accepted. It makes me feel like I'm a human being . . . [who] deserves the same opportunities and experiences that other people do." Simultaneously, Josh recognizes his need to "break out of that whole mold and . . . embrace my differences." The current advisor to his school's GSA, Josh feels he is helping his students to be who they are. "Just having a forum, a safe space, to talk about needs, wants, dreams, and hopes" was Josh's role.

Like Josh, Laila refrained from mentioning her homosexuality with students or colleagues. First, Laila does not want her colleagues to think she's experiencing a "midlife crisis . . . or going crazy . . . or going through *something*" because of her newly realized sexual orientation. "I don't want my sexual orientation to be treated as a joke," she argued. Given her understanding of the goings of her school, principally "the cliquey and gossipy" environment—Laila was certain that she would be judged by others since she was once involved in a heterosexual marriage and now she's "suddenly [in a romantic relationship] with a woman." "I'm already going through quite a bit with my family," Laila shared; understandably, she wanted to maintain privacy between her personal and professional lives. To justify this way of thinking, Laila explained that she did not see herself as

> closeted at work as much as I'm not making an announcement. I'm not denying it, but I'm not walking around proclaiming it. If someone were to walk up to me and ask me—which hasn't happened yet—I'm not sure as to what I would say to be perfectly honest. I want to just say yes and in my mind I think I would, but if I was confronted or taken off guard, I'm not sure what I would do.

In the end, Laila confessed being closeted at work had also become irritating "because . . . I just want to live my life without having . . . to explain myself like that." Even though Laila never talked about her homosexuality with any of her colleagues (aside from two), she suspected,

> There's a lot of people at work who know, but they haven't said anything to me. I just get that vibe from people. There are a couple of teachers who I've told, but I don't know if they've kept it quiet . . . I just want to go to work like everybody else and have my life like everybody else, but I feel like I've got to take these precautionary steps . . . I don't really want to because it makes me feel like I'm doing something wrong. It still makes me feel like I'm doing something I shouldn't be doing.

Additionally, Laila found that some of her colleague's actions are telltale signs that they suspected her romantic involvement with her same-sex partner. For instance, Laila revealed,

> I was walking out to the car with my current partner and I saw two people in the parking lot and when they saw us together, one shot the other a look and the other shot the other a look and they kind of smiled.

Laila found herself often in a state of paranoia. She describes this as living "constantly in a fight or flight mode, like, danger, danger, everywhere." She confesses that when she was married to her husband she "didn't have to think twice about mentioning a situation with a heterosexual relationship, you start to talk and then you just have to think who am I talking to. What if I say [I'm a lesbian], and then this happens?" Consequently, Laila found she tends to "catastrophize things that may not even need to be catastrophized because you're just so worried about" revealing her sexual orientation. Laila recognized that once she decided to reveal her sexual orientation, the decision would be final and

> you can't take it [coming out] back, so that decision to do it is critical. What time, who you're going to tell, what are you going to tell, how you're going to say it? I ask myself, "Am I dressed a certain way?" My family has made very clear to me that I'm different. I'm meaner and, I don't know, I'm just like all this stuff. And I'm like, "I am? I don't feel different." But, so I walk around work going, "Am I wearing boy clothes? Am I walking like a boy? Am I talking differently, have I changed how I am?" I'm actually dressing and acting the way I want to now, but . . . I guess I feel like everybody's looking at me. Everybody's watching me. Everybody's thinking something about me. And I know that sounds like I'm completely paranoid. This heightened sense of paranoia and you know things can get so out of control. And I just want my work environment to be nice. I just want to come to work and do my job. I just don't want to have to worry about my sexual identity at work, but I feel like . . . something bad's going to happen.

In an effort to pacify her anxiety and paranoia, Laila sought counseling because

> I've been trying to have somebody help me work though it and how to do it and when to do it, if not to do it. I have a lot of advice coming from a lot of directions from a lot of people. . . . It's stressful, you know, I don't sleep as well as I used to. I thought once I did this I was going to be so happy. I was like, I finally get to live the way I want to. I'm going to have a partner and everything's going to be great and then it's just not like that. I mean, I'm not saying I'm not happy but I'm not as happy as I thought I'd be. I just thought it was going to be such a freeing experience, and it is just the exact opposite from that for me right now in some ways. . . . I isolated myself a lot last year. I wouldn't talk to people as much and they were wondering if something was wrong with me.

Unlike Laila's experience with remaining closeted at work, Sam's coming-out story happened early on in the school year. Sam did not want to have his transition to appear stigmatizing or abnormal in the eyes of his students. Sam remembered the conversation with his class being authentic and extremely intimate. For instance, Sam recalled,

> It must have been . . . two months into the school year, when I talked about it, and that was because it had just organically come up in conversation. . . . I said, 'The only difference was that women could, you know, have children,' and then I corrected myself. I was like, 'Well . . . people with wombs could have children and not necessarily women.' The kids . . . laughed and then a bunch of other people were like, 'That's not funny; that's a real thing." And so I was like, "Yeah, no, I did not mean that as a joke, 'cause I'm a trans person," and then they applauded, which I thought was weird, but they were like, "No, no, we should applaud!" They applauded the next day when we talked about it again.

When it came to colleagues, Sam shared that the adults who worked at his school site "don't say anything to me, and I know from hearing from other people [other teachers] constantly misgender me behind my back. . . . I know some of them either don't understand or don't care." During his first year of teaching, Sam felt isolated and depressed because "there was no one else that I could . . . talk to about" self-identifying as gay at work "because I'm the only one." For Sam, awkwardness occurred when his good-intentioned colleagues struggled to use the correct pronoun when addressing or referring to him. On one hand, there are teachers who Sam felt "really want to do the right thing . . . but they don't really know how . . . so they avoid subjects . . . or are over-apologetic if they accidentally misgender me;" however, others

simply refused to use Sam's correct pronoun, which troubled him. For instance, Sam confided that

> it was rough with this one person who . . . I mean we hadn't been close, but, she, like her office is in the same hall as my classroom, and we talked pretty frequently, and she seemed like somebody I could trust on a basic level. She was fun to talk to, and then I found out that she had no interest in using my pronouns, or anything, and it just . . . it becomes harder to trust someone. . . . I really liked this person, and I guess I still do, in terms of everything else, but this is kind of a big deal.

Even in the midst of the awkwardness, Sam realized the humanity and humor in his gender transition. Sam began taking testosterone, colloquially referred to as "T," during his first year of teaching. This meant that Sam's body, like his students' bodies, were undergoing radical and extreme hormone changes. Sam acknowledged that one of the most enjoyable aspects of transitioning from female to male was having

> my voice . . . cracking all the time because of the T, which, I really enjoyed that part of it, because, so were my students' voices. It was just like—yep I am going through exactly what you are right now! You want to scream and hit things? Me too! Your voice is cracking embarrassingly in the middle of class? Mine too, [which] was kind of fun.

Armed with little professional teaching experience, Chris once felt anxious about publicly self-identifying as an LGBTQ public school teacher while at school. Chris admitted that this paranoia occurred before the district even hired him. He recalled, "I was paranoid in my interview," because Chris did not costume himself in the traditional female attire, like a dress. Chris was concerned "that my colleagues wouldn't be . . . welcoming . . . and accepting to my identity." Even though Chris did not don stereotypical female clothing, he intimated, "I dressed

very professionally, and I looked at my partner at the time and I asked her, 'Should I dress differently for the interview?'" According to Chris, his partner, at the time, quelled Chris's fears about his outward appearance by affirming, "You are dressed professionally, and you feel comfortable with what you are wearing. I see no problem with what you are wearing." Much to Chris's excitement, he was offered the job; he accepted the teaching position. Chris posited, "I got . . . very comfortable with my department . . . and we talk to each other, interact with each other, as if none of that [her self-identification] matters . . . and that feels great!"

When it came to discussing his sexual orientation with his students, Chris reported, as a professional, "I'm very much true to myself. I don't go out and say, 'Hey! I'm gay!' . . . and as a teacher you need to be professional. In the sense that you don't disclose . . . your personal life." Chris decided, however, that should a student ask her if she were married, "I would tell them; I wouldn't lie to them. I honor their question, but I don't volunteer the information."

Theme 4: Fear

On a deep level, it is hard to be in a room with someone who is disgusted by you.

–Stephanie

Although each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers described the importance of meaningful, professional relationships with students, the theme of fear emerged strongly throughout each interview. The self-described strained, even cautious, relationships each of these teachers possess (amongst themselves, colleges, and students and students' families) because of their sexual orientations trigger fear that negatively affected these teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and lived experiences. Without question, these concerns by self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers has not dissipated with time; today "such concern [self-

identifying as a LGBTQ public school teacher] plays into . . . a debate that in turn touches on Americans' deepest anxieties and depressions" (Kissen, 1996a, p. 76).

Categorized as an intense, primal emotion, fear causes humans to "live lives devoid of joy, happiness, and pleasure" (Dozier, 1998, p. 3). Fear's effects on individuals often results in pain and profoundly shapes those who experience it. Historically, fear, in the context of education, has affected—and continues to affect—those teachers who either self-identify as or who have been perceived to be LGBTQ due to ongoing violence and homophobia (Blount, 1996; Lugg, 1996a, 1996b, 2003a). Self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers often find themselves the target of such discrimination because the American public education system is still struggling to provide all educators with the discourses they need to implement sound non-institutional barriers, policies and practices to protect those teachers who self-identify as LGBTQ (Harris & Gray, 2014; Smythe & Spence, 2012).

Stephanie feared that students "might be mirroring some of the attitudes of their parents." Stephanie feared that homophobic parents "wouldn't want their kids in my room anymore . . . or just getting some backlash" because of her self-identifying as a lesbian, even though she opted to remain closeted at work. Her fears are elevated by the belief that, historically, parents have profiled self-identifying or suspected LGBTQ public school teachers as pedophiles, since "I think people have the idea that homosexual are . . . about sex, and that's all they ever think about." Stephanie does not want parents "think[ing] that you'll encourage . . . my [the parents'] daughter [to turn gay] because she's in *your* class." Worse, she does not want her students' parents to think, "You're sick; there's something wrong with you" simply for being a lesbian. If she were to publicly disclose her sexual orientation, according to Stephanie, she may lose "credibility as an intelligent human being because . . . of my sexual orientation." For

Stephanie, what people in general fail to realize is that, like their heterosexual counterparts, self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers

> go shopping and have the same exact relationships, but it's just with the same sex and . . . any little anything could be blown out of proportion. . . . [For instance,] with gay male teachers . . . they [parents] just think that's all you think about is sex and so there could be that danger . . . and then just being afraid . . . that their daughter's in the class with a lesbian teacher they might turn out to be a lesbian. They [parents] might complain about things, exaggerate things, or just plain make up things to get you removed. I've heard stories about that.

Laila found that although she did not self-disclose her sexual orientation to her colleagues, the friends who suspect have distanced themselves from her. Laila explained,

> Well, since I'm not out-out, I haven't really felt like that from an administrator . . . but there are teachers who I know are blatantly against this lifestyle, and I have a feeling that, you know, at least one of them knows, and she has not been as friendly; she doesn't come in my room anymore; or if my partner's at work with me, she just acts different around me. I think [she] . . . talks about me to other friends of mine who . . . I have felt like some friendships have suffered a little bit. She isolated [herself] away from me. I have definitely felt that.

With the recent presidential election, Cassandra feared that America was heading in the wrong direction. Cassandra elaborated on how the fear caused her to remove herself from the American media, altogether. Cassandra expanded,

> I've turned off social media; I haven't been reading the paper; I've stopped listening to NPR. . . . I felt like . . . with the political climate I have to be afraid again, but I am . . .

> pissed about being afraid again. Like, no. No more fear. . . . I don't want to be afraid. . . . Sometimes being afraid is a choice. Not always, but sometimes. And I don't want to be afraid, so just in case things change in the next year with the new president, I [have] to get married this year. And we [she and her partner] were fine getting married but we thought, "Well let's just do it sooner than later." I have to say the happiness of going to get married is trumping—ooh bad word!—superseding all negative things.

Even though Cassandra worried about the ways in which she perceives America turning more toward a conservative stance on marriage equality, she did, in fact, enjoy where she lived. Cassandra elaborated further:

> I am glad I live where I live and seeing all the red versus blue [states of the country]; I know where not to move, but . . . the possibility is there that I might get fired. I might get let go or asked to step down because of who I am. And teaching brings me such joy. It's really hard, though. I can remember years ago, I got riffed, and I was cut loose, and I had been a teacher for six years but only three in the district, so I was below the line, and I was thinking, "Do I want to do anything else aside from teaching?" I went through all of these [occupation scenarios], and I was like, "My gosh, it all comes back to teaching. I don't want to be a barista. I don't want to be in the medical field. I don't want to be a truck driver. I don't want to be a lawyer. I don't want to be in HR." Teaching . . . is a calling. So what if that goes away? And I guess I haven't put a whole lot of thought into it because . . . ignorance is bliss, and I'm thinking, "Well that [losing her job because of her self-identifying sexual orientation] won't happen." But geez it might, and then what? It's a heavy load. I guess I choose to think that it won't, and I just

> focus on that positivity and hopefully people see me as a teacher first not as a gay teacher.

Like Cassandra, Stephanie felt stressed after the recent presidential election. Stephanie viewed this election as, perhaps, forcing "her . . . back into the closet . . . due to the hatred and the closed mindedness of our society and country." Most crucially, Stephanie confessed she feels unsafe and that the presidential election

> has made me fear for my future; it made me fear for the validity of my marriage and made me wonder, "Is that going to be taken away? Am I going to have the same rights as everyone else? Am I going to literally have to go back into the closet for my job? Are those rights going to be taken away?" So there is a lot of uncertainty right now in my life, because of that election, and so I feel like I went from one extreme to the other in a period of like a week. . . . It's sort of a day-by-day roller coaster, and what was also interesting was the day after the election, that Wednesday, we [teachers] didn't have any kids and it was a staff development day, and I couldn't bring myself to come in in the morning. I was just too distraught. I had been up until two in the morning crying. So I didn't go in to work until lunchtime. I walked into the cafeteria, and all of my colleagues are sitting at the lunch tables eating, and I walk in and . . . I had a number of people get up and hug me and tell me that they're going to be there for me and that they would for fight that battle to the death for me. So I felt very supported by my colleagues, which was amazing. So in that respect I feel very safe and very lucky. But there's only so much they can do, you know?

According to Sam, he experienced fear when it came to his students' parents. Sam believed that although he was transparent in his decision with colleagues, students, and their

parents about his self-identifying as a transgender male, the parents would be transphobic and could cause him potential mental distress and anxiety. Sam explained, "I've had parents who definitely were not super happy with their kid being in my class, but, who also were not willing to say that that was why." Sam found it obvious that this particular group of parents zeroed in on Sam being transgender because "they [the parents] didn't have any other actual reason [for removing the student from the classroom], and they were just pulling straws out of the air." Aside from this experience with parents, Sam felt support from administration.

Theme 5: The Need for District Inclusiveness and Safe Spaces

I'm going to use my voice to make sure that . . . everyone feels safe in my classroom.

–Josh

A safe space, according to Holley and Steiner (2005), is an "environment in which students are willing and able to participate and honestly struggle with challenging issues" (p. 49). Although this definition only addresses the *student* needing to feel comfortable expressing her or his self-expression (both gender and sexual orientation) within the academic environment, each of the following six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers argued that they needed to experience "the contours of [a] safe space" (Aaro & Clemens, 2013, p. 135) while at work. This notion of a safe space is illustrative of what Palmer (2004) called a *circle of trust*. Palmer wrote, "A circle of trust need not be limited to people who live nearby" (2004, p. 74). For the LGBTQ communities, such a circle of trust works in the same fashion as a place where people "share such a strong culture of soul-honoring relationships that [they] . . . pick up like old friends . . . as if [they] . . . had never been apart" (Palmer, 2004, p. 74).

Likewise, the thought of a school district being inclusive, or feeling a personal and professional connection with peers while receiving the opportunity to collaborate, is what

mattered most to these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers (Clair, Beatty, & Mclean, 2005). In terms of district inclusiveness, Laila viewed her school district as heading in the correct direction of social justice and "equitable practices;" at the same time, she was skeptical. For instance, Laila posited that the school district was purposefully hiring self-identifying LGBTQ educators to "fill a politically correct quota." Additionally, Laila argued, "Sometimes I feel like they're being hired for that reason. I'm not sure how sincere it is, though."

Similarly, Chris felt a strong disconnect between hiring self-identifying LGBTQ teachers and including them in the actual district-level conversations surrounding the lived experiences of these teachers. It was not until the previous school year that he discovered the district offered Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) trainings for self-identifying LGBTQ students. Chris entertained, "Granted, I was a first-year teacher, so I was pretty much head to the grindstone but . . . I think there needs to be equity trainings . . . and a dialogue that happens within each school, not just at the district level." Chris wanted the district to provide platforms to address not "just racial issues" but also to create and implement LGBTQ-sensitivity trainings for all teachers to help students who are "coming into their own identity, and are, obviously, shit scared doing it." Chris contended that the students of this district "need the support . . . otherwise they are going to hide behind in the shadows, suffering in silence."

Chris's experience was positive, for the most part, and, he revealed, "I have been fairly pleased . . . working in the school district." Chris expanded,

> When it comes to . . . my individual school, where I work at and my colleagues, everybody seems supportive, including my administration. They're actually the people that are most onboard with me being me, and allowing students to come into their own,

> especially if they identify as LGBTQ, and . . . I have the support I need so far. However, I haven't quite gone into . . . the district. I haven't quite explored that avenue.

Laila found that within the school district at large "the trend is to pretend like you are . . . being politically correct to be saying the right things but . . . consequently the work place has people who are okay with it and people who are not okay" with self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators. Interestingly, Laila experienced living and working "on both sides" of the sexual orientation binary. According to Laila, "I know what it feels like to be married heterosexually. I know what it feels like to be in a gay relationship. I've had both experiences, and . . . it's just not the same. Before in my class, I could say, 'Oh, my husband this, my husband that.' I don't feel comfortable saying, 'My partner this, my partner that,' because I'm afraid of the reaction."

Stephanie confessed, "I'm a little more guarded in the district." When it comes to district inclusiveness, Stephanie argued, "It depends on who you ask, and who you talk to." Stephanie perceived the school district as wanting to provide "equity for all . . . [because] they're so many trainings that they have for race equity;" nevertheless, when it came to addressing and discoursing about LGBTQ-related issues within the environs of the school district, she contended the school district prescribed to a "check this off as a box" option and is then done. For example, after allegations were brought against a teacher who allegedly bullied a self-identifying LGBTQ student, the school district in which Stephanie was a teacher mandated that all public school teachers who work within that district received a training in learning about and dealing with LGBTQ-student issues. Stephanie explained,

> In response to show that all of their teachers were not bullies against gays and lesbians . . . [the school district] had a training at all the schools. So . . . a piece of a

> paper was given to the principals at the schools and the principals then had to give that information out to their staff. And, so, at our staff meeting, our principal literally handed out this one page paper of LGBTQ terms. At one point my principal said, 'The Q, I think, stands for queer.' . . . Clearly, she had not been prepped on it. She didn't know half of what she was talking about, and it felt really like a slap in the face to me; that's what I mean when I say it was like a check in the box. Yeah, we've covered our asses. Now everyone's trained . . . and that is frustrating. As far as the whole district, do I feel supported by them? Not really.

Stephanie reasoned that if the district "would have brought in someone who that they were talking about," the training wouldn't have felt "rushed during a random staff meeting." If she were tasked with presenting the information, Stephanie judged she "would have given background" of the daily issues self-identifying LGBTQ students face. "This one little 20-minute deal for us . . . shows me" that when it comes to LGBTQ issues "it's not as important" as the district would make it seem. Stephanie maintained she and other self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers "need way more support that we have right now," not only to help teachers like her but also to protect all students from stigmatization, bullying, and harassment. Stephanie revealed that her district once supported the Zero Tolerance policy. Stephanie indicated, "I don't think that's happening anymore. I think the district, in general, is swinging toward a Restorative Justice model, but that's not being necessarily communicated" to principals or teachers. Even though the Restorative Justice model is aimed at students, Stephanie equated the lack of communication surrounding the adoption and implementation with the lack of trainings and discourses surrounding LGBTQ issues within her school district. Stephanie urged the following:

> I think more in-depth trainings would be good for all teachers, and what I'm thinking of is, in particular, with all of these race trainings there was one in particular that really was powerful for me that I took. It was the Taking It Up. The one where it was three days and it was incredibly intense and you had your small group and, you know, you created a relationship with those people, and you shared really personal things and, you know, I went into that training thinking I'm not a racist, I don't have much to learn here and I came out thinking holy shit, like, I have a lot to grow, and I wish that those kind of trainings were for gays and lesbians. I wish that there was a focus like that. So I think that's one aspect. I think the more teachers that come out and are visual, in that sense, I think that will create a safer environment.

Cassandra advocated for the school district to provide a safe space for self-identifying LGBTQ teachers to share their lived experiences to increase visibility and awareness surrounding "gay and lesbian issues." For example, Cassandra wished to see the school district adopt and implement programs that promote the social, professional, and personal health of its self-identifying LGBTQ employees (not just educators), much like the goal of the national organization, Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). Cassandra intimated,

> I wish . . . that gay people had a venue, a safe venue to tell their story. One, they could tell it to other gays. Two, they could tell it to people who are just coming out that might need to hear that. Three, like at a PFLAG meeting where families don't know . . . but it makes us less invisible, and in my story, I felt as a gay that I was a less than and not good enough because I was this, a different thing that did not fit in. And when you get to tell your story, you put yourself on a map. You step out of the shadows. You come out of

> the closet. You get a moment to say, 'I matter.' And it would be awesome if other people got to do that, too, for different things. People have a voice. We have stopped listening to each other as humans. We talk, but we don't listen. We hear, but we don't listen.

Cassandra continued by saying that she would like to see more opportunities to share her lived experience with others. Cassandra remarked,

> I felt as a gay that I was a less than and not good enough because I was this, a different thing that did not fit in. And when you get to tell your story, you put yourself on a map. You step out of the shadows. You come out of the closet. You get a moment to say I matter. And it would be awesome if other people got to do that too for different things. People have a voice. We have stopped listening to each other as humans. We talk but we don't listen. We hear but we don't listen. It's different. And I felt that I was listened to. And I was really special now.

Sam found that isolation was the worst aspect of his job within the school district. While attending graduate school, Sam was more involved with the LGBTQ communities and events. There, he felt more connected with transgender groups, but now that he is working and living within this specific area, Sam divulged he misses those connections. Sam stated that he felt as though "I am the one that has to start everything, even if the people will help me along the way, this is my initiative to take, because I'm the only one here who knows and/or cares enough." To help self-identifying LGBTQ teachers feel more connected, Sam recognized, "we just need training for teachers, for admin, for students, for everybody, so that it doesn't have to be the one queer person on staff who is bringing up issues." Sam desired to be "able to sit down with other LGBTQ folks from the district and just talk and just say whatever we need to say. That's the

support that I'm usually in need of . . . I would love it if we [the district and self-identifying LGBTQ teachers] did that."

Additionally, Sam needed his students to feel they had a safe space "to be and express themselves." Sam wanted his students to know that all students should feel safe, respected, and honored in his classroom. Sam acknowledged that it was "really nice when I see that I have had a positive impact on something for just being here." To ensure that his students were aware of his classroom representing a safe space for all, Sam admitted that he "keeps a gay pride flag next to my door, and . . . I have had a lot of students be like, "I saw that . . . and I can feel accepted here." Because Sam imparted his gender transition, students have made comments like, "This is the first time I met a trans[gender] grown up, or a trans teacher." This made Sam feel better knowing that his lived experience created an affirming and welcoming space "where my students can be themselves, or at least have someone who would let them be themselves."

Sam, like the previous co-researchers, wanted the school district and administration to discuss the issues of homo- and transphobia as it addresses and attempts to dismantle systems that perpetuate racism. Sam mentioned, "I'm not saying we don't have a racism problem . . . but at least everyone knows that if you say something racist, that is not okay." Sam believed the school district in which he works did not examine its biases surrounding LGBTQ issues and that hurts everyone. Sam explored,

> I don't feel that the same things are true about LGBT people. I don't feel like it's as assumed that saying something homophobic is wrong and . . . that has to change. I think that it goes back to just feeling like this is not something we should talk about. It needs to be made something that is completely okay to talk about. We just need trainings for

teachers, for admin, for students, for everybody, so that it doesn't have to be the one queer person on staff who is bringing up issues.

Additionally, Sam needed the school district to "be more transparent and direct about what we need to be doing in schools to support our students," specifically when it came to the recent political discourses surrounding the use of the bathroom. For instance, last year, Sam asked his principal whether the bathrooms were designated as *gender neutral*, meaning suitable for both genders to use. The principal confirmed they were; however, outside each bathroom door "the signs say they aren't" because one bathroom was labeled *men* and the other bathroom *women*. By the end of the school year, Sam celebrated, "Someone at the district had been like, 'Hey! You gotta change those signs!" Later, he was told that "some people had been mad about the signs changing" from the designated gender signs to "gender neutral."

Summary of Qualitative Findings

Descriptive and rich themes emerged as the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers discussed and reflected upon their lived experiences in this qualitative study. Their lived experiences have been peppered with narratives that offer deep, robust insight into the lives of an often-underrepresented and marginalized group of public school teachers. Buttressed and nuanced by thick, intimate descriptions, the following five themes intersect and give life to, define, and capture the essence of these individuals' lived experiences: meaningful relationships; possessing the passion to teach; negotiating the positives and negatives of coming out while at work; fear; and the need for district inclusiveness and district-created safe spaces.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the phenomenological findings of the lived experiences of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. The chapter recapitulated the strategies for the

design and analysis of this study, including the data coding and analysis procedures. The chapter then outlined and discussed the five main themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews: relationships; passion to teach; choice to self-disclose sexual orientation at work; fear; and district inclusiveness and safe spaces. The rich and thick descriptions offered by each of the six co-researchers demonstrated the complexities and nuances of the personal and academic lives of these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers.

Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of this phenomenological study by merging the study results with the research sub-questions and will share what effects this qualitative study has had on the researcher's own lived experience. In addition, the following chapter will provide recommendations for other public school teachers, public school administrators, and public school districts when it comes to helping, affirming, and respecting self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, and, finally, will suggest topics and implications for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

> Regardless of our sexual orientation, educators are vulnerable public figures, needing approval, prepared for derision, conflicted by the authority imposed by their roles, and fearful that they will or have become in public domain something separate, and thus somehow invalid. (McNinch, 2007, p. 201)

The previous four chapters of this phenomenological study addressed how homophobia and heteronormativity have long been entrenched in the social discourses of the American public education system. Chapter 1 discussed the historical background against which the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities have fought to expand and redefine themselves. Chapter 2 then detailed major historic, judicial, political, and social accounts of homophobia throughout the United States as informed by the review of the literature and the chapter specifically included queer theory and intersectionality to render a deeper examination of the lived experiences of these multi-dimensional stories. Chapter 3 outlined the concrete procedures taken by the researcher to interview six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers using a narrative inquiry framework. Chapter 4 presented the qualitative findings that were discovered by mining the interview data for codes, organizing those codes into families, and which yielded five salient themes from the reduced interview data.

Chapter 5 will summarize the findings of this phenomenological study by aligning the study results with the research sub-questions, in order to demonstrate how the sub-questions are answered by the data. The chapter, in addition, will provide recommendations for public school teachers, public school administrators, and public school districts to help, affirm, and respect self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Last, the chapter will suggest topics and implications for future phenomenological research. It is paramount to remember, however, that

the co-researcher participation sample was limited; as such, the findings are not representative of the LGBTQ teaching community at large.

Background of the Qualitative Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers: three lesbians; one gay male; one gender fluid gay female; and two transgender males. Through formal, semi-structured qualitative interviews, the researcher was able to use methods of narrative inquiry, as well as the theory of intersectionality, to share the stories each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers brought "within the institutions within which we work, the social narratives of which [they] are a part, the landscape on which [they] live" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 64). For this qualitative study, the researcher first assigned each of the six co-researchers a pseudonym and then preserved each of the six co-researcher's self-identified sexual orientations. From this point forward in the chapter, the researcher will refer to each of the six co-researchers by her or his pseudonym: Laila; Stephanie; Josh; Sam; Cassandra; and Chris.

In the context of this qualitative study, a phenomenological approach provided the most appropriate method by which to explore, analyze, and understand the lived experiences of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. The following central question and four ancillary sub-questions drove and informed this study:

- Central question: What are the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators?
- Sub-question 1: How has being LGBTQ shaped the lived experience of educators?

- Sub-question 2: How have the intersections of personal life, professional life, and formal policies and laws impacted the overall lives of LGBTQ public school teachers?
- Sub-question 3: How have the intersectional interactions with administration, faculty, students, and students' families shaped the experiences of LGBTQ public school teachers?
- Sub-question 4: What supports do LGBTQ public school teachers need in place to promote their safety while at work?

Review of the Five Emergent Themes

Using these sub-questions as the underpinnings for the phenomenological interviews, the researcher mined, evaluated, and coded the data for emerging themes. Each of the six co-researchers' storied lives intersected at five common-core themes, all of which emerged after the researcher coded and analyzed the interview data. The following five themes revealed the essence of these six individuals' lived experiences as self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators:

- Relationships with Students
- The Passion to Teach
- The Decision to Self-Disclose at Work
- Fear
- The Need for District Inclusiveness and Safe Spaces

In addition, these five intersecting themes materialized from the narratives shared by each the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators and addressed each of the four sub-questions; thus, the five themes are the results of capturing the essence of these teachers' lived

experiences. Clusters of subthemes emerged from each of these larger, salient themes and will be addressed in greater depth under their respective themes.

For a qualitative researcher to explore the lived experiences of a group of individuals within the same social sphere there needs to be shared experiences. The five emerging themes, all of which "are shaped by different factors and social dynamics operating together," (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 3) provide evidence that the co-researchers did, in fact, have shared experiences. It is where these stories intersected and overlapped that actual meanings surfaced (Creswell, 2008). Collins & Bilge (2016) argued this approach to revealing the essence of any lived experience is the best way to arrive at "an approach to understanding human life and behavior rooted in the experiences and struggles of disenfranchised people" (p. 36).

Deconstruction and Discussion of the Sub-Questions

Sub-question 1: How has being LGBTQ shaped the lived experience of educators? Given the historical backdrop of the lived experience of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers in America, it is clear that the American public education system is still fraught by heteronormative and homophobic discourses (Kimmel, 2014; Lugg, 2006, 2012, 2016; Olson, 1987; Pascoe, 2007; Sanlo, 1999). These engrained discourses have been produced and reproduced by social, cultural, and historical factors that "have combined to make the controversy over homosexuality and education one of the most publicly volatile and personally threatening debates in our national history" (Harbeck, 1992, p. 1). Harbeck (1992) pointed out that the American public education system

> has emphasized religious and moral development as a primary goal. Thus, teachers, as role models for impressionable youth and as employees of local government, often faced a wide variety of forbidden behaviors, such as prohibitions on smoking, drinking,

> dancing, dating, marriage, and pregnancy, that was unequaled in any other profession. In fact, monitoring the activities of the teacher has been an affirmative community responsibility, rather than a mere prurient interest. (p. 1)

As the reviewed literature and this phenomenological study demonstrated, fear on the part of the self-identifying LGBTQ public school educator, according to Harbeck (1992), has existed since the inauguration of education altogether. Harbeck wrote,

> We do know that since colonial times the most common scenario is one of a person living an exemplary life in fear of discovery. In that rare instance when his or her homosexual orientation became known, the teacher quietly resigned or quickly left, since the potential consequences of challenging the system alone were extreme. (1992, pp. 123–124)

In the following section, the researcher will discuss how some of the co-researchers' stories fit—or not—within the existing literature and theoretical frameworks of history, queer theory, and intersectionality, paying attention to how these factors relate to the lived experiences of this research's six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers.

Fear. During the formal phenomenological interview process, each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers cited a number of factors that contributed to their lived experiences. The lived experiences of these self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers shared stories about the fear brought on by social, cultural, and historical aspects surrounding homophobia that existed in the American public education system (Blount, 1999, 2000, 2005; Capper, 1998; D'Emilio, 1983, 1985, 2014; DeJean, 2007; Lugg, 1996a, 1996b). The individual accounts of their lived experiences, both personal and professional, demonstrated that the theme of fear is prevalent in their daily lives.

Palmer (1998) explained, “The personal fears that . . . teachers bring to the classroom are fed by the fact that the roots of education are sunk deep in fearful ground” (p. 50), specifically homophobia. The qualitative findings of this study concluded that the intersecting theme of fear plays a recursive role in the lives of these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers revealed that the social and cultural attitudes toward the LGBTQ communities have, in all likelihood, adversely affected them in profound ways. Furthermore, the findings of this study recapitulated the reviewed literature conducted with similar populations of teachers (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Sears, 1991, 1993, 2005; Tooms, 2007; Tooms & Alston, 2006). The emotional navigation it took these six teachers either to disclose or talk about their sexual orientation at work was arduous, painful, and humiliating.

For these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators, fear manifested itself at two crucial sub-themes: the fear of rejection by and retaliation from students and the fear of losing relationships with students at the cost of coming out.

Fear of rejection by and retaliation from students. Throughout each of the formal interview sessions, the six co-researchers shared their lived experiences and explained how fear has affected their lived experiences while at work. The fear these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers experienced is not predicated upon the fear of losing respect, admiration, or friendships with colleagues or administration, however. For each of the six co-researchers, the fear of being rejected by or experiencing the loss of relationships with students was the crucial outcome they feared. Each of the participants framed their love of teaching around the relationships they foster and maintain with their students, and all revealed that any rejection or retaliation from students was worth remaining closeted. For example, Cassandra confessed, “I

was just always afraid the kids would find out. I was afraid . . . that I would be discovered. And then I would have [a] hate crime against me, like something written on the board, like, 'Faggot go home,' or "God hates gays," or "We know you're gay," something, *something* [emphasis added] where I would feel like a victim." "No student has ever called me a faggot or yelled at me or treated me differently," recalled Josh. Instead, the students made "snide comments or asked, 'Are you married?'"

Stephanie admitted that one of her fears is that her students "might be mirroring some of the attitudes of their parents." Stephanie feared that this mirroring of their parent's attitudes would make the students begin to question her sexual orientation. Stephanie expressed,

> I do feel . . . the majority of my kids are totally cool with it and would be fine and probably the majority of them assume I am a lesbian, . . . but I do know that there are parents out there [who] would not be okay with it, and there's just a part of me that doesn't want to deal with that.

In a Foucauldian sense, these homophobic discourses would have, according to Stephanie, an indirect and negative effect on the relationships she cherished with her students. Although Stephanie did not disclose her sexual orientation at work, she still feared that homophobic parents "wouldn't want their kids in my room anymore." She understood, also, that some parents might consider her as being pathologically "sick . . . [and] thinking that there's something wrong with me." No parent had ever removed her or his child from Stephanie's classroom at the time of the formal phenomenological interview; nevertheless, given that the literature revealed fear has always plagued self-identifying or those public school teachers perceived to be LGBTQ (Altman, 1971, 1981, 1983; Bawer, 1993; Biegel, 2010), it is expected that Stephanie feared it happening.

Unlike Stephanie, Sam experienced having a student removed from his class because of Sam self-identifying as a transgender male. Sam revealed,

> I've had parents who definitely were not super happy with their kid being in my class, but, who also were not willing to say that that was why. "It was pretty apparent, because they didn't have any other actual reason, and they were just pulling straws out of the air. And so I had at least one lovely meeting with a huge elephant in the room, but . . . we got through that because I could defend my teaching practices. I was like, 'Nope, all the things you're saying are not relevant.'

In the end, Sam's administrator decided to allow the child to remain in Sam's classroom, which substantiated Sam's merit as a professional teacher. Historically, teachers like Sam may have not been supported by their administration out of the pressure of parents.

To add, Stephanie's fears elevated when she began discussing the potential risk of being thought of as a pedophile, illustrating the mass hysteria surrounding Anita Bryant and Senator John Brigg's campaigns to remove self-identifying or perceived LGBTQ public school teachers from classrooms. As shown by previous historical accounts,

> Paranoia surrounding LGBT teachers in part traces back to unfounded theories linking homosexuality and pedophilia. Although the American Psychological Association and numerous other research organizations have concluded that homosexuality does not make someone more likely to sexually abuse children, conservative organizations such as the Family Research Council and the American College of Pediatricians . . . argue that homosexuality is a threat to children. (Machado, 2014)

Clearly, the idea of the LGBTQ public school teacher as a child molester remains intact; thus, "stigma in the context of work can lead to discrimination, stereotyping, social isolation, stifled advancement and opportunities, and even job loss" (King, Reilly, Hebl, 2008, pp. 567–568).

Stephanie talked about the fear of being compared to a pedophile or as a recruiter for a gay agenda. This discourse, which has historically equated LGBTQ teachers as child molesters, has greatly informed her lived experience. Stephanie blamed not disclosing her sexual orientation on the fear of "getting some backlash from parents." In a Foucauldian (1978, 1980a, 1980b, 1990) sense, this use of homophobic discourse is what empowered parents to retain control over an LGBTQ teacher from disclosing her or his sexual orientation. Simultaneously, this same discourse had disempowered Stephanie from feeling comfortable enough to disclose her sexual orientation. Laila, like Stephanie, had experienced the same fear and shared,

> Well, you know some people just think that you'll encourage their kids to think, 'Well my daughter thinks she's gay now because she's in your class [or] I don't want my kids in your room—you're sick! There's something wrong with you!' and, therefore, my credibility as an intelligent human being goes down because of my sexual orientation. . . . They go for you; they get you fired . . . just to get you out of the school, to get you away from the kids, even though that's ridiculous.

Although Stephanie never revealed if she personally knew a teacher who was targeted for her or his sexual orientation, she admitted, "I've heard stories about that." Stephanie confessed, "I think people have the idea that homosexuals . . . are about sex, and that's all they ever think about." Stephanie considered that parents might be afraid that she will "encourage [her students] to be a lesbian." In her lived experience, Stephanie equated being homosexual with being the Other, or the Butlerian (1988, 1993, 1999, 2004) notion that something oppositional, undesirable

stands in stark contrast to the expected heterosexual. These stories are evidence of how societal, cultural, and historical discourses deeply influence people's lived experiences (Foucault, 1978, 1990). Stephanie stressed that all self-identifying LGBTQ individuals

> go shopping and have the same exact relationships, but it's just with the same sex and . . . any little anything could be blown out of proportion. [For instance,] with [gay] males . . . they [homophobic parents] just think that's all you think about is sex and so there could be that danger . . . and then just being afraid . . . that their daughter's in the class with a lesbian teacher they might turn out to be a lesbian. They [homophobic parents] might complain about things, exaggerate things, or just plain make up things to get you removed. I've heard stories about that.

Cassandra believed that when students asked her if she was married, it meant they were covertly asking if she was a lesbian. "It is my greatest fear . . . to have a kid ask me: Are you gay?" Casandra shared that she perceived this question as a covert way of assuming—even accusing—she was a lesbian. "The students don't ask my heterosexual colleagues if they're married." Cassandra confessed that if she lied and said, "No!" or avoided the question altogether, what would that mean to the students who look to her as a role model for the LGBTQ communities. "I don't' want to lie to the child. . . . Part of me fears the question . . . especially when I prep myself for an answer, for a question that I fear will be asked, because I don't know how to answer it, and if I'm not loved or liked for being who I am, that's painful."

Fear of losing relationships with students at the cost of coming out. While Laila enjoyed teaching and has found her current teaching position fulfilling, she was not ready to disclose her sexual orientation just yet. "I am remaining closeted at work," she discussed. "I don't know that I'm closeted as much as I'm not making an announcement . . . or proclaiming

it," she added. If she elected to disclose her sexual orientation at work, Laila was frightened that her colleagues would make "comments like, 'Oh, you're just going through a midlife crisis'; or 'You're going crazy.'" She did not want others to perceive her newfound and self-identifying sexual orientation as her "going through a phase," like so many people believe homosexual men and women experience. Her sexuality "is not a joke at all, and I don't want it to be treated as such."

Working in a heteronormative environment like a public school can be incredibly stressful, especially when it comes to self-identifying as LGBTQ. King, Reilly, and Hebl (2008) argue that for the self-identifying LGBTQ public school educator, "The threat of discrimination is further complicated by the fact that the stigma itself is invisible; one's sexual preference is not immediately apparent to others" (p. 567). In this context, Laila felt her working environment was "pretty progressive . . . so I should feel okay with it [being a lesbian], but I think it has more to do with me just switching from a married person to a gay person in the work place."

Laila went on to say that "because teachers can be cliquey and gossipy," she did not want to draw unwarranted attention to herself or her newly adopted lifestyle, especially now that she is involved in a same-sex relationship. She feared, "There's…many people in the building who wouldn't accept me" for being a lesbian. In fact, her suspicions were amplified when she "was walking out to the car with my current partner, and I saw two people in the parking lot; when they saw us together, one shot the other a look and the other shot the other a look and they kind of smiled." Additionally, Laila was concerned about her students' and her students' parents reactions to her sexual orientation. Laila shared,

> I have to worry about the parents . . . and the kids. . . . [E]ven though I find the kids say[ing] they're progressive, anytime there's a video or something where this [the topic

> of homosexuality] comes up, they say some things and I just don't know that the kids are as progressive or are as okay with it as they act like they are. Because I think students might be mirroring . . . the attitudes of their parents, . . . I was worried that they wouldn't want their kids in my room anymore and . . . just getting some backlash.

Historically, society has perceived homosexuals as child molesters, terrorists, and as recruiters for the homosexual lifestyle (Howard, 2016). Due to these engrained and oppressive cultural and societal discourses, Laila often self-policed herself throughout the workday, even catastrophizing events before they occurred. Ferfolja and Hopkins (2013) found that such self-regulation and "self-surveillance draws on discourses of the [self-identifying LGBTQ] . . . teacher that normalize and render them invisible . . . and position sexual diversity as aberrant, unprofessional, and in need of scrutiny and silencing" (p. 314). Laila explained that once she came out to herself she was

> constantly in a fight or flight mode, like a danger, danger everywhere; whereas before [coming out] you didn't think twice about mentioning a situation with a heterosexual relationship. I don't sleep as well as I used to. Now I . . . have to think [about] who I am talking to . . . or the ways I dress. I feel like everybody's watching me, thinking something about me.

Stephanie feared that if she did reveal her sexual orientation to her students there, indeed, would "be an issue that makes a kid shut down just based on my sexuality and that would kill me; that would be horrible. . . . I have that fear of coming out and a kid shutting down just because of that." Furthermore, Laila assumed coming out "was going to be such a freeing experience;" contrarily, in her lived experience, "It's just the exact opposite from that for me right now in some ways." She further contended,

> People have the idea that homosexuals are . . . all about sex, and that's all they ever think about. . . . And they don't realize you [homosexuals in general] go shopping and have the same exact relationships, but it's just with the same sex. And so . . . any little thing could be blown out of proportion; there could be that danger and then just being afraid with that ignorance that their daughter's in the class with a lesbian teacher they might turn out to be a lesbian. Just to get them away from you, they [a student's parent] could . . . exaggerate things or just plain make up things to get you removed. I've heard stories about that. Not here, but it does happen.

For Laila, the idea of homosexual teachers as predators or recruiters for a homosexual agenda seemed unjustified, even ridiculous. Laila recognized the hypocrisy the LGBTQ communities face in society and at work. For instance, she argued, "Straight people can just walk down the street being affectionate. Those little simple things that I used to take for granted, and now they're huge. It's just the weirdest transition ever." Even though she had never disclosed her sexual orientation to the entire staff, Laila suspected some people might already know or suspect it. She revealed,

> People at work who may know . . . but they haven't said anything to me. . . . There are a couple of teachers who I've told, but I don't know if they've kept it quiet. It's irritating . . . because I just want to go to work like everybody else and have my life like everybody else, but I feel like I've got to take these precautionary steps, . . . because it makes me feel like I'm doing something wrong. It still makes me feel like I'm doing something I shouldn't be doing and . . . I have to get that mindset out of my head.

The fear these self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers have endured is one of the four essences of their lived experiences. Their fears are rooted in the historical, cultural, social,

and political discourses that have embedded themselves into the current ideals of what is and is not normal in terms of one's sexual orientation. Further, their fear of not revealing their sexual orientations have impeded their ability to share who they are as individuals with the very people who they credit as the reason for entering and remaining in the vocation of teaching: their students. Despite the fear of not disclosing their sexual orientations with students, these public school teachers "who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, . . . enjoy a rich legacy of contributions to the welfare of students and the nation's schools" (Blount, 2005, p. 3).

Sub-question 2: How have the intersections of personal life, professional life, and formal policies and laws impacted the overall lives of LGBTQ public school teachers? One of the major components that addressed this sub-question was the critical theory of intersectionality. Collins and Bilge (2016) explained intersectionality as "an analytic tool [used to] . . . foster a better understanding" (p. 15) of stigmatized and oppression groups within various social, historical, and cultural contexts. By embedding the theory of intersectionality into this phenomenological study of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, the researcher furthered the use of the interplay between narrative inquiry and intersectionality as "an important tool linking theory with practice that can aid in the empowerment of communities and individuals" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 36). The sexual identities of these co-researchers analyzed within a "system of power . . . which is part and parcel of interlocking systems of oppression" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 69) worked to reveal their lived experience as a historically, socially, and culturally marginalized group.

The importance and relevance of juxtaposing intersectionality with both narrative inquiry and phenomenology was augmented when Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contended that intersectionality "treats oppression as resulting from the joint operations of major systems of

oppression that form a complex social structure of inequality" (p. 71). Clandinin & Connelly (2000) offered,

> Narrative has become so identified with stories, and stories have such a particular unique sense about them—often treated as things to be picked up, listened to, told, and generally rolled around as one might roll marbles around—that narrative inquiry has, for some, become associated with story recording and telling. (p. 77)

The Decision to Self-Disclose at Work

In the context of this qualitative study, the rich narrative and complex stories of these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers intersect at crucial points, all of which offer deeper, more profound insight and aid in capturing the essence of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers' lived experiences. The following two sub-themes emerged under the larger context of deciding whether to disclose one's sexual orientation while at work: effects of disclosure on professional lives and the impact of formal laws and policies.

Effects of self-disclosure on professional lives. The act of self-disclosure itself is grounded in Foucault's theory of the power of language as discourse. The discourses encompassing sexuality and its ability to either value or devalue the individual "constitutes a prism through which human knowers organize, interpret, and give meaning to their experiences" (Pellegrini, 1992, p. 43). The meaning can either advantage or disadvantage the intended subject. The discourse surrounding the closet "tell us what to think [about the role of the closet in a homosexual's lived experience] because it is impossible to think outside language" (Pellegrini, 1992, p. 43). As such, each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers are rendered visible, invisible, valued, or devalued by their decision to share their sexual orientations.

For example, Chris took it upon himself to work with his students through his school's equity club, even though Chris did not self-disclose his sexual orientation. Chris's lived experience has allowed him to model to students that being comfortable with who they are as individuals is an important part of him serving as a self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher. Chris shared that although he did not share with his students about being a queer transgender male, "I am trying to show students that . . . [they] shouldn't be afraid of being who [they] are. They shouldn't let society necessarily get in the way, with who you are, or be happy." The journey of working with his students through a social justice framework allowed him to not only reflect inward but to look outward as he, and his students, embarked on this journey together. Chris acknowledged,

> My decision not to disclose my sexuality . . . as a teacher is based on [being] . . . professional. In the sense that you don't disclose that—your personal life, such as who you're married to or who you're dating; you don't talk about your political views or what your religious views are. I mean, I teach at a public institution, so you don't really share those thing; however, when . . . they ask about who I am as a person, or they ask, "Are you engaged to be married to a man or a woman?" I would tell them. I wouldn't lie to them . . . and I find that they honor that trust when you tell them and you honor their question, but I don't volunteer the information.

Passing. In the context of homosexuality, passing is used by self-identifying LGBTQ persons as a "mechanism of concealment," in which the individual deflects attention away from her or his sexual orientation by "changing the gender of friends and lovers in ordinary conversation" (Silin, 1995, p. 166) to appear or pass as heterosexual. Cemented cultural and historical discourses surrounding the act of passing have existed to meet the demands of

heteronormative and homophobic society. Foucault (1990) noted, "There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things. . . . There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (p. 27). Yoshino (2007) continued this discussion on passing by adding,

> Through the middle of the 20th century, gays were routinely asked to convert to heterosexuality, whether through lobotomies, electroshock therapy, or psychoanalysis. As the gay rights movement gained strength, the demand to convert gradually ceded to the demand to pass. (p. 19)

Passing neither confirms nor denies the sexual orientation of an individual; instead, passing is an ambivalent approach to disclosing one's sexual orientation. Most notably, Stephanie disclosed that she agonizes over how she will respond to questions about her being married. Stephanie avoided discussing her same-sex marriage, even going as far as redacting the referenced female pronoun, altogether. Stephanie described, "There are so many instances where I need to think in my brain, and 'How am I going to respond to this or reword that so it [her response] gets rid of the female pronoun or . . . even the fact that I'm married." Self-identifying LGBTQ individuals will often adopt traditional gender identity/expressions and stereotypes (like heterosexual men maintaining short hairstyles and heterosexual females maintaining longer hairstyles) as a means of passing or performing the expected gender role. Passing as an act of societal and cultural assimilation portrays homosexuality "in such a negative light" (Yoshino, 2007, p. 19). Passing, to a greater degree, is a way of discouraging any discourse about the suspected individual's homosexuality, resulting in an act of homophobic discrimination. Silin (1995) argued that by passing, one is engaging in silence or purposeful silence that leads to advancing discrimination

and homophobia. This type of silence is an act a public discourse, a discourse that is not always favorable, healthy, or positive for the individual or for the advancement of the LGBTQ communities.

More so, one could argue that passing as an act of silence is performative in nature. If silence is "defined by the tension between revealing enough . . . and concealing enough so as not to be discovered by those who might do . . . harm," (Silin, 1995, p. 83) then a Butlerian (1988, 1993, 1999, 2004) and Sedgwickean (1990) approach to the effects of silence on the LGBTQ communities' mental health is alarming. Self-identifying LGBTQ teachers will participate in the act of silence "to avoid being revealed or because they fear a hostile or indifferent . . . work environment" (Lipkin, 1999, p. 147). Uribe and Harbeck (1992) maintained,

> The mental health and social development of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth is further compounded by the often-invisible nature of one's sexual orientation. Most persons who belong to a particular racial group or who are physically challenged in some matter, for example, cannot hide their status as a member of that minority group. Their challenge lies in coping with the preconceived notions of all persons with whom they come into contact. Most gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, however, face the constant and complex choice of potentially posing as 'normal' among other normal in order to distance themselves from these negative preconceived stereotypes. (p. 13)

Of the six co-researchers in this study, only one, Sam, shared his self-identity as a transgender male with his students openly. Sam's coming out story happened early on in the school year. In fact, Sam revealed his transgender identity while teaching a lesson on gender roles. Sam remembered the conversation with his class being authentic and extremely intimate. For instance, Sam recalled,

> It must have been . . . two months into the school year, when I talked about it, and that was because it had just organically come up in conversation. . . . I said, 'The only difference was that women could, you know, have children,' and then I corrected myself. I was like, 'Well . . . people with wombs could have children and not necessarily women.' The kids . . . laughed and then a bunch of other people were like, 'That's not funny; that's a real thing.' And so I was like, 'Yeah, no, I did not mean that as a joke, 'cause I'm a trans person,' and then they applauded, which I thought was weird, but they were like, 'No, no, we should applaud!' They applauded the next day when we talked about it again.

The other five co-researchers remained closeted about their sexual orientations. Cassandra admitted to passing out of fear; however, now that she has moved out of a more-conservative state to Oregon, Cassandra felt okay about defying the gender paradigm, such as cutting her hair. Cassandra confessed,

> For years, . . . I had long hair. I wasn't a big dress wearer, but . . . I wanted to look straight. Then when I moved away from family and out of [her home state] and that really helped. I surround myself with good people, gay, straight, married, single, and that helped, and I just, the more I have grown, the more I learn, the more I experience life, the more . . . I learn about myself and the more experiences I have in teaching and in life, the thicker the skin I get if something happens.

Given the complex interchange between "where different lines [of experiences] . . . intersect and where lines cross with other lines," (Ahmed, 2006, p. 136) the lived experience was created, divided, and captured. Josh elaborated,

> I'm pretty open, well, and let me just say—sorry—pretty open, meaning, I'm open usually with the female staff. Now that I've been more involved with the teacher's union I know I have male allies there. But I'm open with the female staff in my building, and I'm more readily to tell them about my gayness, my sexuality, and my experiences that way, because they're open with me about their family things.

For Josh, his own self-identification as a gay man was "still such . . . a taboo subject." In the context of passing, Josh (like Laila, Stephanie, Chris, and Cassandra) admitted, "I guess I conform . . . by hiding who I really am all the time" while at work. Josh confessed that by passing, "I am not being 100% open with my students, avoiding saying I'm gay." Josh believed that not telling his students about his homosexuality is caused by spending "so much of my life thinking . . . that I was different" based on his sexual orientation, specifically the incident from graduate school. Resultantly, Josh had to "lie to myself [and] lie to people" to keep his sexuality a secret, "which makes me feel bad." Josh, also, felt that he does not feel comfortable honoring his homosexuality at work because of his previous administrator's decision not to expose his own homosexuality with staff. Josh explained,

> I had a closeted gay administrator, and I was open to him about my own homosexuality; he was open to me. But he wasn't . . . out to anyone else at work—maybe a few staff members. It was interesting . . . seeing how he navigated the world of remaining closeted . . . and I . . . didn't feel safe being out with my students or with most of the staff because he wasn't.

Throughout elementary, middle, and high school, Josh felt the need to conform to society's expectations surrounding gender and sexual orientation to avoid any discourse about his homosexuality. Fitting into groups and not being perceived as abnormal made Josh feel "like

I'm part of a group. Fitting in makes me feel like I'm accepted. It makes me feel like I'm a human being . . . [who] deserves the same opportunities and experiences that other people do." Simultaneously, Josh recognizes his need to "break out of that whole mold and . . . embrace my differences."

Stephanie wanted to feel comfortable sharing her sexual orientation because she admitted it is a major part of her life. Stephanie declared,

> It's about who am I as a person, and who you are as a person, and a big part of me is my wife and my family and my friends who . . . are lesbians. So hiding that part is really sad to me and frustrating that I can't talk about that at school. . . . Like I said earlier, there's that lingering fear of what if, what if I do that and someone is like, "Ew! Gross!" and says something mean? I am a human being too; I have feelings, and they get hurt, and I know teachers are supposed to have thick skins, but you know everyone's human.

Chris, Stephanie, Cassandra, and Josh's lived experiences intersected at fascinating meeting points. For example, none of the three self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers is *fully* out at work. Chris will reveal her sexual orientation to students and staff *only* when asked; Stephanie and Cassandra were out to staff but *not* to students; and Josh was not out to students "100%," deciding only to discuss his homosexuality with female colleagues. First, none of these teachers was completely out of the closet due to certain events within their lived experiences. Second, due to the fear of future retaliation and judgment from others, one could argue that they are *passing* as a way to avoid or mute any discourse about their sexual orientations.

The passion to keep returning to the classroom. Chris's experience with helping his students realize the importance of finding themselves and celebrating their differences intersected with Josh's mission at his school. The current advisor to his school's GSA, Josh felt

he was helping his students to become who they are as individuals living and "thriving in 21st-century America." Like Chris, Josh hoped that by "having a forum, a safe space to talk about needs, wants, dreams, and hopes, his students would feel welcome and safe at school." "I love my job," Josh expressed. Both teachers shared a sense of helping the school community with and for their students and that sense of purpose and passion kept them returning to the classroom. Chris illustrated,

> This year . . . I'm putting myself out there a little bit more, because I'm a little more confident, so I am heading up essentially a GSA [Gay Straight Alliance] club, but we just decided to call it an Equity Club. We're starting from rock bottom, . . . trying to scrounge around to see who would want to join. Right now, it's very low key, just hanging out, making sure that students understand that it's just a safe place to be, and it's for students who either get bullied for their physical appearance, gender identity, whatever it may be. It's just a safe place to be.

Chris also revealed that by helping facilitate his school's equity club he was not only engendering a safe place for her students, but also he was providing time for himself to set a good example for his students, both as a transgender teacher and teacher-mentor. Chris expanded,

> As an LGBTQ-identified person and teacher, I . . . have the success, like anybody else in their lives. I can have a good a home; I can have . . . a successful marriage. I can have . . . kids if I wanted to. I can get my doctorate if I wanted to . . . but showing students that they can do anything . . . but showing them that you were successful, and still working to be successful, that they have a chance is what makes it worth it.

Like Chris, Stephanie took pride in her job as a public school teacher; she mentioned, "It is an important job and not everyone can do it." According to Stephanie, "It's a select few who cannot only teach but stay teaching for more than five years." She continued, "I don't want any other job, even though it's incredibly difficult being a teacher, and it gets even more difficult every year I feel." Stephanie detailed,

> I think part of it comes from the psychology background. I am more of a listener than a talker so this interview is . . . difficult for me, but . . . I like to listen to people share what they're thinking and how they're feeling and that makes me feel good because that makes me feel like I am helping them in a way. . . . I feel kind of proud I guess that they choose me to talk to as opposed to anyone else. It makes me feel important and special.

Josh entered the teaching field because he thought he could make a difference in the lives of students. Josh considered his vocation of teaching "a fallback career;" however, he was aware teaching "was something I knew I could do. I am good with people. I'm good with education . . . so it was something . . . I could do and do well. I was brought up in a household where education was revered, and my mother was a schoolteacher . . . and I knew I could make some change, like changing people's perspectives . . . and educating them and helping them learn and grow and become their own people."

The impacts of formal policies and laws. McNinch (2007) offered commentary by pointing out, "Despite significant and liberating advances in human rights for homosexuals,. . . the role of the queer teacher has been and remains conflicted" (p. 211). More so, the self-identifying LGBTQ public school educator has had to carry "the burden of the closet" on her or his shoulders (McNinch, 2007, p. 211). Even though America appears less homophobic due to its "obsession . . . with gay culture itself," the self-identifying LGBTQ teacher must model

“health and openness beyond stereotypes” (McNinch, 2007, p. 211) while still fighting against those same stereotypes that have affected these teachers for centuries.

When it came to the current political climate of the United States, Stephanie and Cassandra feared that the country was heading in the wrong direction in terms of its formal laws, institutional barriers, and policies addressing the rights of the LGBTQ communities. As it turns out, Stephanie and Cassandra’s fears were amplified because

> currently, federal law protects people from workplace discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, religion, sex, age, and disability. But the law fails to specifically address sexual orientation. A recent executive order by President Barack Obama protects any federal employee or contractor—around 28 million workers, or one-fifth of the American workforce—from discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, it doesn't cover teachers, who are subject to state and local laws. (Machado, 2014)

Cassandra elaborated on how the fear of the political landscape caused her to remove herself from social media, altogether. Cassandra expanded,

> I’ve turned off social media; I haven’t been reading the paper; I’ve stopped listening to NPR. . . . I felt like . . . with the political climate, I have to be afraid again, but I am . . . pissed about being afraid again. Like, no! No more fear! . . . I don’t want to be afraid! . . . Sometimes being afraid is a choice. Not always, but sometimes. And I don’t want to be afraid, so just in case things change in the next year with the new president, I [have] to get married this year. And we [she and her partner] were fine getting married but we thought, “Well let’s just do it sooner than later.” I have to say the happiness of going to get married is trumping—ooh bad word!—superseding all negative things.

Cassandra elaborated further,

> I am glad I live where I live and seeing all the red versus blue [states of the country]; I know where not to move. But . . . the possibility is there that I might get fired. I might get . . . let go or asked to step down because of who I am. And teaching brings me such joy. It's really hard, though. I can remember years ago, I got riffed, and I was cut loose, and I had been a teacher for six years but only three in the district, so I was below the line, and I was thinking, "Do I want to do anything else aside from teaching?" I went through all of these [occupation scenarios], and I was like, "My gosh, it all comes back to teaching. I don't want to be a barista. I don't want to be in the medical field. I don't want to be a truck driver. I don't want to be a lawyer. I don't want to be in HR."

Stephanie confessed America's recent political election

> made me feel sort of shoved back in the closet in a way [because] . . . the hatred and the closed mindedness of our society became so apparent so quickly after the election that it scared the shit out of me. And that made me feel unsafe. It made me fear for my future; it made me fear for the validity of my marriage and made me wonder, "Is that going to be taken away? Am I going to have the same rights as everyone else? Am I going to literally have to go back into the closet for my job? Are those rights going to be taken away?"

Like Stephanie, Cass revealed,

> Growing up, there was one gay kid who was just crucified almost—poor kid. And I didn't want that. I was convinced that if someone found out I was gay, they would hate me, they would exile me, and they would hurt me, and kill me. So, I kept it a secret. . . . But as a teacher . . . I was afraid that I would be discovered.

Cass admitted that she felt

sad there is still a world where I have to be fearful. But I also know that in some states I could be fired for being gay, which is ridiculous. That there's people in government that still are putting laws against gays or transsexuals like they're less-thans, and that just pushes that and then parents raise children that think that and those children are in my class. And, and I don't want them to think that I have some kind of agenda. I just want us all to love each other, be kind, [and] make the world a better place.

Stephanie was alarmed that her rights might be taken away as a self-identifying LGBTQ individual. Stephanie asked,

Am I going to have the same rights as everyone else? Am I going to literally have to go back into the closet for my job? Are those rights going to be taken away?" So there is a lot of uncertainty right now in my life because of that election, and so I feel like I went from one extreme to the other in a period of like a week. . . . I've had a little bit of time to process since the election and I'm still having that uncertainty, I don't know where I'm at. It's sort of a day-by-day roller coaster. And I should bring up the day after the election. That Wednesday we didn't have any kids and it was a staff development day, and I couldn't bring myself to come to school that morning. I was just too distraught. I had been up until two in the morning crying. So I didn't go in until lunchtime, and I walked into the cafeteria. All of my colleagues were sitting at the lunch tables eating, and I walked in and . . . I had a number of people get up and hug me and tell me that they're going to be there for me and that they would fight that battle to the death for me. So I felt very supported by my colleagues, which was amazing. So in that respect I feel very safe and very lucky. But there's only so much they can do, you know.

Palmer and Zajonc (2010) reasoned, “If . . . fears dominate our thinking, we deny ourselves valuable avenues of inquiry, and dismiss, for example, the thousands of years of contemplative exploration contained . . . in our world” (p. 65). Collins and Bilge (2016) continued by arguing, “When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped . . . by many axes that work together and influence each other” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). Subsequently, narrative inquiry and intersectionality played a key role in these teachers’ understandings of their lived experiences as self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers.

In sum, the two sub-themes that emerged from these shared experiences offer greater insight into the lived stories of these self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Their decisions to self-disclose their sexualities at work, their experiences with passing, and the formal laws and policies that shaped their lives all intersect to illuminate and inform the construction of their narratives. More so, these sub-themes interplay and reveal deeper patterns and more meaning in terms of “the reflexive relationships between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71).

Sub-question 3: How have the intersectional interactions with administration, faculty, students, and students’ families shaped the experiences of LGBTQ public school teachers? The current oppressions self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers experience within the scholastic environment is no different from those of the past. Blount (2005) found, “Today, LGBT[Q] educators often face overwhelming resistance in their schools and communities. Few states or cities currently offer nondiscrimination policies that include sexual orientation or gender identity/presentation” (p. 3). Given this and the current political climate of the American landscape, it is no wonder that interactions between administration, faculty,

students and their parents have greatly altered the lived experiences of public school teachers who self-identify as LGBTQ. Turner (2010) pointed out, "The pedagogical implications [of revealing one's sexual orientation] will vary according to the educator's community and circumstances" (p. 298). Blount (2005) echoed this by stating,

> Just as they were 100 years ago, school workers today are hired in part to model and preserve normative sexuality and gender. When parents, community members, and school workers plead for more men in schools so that youth will be exposed to 'strong male role models,' really this often means that they want heterosexual men who will regulate the sexuality and gender of students and school personnel. Men who pursue traditionally female-associated jobs, display gender-nonconformity, remain unmarried or openly identify as gay . . . typically are not hired . . . or, if hired, endure heightened scrutiny. In much the same manner, women who seek male-associated educational positions . . . tend to face internal resistance, if not over employment discrimination. (p. 182)

The following teachers' stories are illustrative of this concerning their students' parents, their colleagues, and their administration.

***Parents*.** Self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers frequently decided not to share their sexual orientations with their students out of fear of their students' parents' negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Blount, 2006; Elia, 1993; Herek, 1997, 2010, 2012). Such attitudes "act to (re)produce teaching as a moral profession where the private world of a teacher is positioned within educational institutions as existing separately to the world of teaching" (Gray, 2013, pp. 703–704). Those who do not support such teachers disclosing their sexual orientations with students have admitted, "One of their most commonly expressed beliefs was

that schools should focus on reading, writing, and arithmetic; and leave the discussion of social issues, like differences in sexual orientation, up to the parents" (MacGillivray, 2008, p. 33). The opponents do not want self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers to promote, sanction, or valorize homosexuality; therefore, navigating the private and personal worlds of their sexual orientations is often a difficult task for self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. As a result, some self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers felt divided about sharing that part of their lived experience with their students. For example, Laila shared,

> I have parents who are supportive of [homosexuality] and parents who are appalled by it, and I can usually read that through the students who come in, because, like I said, my students usually mirror their parents' opinion on things. And so . . . I feel like I could be talking to one person and everything would be just fine and I could be talking to the next person and it wouldn't, so there's not a feeling of complete relaxation at my work. There's a little bit of hiding, defensiveness. . . . I still wouldn't feel 100% comfortable just because of the population in this town. I still think there's an awful lot of people here who are not cool with this at all.

Laila also discussed her fear of her students' parents equating her homosexuality with her being a child predator or recruiter for the homosexual agenda. She argued that her lived experience as a self-identifying lesbian is "so much different than my straight co-workers who don't have to worry about it [their sexual orientations]." Laila continued,

> Some people just think that you'll encourage their kids to think, 'Well my daughter thinks she's gay now because she's in your class [or] I don't want my kids in your room—you're sick! There's something wrong with you!' So, therefore, my credibility as an intelligent human being goes down because of my sexual orientation. . . . They go for

> you; they get you fired . . . just to get you out of the school. Get you away from the kids, even though that's ridiculous.

Like Laila, Stephanie shared that her lived experience as a self-identifying lesbian is far more complex, nuanced, and less understood than the lived experiences of her heterosexual colleagues in terms of sexuality. She claimed feeling a sense of danger about self-identifying as a lesbian because "any little anything could be blown out of proportion." Like Laila, Stephanie also highlighted instances where self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers could be seen as child predators. Although she had never experienced these accusations herself, she had been aware that historically self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers have been viewed as pedophiles because of society's portrayal of homosexual teachers as "preying on innocent students" (Jackson, 2006, p. 28). Stephanie imparted,

> This hasn't happened to me, but [the allegation made by parents about a self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher] just coming on to their kid . . . could happen, with gay male teachers; they [parents] just think that's all you think about is sex and so there could be that danger . . . and then just being afraid with that ignorance that their daughter's in the class with a lesbian teacher they might turn out to be a lesbian. They [parents] could complain about things, exaggerate things, or just plain make up things to get you removed. I've heard stories about that.

Like the lived experiences of Laila and Stephanie, Sam expressed concern about being discriminated against based on his sexual orientation or gender identity/expression as a transgender man. In fact, Sam added to this conversation by discussing his own experience with parents who targeted him. Sam imparted,

> I've had parents who definitely were not super happy with their kid being in my class,

> but, who also were not willing to say that that was why. "It was pretty apparent, because they didn't have any other actual reason, and they were just pulling straws out of the air. And so I had at least one lovely meeting with a huge elephant in the room, but . . . we got through that because I could defend my teaching practices. I was like, 'Nope, all the things you're saying are not relevant.'

Colleagues. The positive relationship any teacher shares with her or his colleagues is paramount to a cohesive and meaningful lived experience at work. Feeling accepted, legitimized, supported, and affirmed while at work is essential to any professional public school teacher but especially for those who "are silenced within schools through heteronormative discursive . . . practices that dominate schools" (Gray, 2013, p. 703). To create, foster, and model an inclusive and healthy working environment, self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers will often take on the responsibility of connecting and establishing meaningful relationships with colleagues on their own. For instance, Stephanie found that as a self-identifying lesbian she served as a confidant to those teachers who were questioning their own sexual orientations; Stephanie deduced that each of these teachers shared the same fear and anxiety about disclosing their sexual orientations with students and colleagues. After talking with her colleagues, Stephanie felt she was "making work a more tolerable, safer place for my co-workers." Stephanie celebrated,

> Just this year I had two different women from my building come to me and tell me about their love of other women, even though they are married to men. Like my students who tend to gravitate toward me, I feel like there is something about me that people feel comfortable in sharing those things, which I like, and I like hearing their stories. And I like that they are comfortable enough to share that with me.

The relationships Stephanie strived to form with her colleagues is illustrative of how the act of "coming out to others has . . . been associated with beneficial changes in perceived mental health and well-being" (Vaughn & Waehler, 2010, p. 94). Clearly, Stephanie felt a strong sense of empowerment in helping her colleagues discuss their own lived experiences regarding their sexual orientation. Like Stephanie, Sam also established a strong bond with one of his colleagues. In fact, the one colleague with whom he confided is the parent of a transgender child. In all likelihood, the feelings that emerged from this relationship allowed Sam to undergo an "increased assertiveness in setting healthier boundaries" (Vaughan & Waehler, 2010, p. 96) and manifesting healthier relationships with colleagues. Sam reported,

> There's a lot of stuff that just doesn't get talked about. I know a few teachers . . . I could talk to and one—only one!—who has specifically talked to me about it [self-identifying as transgender]. I have one fellow teacher with a transgender son, and so she, at one point, specifically came to talk to me about it, and she was like, "I'm going to be your mom at the school, 'cause you're like my son,' and so that was really touching, and I have gone to her whenever my emotions are doing too much for me, so that's been really good.

Administration. The administrator-teacher relationship has been perceived as one fraught by anxiety and by the fear of rejection and humiliation. These perceptions of eventual rejection and humiliation is what has caused self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers to never talk openly about their sexual orientations with their administration. Historically, self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers who have elected to disclose their sexual orientations have run the risk of losing their jobs or of becoming the victim of discrimination (Blount, 2006). King, Reilly, and Hebl (2008) argued that "to disclose that one is a member of this stigmatized

group is to announce an association with a group that has been historically devalued and even persecuted by society at large" (p. 567).

In the case of Josh's lived experience as a self-identifying gay man, his former administrator also self-identified as gay. Josh remembered that his gay administrator "was open to him; he was open to me; however, he [the gay administrator] wasn't explicitly—or really implicitly—out to anyone else at work." That is, the both Josh and the gay administrator were closeted. In a sense, both Josh and his administrator were keeping each other's secrets, and, as Josh recalled, "I guess I learned a lot about being a gay teacher from him." Josh's lived experience as a gay man attempting to navigate the homophobic environment of his school believed he did not have a positive "role model to look up to."

Compounding Josh's lived experience as a self-identifying gay teacher who was literally watching his gay administrator remain closeted, Josh also recalled his experience during graduate school. After sharing his sexual orientation with his graduate level learning community, Josh was instructed to develop strategies for dealing with those who opposed homosexuality, including parents, students, and administration. Josh recalled,

> One of the students in my cohort said I would have to, as a gay man, come up with . . . how I would deal with, number one: teaching students. How I would communicate to parents. How I would talk to administrators. How I would get a job. And the professor said, "Yeah, that's going to happen to you." And never in my whole education career did I think that one of the last classes in my graduate program would I be discriminated against. . . . I was like, how dare you think I have to do something different than the rest of everybody else, just because I am gay. . . . So, I vowed, from that point on, as a teacher and in my classroom, that I . . . wouldn't make anyone feel that way, feel left out, feel

> different than. And when I felt open enough to share with [the] people of my cohort who I really was, it really sucked; . . . it was unfathomably disenchanting.

Josh continued,

> I know that the people I am . . . explicitly out to . . . are there to praise me more, and . . . help me speak my truth and speaking that truth to power. I have some really good allies in my building, even at the administrative level, I have good allies . . . and *never* in my career and in the school district has anybody said to me . . . that I had to have a plan that was separate from everybody else to explain to parents or people that I was gay to my students, aside from the fact that [I was] watching my closeted administrator to see how he navigated being gay.

Stephanie's interactions with her principal had no direct connection with her sexual orientation; nonetheless, her experience directly affected her perception of the school district's treatment of LGBTQ issues. For example, Stephanie specified,

> A few years back there was a student who was a young gay man, and he felt he was being bullied by the teachers at his high school, and so he brought this lawsuit against the school and so the district in response to show that all of their teachers were not bullies against gays and lesbians had a [LGBTQ-sensitivity] training at all the schools. . . . A piece of paper was given to the principals. . . . At our staff meeting, our principal literally handed out this one page paper of . . . terms and what does LGBTQ stand for and at one point she said, 'The Q, I think, it stands for queer or it's questioning" and clearly she had not been prepped on it. She didn't know half of what she was talking about and it felt like a slap in the face to me.

Laila, Stephanie, and Josh's lived experiences intersected at the crucial points of fearing

homophobic parent interactions, sharing relationships with colleagues, and navigating choices their administrators have made regarding LGBTQ issues. Each of these internetworking experiences either promoted and served the physical and emotional wellbeing of Laila, Stephanie, and Josh, or perpetuated and constituted "discrimination . . . through the policing of hegemonic discourses" (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001, p. 122) of the heteronormative work environment. Palmer and Zajonc (2010) claimed, "The divided life of [teachers] . . . is a perennial crisis common to all generations" (p. 55), and, in the case of these three self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, disclosing their sexual orientations allowed them "to be genuine, to build stronger relationships, to obtain available accommodations, and to advocate on half of their identity group" (King, Reilly, & Hebl, 2008, p. 575).

Sub-question 4: What supports do LGBTQ public school teachers need in place to promote their safety while at work? Holley and Steiner (2005) defined a *safe space* as a "classroom climate that allows students to feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views, and share and explore their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors" (p. 50). The safety in this context "does not refer to physical safety. Instead, classroom safe space refers to protection from psychological or emotional harm" (Holley & Steiner, 2005, p 50). Just as all students need the physical and emotional protection of a safe space, so do self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. "The concept of a 'safe space' is an important one" for self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, all of whom are "at risk of prejudice, discrimination and physical and verbal violence throughout their daily lives" (Myslik, 1994, pp. 66–67). Shneer and Aviv (2006) described the turbulent and triumphant history of the self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher by recalling,

> Gay movements . . . and activism . . . became increasingly visible, especially in the late 1970s. . . . Queer activists responded publicly to the murder of Harvey Milk and the near acquittal of his murderer, Dan White; to Anita Bryant "Save Our Children" campaign, which successfully lobbied Florida voters to ban any form of law that would protect sexual minorities from discrimination; and to California's Briggs Amendment campaigns, which failed to prohibit openly gay teachers from working in California public schools. (p. 219)

A type of support group, Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), originally formed in 1989 for and by homosexual students and their allies to raise awareness of their experiences in schools (Lipkin, 2004), "gained critical political support as nascent research revealed that queer youth experienced high rates of bullying, violence, and suicide" (Lugg, 2016, p. 51). In fact, in 1989, the US Department of Health and Human Services released a report on gay and lesbian youth suicide, which confirmed that gay and lesbian youth were committing suicide at alarming rates (Harbeck, 1995; Lugg & Murphy, 2014). Salt Lake City school district, in 1996, elected to ban the GSA from its East High School to protect "the well-being of the schoolchildren" (Lugg, 2016, p. 50). The 1997 suicide of East High School student Jacob Orosco, an openly gay student, forced the American Civil Liberties Union to take charge. This resulted in the 1998 course case, *East High Gay/Straight Alliance v. Board of Education* (as cited in Lugg, 2016, p. 50). The court ruled that "GSAs were and are protected by the federal government—regardless of state sodomy laws and laws banning the promotion of homosexuality in schools" (Lugg, 2016, p. 50).

Additionally, in 1998, President Clinton signed the Employment Nondiscrimination Act. According to Stewart (2015), this particular act "reaffirmed the executive branch's long-standing

internal policy that prohibits discrimination based upon sexual orientation within executive branch civilian employment" (p. 166). In doing so, Clinton became the first American president to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Consequently, as the 1990s came to a close, homosexual school workers, who, at the beginning of the 20th century, faced "immense social resistance, . . . lack of job security, . . . and hostile [work] climates" (Blount, 2005, p. 178), were now inspired to become activists for their own social and political causes.

The need for district inclusiveness and safe spaces. Clearly, major systems have been implemented to help all students feel safe at school. The following co-researchers offered insight into making a safer classroom and district space where self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers can "openly express their individuality, even if it differs dramatically from the norms set by . . . the profession" (p. 50). Two of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers shared what they hoped their school district could do for them in terms of affirming, honoring, and supporting them and other self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers as they work in the heteronormative and homophobic school environments. The vitality of such "supportive relationships for buffering against the stresses of prejudice . . . has been noted for sexual minority . . . populations" (Parra, Bell, Benibgui, Helm, & Hastings, 2017). For example, Chris offered,

> There needs to be equity trainings and . . . dialogue that happens within each school. Not just at the district level, but within the schools, because I think that that's where our disconnect is. It's where we're in schools with teachers that come in at different times and we're not all on the same page with how to address students who might be going through these changes or maybe coming into their own identity, and are, obviously, shit scared doing it. So, we need to make sure that staff are . . . aware of the fact that there are

students in our schools that are going through these changes, too, and they need that support.

The importance of a safe space for self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers is crucial, especially "when one lacks a coherent space from which to manifest a . . . community. Feelings of alienation can be profound, an assault of emotional homelessness waged on multiple fronts" (Lingel, 2009, p. 386). A safe space, in this context of these teachers' lived experience, does not necessarily equate to the physical space of a classroom, but rather the actual environment of the school itself. Dessel (2010) points out, "Studies indicate that school-based bullying and violence is related to exposure to familial and cultural violence, power inequities among social identity groups, and prejudice and gender essentialist beliefs that require behavioral adherence to dominant normative ideologies" (p. 559). These examples of bullying and violence are not generalizable to the microenvironment of the classroom but also to the overall climate of the school (Hong & Garabino, 2012).

Murdoch and Bloch (2005) argue that administration who support the wellbeing of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers create and fosters a climate of positivity, inclusivity, and respect. Dessel (2010) contends that school districts focus largely on anti-bullying discourses, focusing on racism and homophobia. Dessel (2010) also points out that it is often easier for school administrators and teachers to address open discussion about "the problem . . . and perpetuation . . . [of] racism" (p. 577) because trainings on anti-gay bullying are "more elusive" (p. 577). In other words, racism is easier to address because the victim of racism can be seen, is visible; one cannot visibly see an individual's sexual orientation. Uribe and Harbeck (1992) comment,

> The mental health and social development of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth is further compounded by the often invisible nature of one's sexual orientation. Most persons who belong to a particular racial group or who are physically challenged in some matter, for example, cannot hide their status as a member of that minority group. Their challenge lies in coping with the preconceived notions of all persons with whom they come into contact. Most gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, however, face the constant and complex choice of potentially posing as 'normal' among other normal in order to distance themselves from these negative preconceived stereotypes. (p. 13)

Chris's lived experience highlighted this point. For example, Chris emphasized that the school district in which he works needs to apply the same focus to the LGBTQ communities it served and hired as it does to its mission of dismantling racial oppression. Chris pointed out those topics on race and racism "have been the key topic[s] that everyone has been approaching. The same open dialogues happening about race needs to happen about gender and sexuality issues, too." Lingel (2009) contended, "The ramifications of being denied a public sphere in which to practice a sexual identity that isn't labeled licentious or opportunistic" (p. 389) can lead to a sense of loss, uncertainty, and alienation. Chris stressed that to uphold the physical and psychological health of its teachers, the school district needed

> to orchestrate that with staff first and then decide how we would be able to do that with students, because, without a dialogue, without having time for people to be able to sit and share . . . their different ideas about LGBTQ-identified individuals, nothing is really going to change. They're going to hide behind the shadows, suffering in silence until they get to a point in their life where, either it's not worth continuing on that way, or they find a new life where they can live that way.

Cassandra wanted more rich opportunities to share her story with other self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. When workplaces implement nondiscrimination policies, dismantle institutional barriers, and provide spaces for self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers to express themselves openly and honestly, the likelihood of those workers experiencing a healthier, more comfortable work environment is higher. Safe spaces "in many respects alter the traditional power relationship between heterosexual and homosexuals. . . . [Safe] spaces create the strong sense of empowerment" (Myslik, 1994, p. 74) where stories and lives can be shared, celebrated, and affirmed. Cassandra confessed that sharing her story is vital to her as a human being. Cassandra communicated,

> Talking to another teacher makes me realize I am not alone. . . . It's always cool to meet more people like me. And as you talk, you realize your story is unique to you but it's not exactly the same as somebody else's. And I think that's where we get mixed up as humans is that we think we are this, these lone wolves and that our story is uniquely ours. And in the way it is, but we have so many similarities. If we could focus on the similarities instead of all the differences, I think we would find more love and kindness. So in a way I guess it, for my teaching, it made me want to be a better teacher. It made me want to bring out that loving kindness and to stop in my own story to take a minute to listen to somebody else's because somebody took the time to listen to me. We need to do that more often.

The need for safe spaces is crucial to the overall mental, social, and physical health of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. The relationships these teachers wanted through district inclusivity and trainings "has suggested that positive social relationships are critical for promoting well-being" (Parra et. al., 2017) in their professional lives. The effects of not feeling

included, supported, or respected at work drastically alters a teacher's perception of her- or himself, and, in all likelihood, affects the safe spaces they create with and for students.

Summary of Deconstructed Sub-Questions

The five salient, interpenetrating themes that manifested within this qualitative study were emblematic of the all-encompassing human experience. That is, the humanness that each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers exhibited and expressed through their lived experiences was most evident in the systems of power that worked collectively to shape their stories, histories, and realities. Given the historical, political, cultural, and social discourses set into place by dominant, homophobic society, it is no wonder that these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers find it difficult to feel safe, respected, welcomed, or validated while at work. Specific social and political encumbrances, like the possible reinstatement of a ban precluding self-identifying transgender individuals from serving openly in the US armed forces, echoes and underscores the very realized themes that materialized in this phenomenological study.

Further, this study's qualitative findings demonstrated that these nuanced, multifaceted themes are apt to appear in other lived experiences, not just in those of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers; thus, proving how vital it is for all self-identifying LGBTQ individuals to share stories and reflect upon histories in order to capture and convey the essence of their lived experiences. Overall, this phenomenological study unpacked the social structures of the scholastic environment concerning its historical responsibility of norming people, while, simultaneously, Othering those whose sexual orientations and gender expressions/identities trouble the pre-established vestiges of heteronormative society. When one is normed to believe that heterosexual attraction is natural, then an individual who self-identifies as non-heterosexual

becomes thwarted by the fear of rejection and retaliation, the fear of not sharing relationships, the fear of not having a safe space, and the fear of revealing one's true self. One way to expose, confront, and combat these issues is to unpack the pathology of discrimination and, through a qualitative framework, share experiences as a means of deconstructing a group's lived experience. These are the examples of humanness that every human craves and needs to sustain to function in society. The embedded discourses existing in America's public education system have had far-reaching and catastrophic effects on those individuals who vex the expected heteronormative paradigm, and, like the theories of intersectionality and queer criticism, these five themes worked on multiple levels to construct, disadvantage, and define these individuals' identities while reflecting and upholding multiple discourses of discrimination and homophobic attitudes (Butler, 1999; Crenshaw, 1996; Foucault, 1990; Hancock, 2016; Nash, 2008; Plummer, 2005).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews to gather data from six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. The primary limiting factor of this phenomenological study was that it consisted of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers, four of whom self-identified as lesbian, one as gay, and two as transgender males, each of whom self-identified as non-minority. This study worked to explore their lived experiences as it relates to their personal and professional lives. The findings of this study relate specifically to these six individuals' stories and histories as explained by them.

Though the qualitative findings corroborate the historical perspectives, the literature discussed in previous chapters, as well as the theoretical frameworks of queer theory/criticism, phenomenology, and intersectionality, the narrowness of this study limits the study significantly

beyond these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. As such, the results of this qualitative study cannot be generalized for larger groups of similar populations or geographic locations. Even though the six co-researchers' lived experiences were sensitive in nature, the researcher believed—based on the candidness of the raw interview data—that each of the six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers spoke deeply, curtly, and felt comfortable about sharing their experiences.

In terms of delimitations, the researcher elected to restrict the study sample to public school teachers. These public school teachers had to fit two criteria: first, each had to self-identifying as LGBTQ; and, second, each had to hold a current teaching license as well as be currently working. The researcher chose to do distill the requirements of this study to fill the gap of empirical literature involving this particular group's lived experiences in the American public education system.

The researcher also chose to limit the study sample size to six. This provided the researcher the opportunity to foster a richer, more meaningful relationship with each of the co-researchers. Seidman (2013) stressed that researchers working in the qualitative medium do not need to be concerned about a large number of co-researchers; the researcher, instead, needs to focus on two criteria: sufficiency and saturation of information. Sufficiency in terms of size aims to interview a "population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it" (Seidman, 2013, p. 58). Sufficiency in terms of size aims to interview a "population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it" (Seidman, 2013, p. 58). From here, Seidman believes the phenomenological researcher will know when she or he has reached the saturation of information

when “the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported” (Seidman, 2013, p. 58) and is “no longer learning anything new” (Seidman, 2013, p. 58).

Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

According to Mosher (2001), “One problem facing the research . . . [self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers] is finding the samples needed to represent the gay, lesbian, and bisexual populations” (p. 172). With this in mind, it is critical that more studies be conducted in this particular arena. Given the nature of phenomenology, a qualitative researcher could study any number of topics. For instance, the researcher recommends re-interviewing the same six co-researchers five years after the completion of the present research. Due to the ever-changing landscape of American education, new studies could reveal that the themes that emerged in this study would not re-emerge five or more years in the future. Through a follow-up study, performed at a future time, a qualitative researcher could examine how the lived experiences have changed for these six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Other studies could involve additional self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers from within the same school district or from other districts.

The number of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators currently working in the American education system is unknown; therefore, the lived experiences of other self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers was limited to these six co-researchers. It is reasonable to conclude from the results of this study and from the research literature that others who self-identify as LGBTQ have, in all likelihood, experienced bullying, harassment, or stigmatization (either directly or indirectly) at some point in their teaching career. Because the American public school system reflects the values, policies, and practices of its communities, self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers often struggle to reveal their identities out of fear.

Suggestions to Expand and Broaden the Research in This Area

The researcher offers the following topics that could make an interesting and compelling study to deepen and broaden the study, as well as to address the limitations, of the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers:

1. What are the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers of color?
2. What are the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers in rural settings?
3. What are the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers versus self-identifying LGBTQ teachers at private institutions?
4. What are public schools doing to embrace an inclusionary model

If a quantitative researcher expressed interest in this topic, the researcher of this study recommends the following:

1. Conduct a district-wide study, which involves vetting data from self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers across districts.
2. Conduct a longitudinal study, in which self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers are surveyed.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

The implications from this phenomenological study may suggest areas for future research. This qualitative study focused on the lived experiences of six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. Future studies could replicate and explore these same factors in other parts of the state in which this study took place, in other parts of the country, or involve more than six teachers. Furthermore, future research could explore the lived experiences of self-

identifying LGBTQ public school teachers district-wide or concentrate on one school site. These further areas of research would provide even deeper dimensions and explorations to the already-existing corpus of literature on self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators. Most crucially, these topics may satisfy the gap in the literature that currently exists regarding the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers.

Self-Reflection

While striving to answer the central research question of this phenomenological study, (What are the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators?), the researcher was able to reflect on his own lived experience as a self-identifying gay public school teacher. Many overarching intersections in the personal life of the researcher drew him to this particular topic of research.

The researcher was raised in a somewhat conservative town in the northwestern portion of the United States; as such, his town of fewer than 10,000 residents offered him very little in terms of cultural diversity. The researcher's hometown, with its traditional forms of American public education, as well as its entrenched homophobic discourses, taught the researcher that anyone who self-identified or who was perceived as homosexual was wrong, abnormal, immoral, and inconsistent with society's heteronormative expectations. As a result, the researcher remained closeted throughout high school and well into college.

It was not until the researcher matriculated to college that his interest in social justice, LGBTQ rights, education, and literature was unearthed and fostered. English professors, Beverly Ann Chin and Casey Charles, are responsible for broadening the researcher's theoretical thinking and pedagogical acumen when it came to these items. Both professors introduced the researcher to the seminal works of Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick and showed him the power of

deconstructing literature through queer theory/criticism that would ultimately lead him to deeper, richer levels of learning, discussion, pedagogy, and scholarship. Additionally, it was what Professors Chin and Charles taught the researcher that drove him to pursue an advanced degree in effecting change for the LGBTQ teaching communities and, in the end, led to the underpinnings of this qualitative study.

Most recently, the researcher was commissioned by his high school's student leadership team to participate in a student-initiated and -led conversation concerning the ways in which homecoming royalty are inaugurated at the high school football half-time ceremony. The student leaders wanted to call the winners *royalty* rather than by the gendered terms, *king* and *queen*. The student leadership team contended that substituting the traditional label of the winning couple to a more inclusive, politically correct, and non-gendered term would create an affirming, accepting, and safe environment for those students who self-identify as non-heterosexual, as well as for those who stray from the male/female binary. After being asked his opinion, the researcher, motivated by the courageous conversations he had shared with each of the six co-researchers, revealed to the entire student leadership team that he was, in fact, gay, and that such a decision would greatly influence the school. In doing so, the researcher realized that his story and experience, like the stories of the six co-researchers, needed to be shared. Most crucially, the researcher felt empowered by this qualitative study to champion for those students whose voices are often silenced and disregarded out of misunderstanding and homophobia.

What are the lived experiences of LGBTQ public school educators? This is the fundamental and life-changing question at the center of the researcher's life and work. Much deliberate and conscious self-reflection and self-acceptance caused the researcher to appreciate the lives of those teachers who participated in this study and those whose voices, histories, and

experiences have yet to be found, explored, unpacked, and shared. In fact, the five emergent themes that intersected to reveal a deeper understanding of Laila, Stephanie, Cassandra, Josh, Sam, and Chris's lived experiences untangled and reordered the ways in which the researcher saw himself in the world of education. Further, each of the co-researchers' storied experiences are deeply reflected in the personal and professional histories of the researcher and, as such, this study allowed the researcher to take pause and reflect on his own thoughts about self-identifying as gay in the heteronormative and homophobic environment and landscape of the American public education system.

Conclusion

Since its conception, the American public education system has, in large part, fostered, produced, and reproduced "deep-seated assumptions . . . connected to gender ideology and sexual identity," (Bailey & Graves, 2012, p. 44) leaving self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators as a vulnerable population. Historically, self-identifying LGBTQ public school educators have endured much discrimination by homophobic and heteronormative discourses. To understand the ways in which self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers have navigated the oppressive environs of the scholastic environment, the researcher adopted a phenomenological approach to interview six self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers and, from there, reduced the raw interview data into coded themes to reach and reflect the universal essence of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013).

These themes, demonstrated through vivid, rich descriptive detail, corroborated the importance of conducting qualitative research involving the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. The themes, further, worked to deconstruct each of the six public school teachers' lived experiences based on the interconnecting levels that produce and

sustain meaning. Building upon past qualitative studies, this study utilized and was undergirded by queer theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and intersectionality to help the researcher unpack, analyze, and share the voices of a group of marginalized individuals whose experiences have often been unrecognized, silenced, or overshadowed throughout history by dominant heteronormative assumptions.

The timing of this study could not have occurred at a more turbulent time in American history, given recent violent crimes and discrimination policies deposited against the LGBTQ communities, as well as with the election of more conservative political leaders. Despite past and present laws and policies that have made discrimination toward the LGBTQ communities unethical, the qualitative findings of this phenomenological study provided strong, relevant evidence that heteronormativity, homophobia, and their various forms of discourse are alive and well in the environs of the American public education system.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Letter

Research Study Title: **"**Storied Lives, Unpacked Narratives, and Intersecting Experiences: A Phenomenological Examination of Self-Identifying LGBTQ Public School Educators."

Principal Investigator: Robert J. Bizjak
Research Institution: Concordia University
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jerry McGuire

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the lived experiences of self-identifying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) public school teachers. We expect approximately 3-10 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on October 2016 and end enrollment on January 2017. To be in the study, you must hold a current teaching license and teach at a public school during 2016-2017 school year. You must also self-identify as LGBTQ. Participants will engage in three semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, lasting less than 60 minutes each. During each interview, the participant will be asked to recall, describe, and reconstruct her or his lived experiences so that the researcher can arrive at the essence of what it is like to serve as a self-identifying LGBTQ public school educator. Interviews will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to be analyzed and coded. To enhance the study, participants will be provided research journals to capture reflections and musings of their professional and personal experiences. Doing these things should take fewer than three hours of your time.

There are minimal risks should you decide to participate in this study. The risk of accidental disclosure could occur should a person outside of the study recognize either of us at the library. Emotional distress and discomfort could occur due to the sensitivity of the formal interview questions. To minimize emotional distress and discomfort and to promote confidentiality, all personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. The researcher will contact you via non-audio recorded telephone. No conversations will take place over email. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a cabinet. When the researcher looks at the data, none of the data will contain your name or identifying information. The researcher will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times, and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

There is some risk of accidental disclosure of your participation in the study should a person outside of the study recognize both of us at the interview site. I have taken steps to minimize this risk by securing a windowless room for interviewing and planning for the interviewee and interviewing arrival and departure times to be separated by at least 10 minutes.

Benefits:

Information you provide will add to the already-existing literature on the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ teachers, as well as shed new light on contemporary issues.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety. All interviews will be audio recorded; immediately following transcription, audio recordings will be permanently deleted as soon as the interview is transcribed.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions, you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Robert Bizjak, at his private email: [Email redacted]. A trained counselor is available to speak with you confidentially at any point during the study. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

You have been selected to speak with me as a part of my research study: *Storied Lives, Unpacked Narratives, and Intersecting Experiences: A Phenomenological Examination of Self-Identifying LGBTQ Public School Educators*. My research project focuses on the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers. As such, the purpose of this interview is to understand your personal and professional experiences as a self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher. I am not investigating opinions or here to judge your experience; rather, I am interested in how your stories, histories, and perceptions have informed and grounded your individual experience. This means that I want to talk about specific experiences, details, and stories. I would like to remind you of FERPA and the protection of student data as your share your stories.

I designed the following 10 preliminary questions in such a way that each will act as a guide and build upon each other to navigate us toward gaining a fully realized understanding of your lived experience. To keep the conversation flexible and casual, I welcome you allowing the conversation to simply "flow." Please pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable; I will check in with you during the interview if I sense you are experiencing distress or appearing uneasy. Please remember, you may stop the interview at any time.

I have planned this interview to last no more than 60 minutes.
Do you have any thoughts, questions, comments, or concerns?
Do you agree to participate in this research study?

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Participant Code: _____

Interview #: _____

Date: _____

Interview #1

This is the first of three interviews. These questions will focus on a historical context of you and your chosen profession.

1. To begin, please tell me about yourself. Who are you?
2. Please describe what brought you to the teaching profession.
    a. Please explain how your sexual orientation influenced your decision to enter the field of education.
    b. Describe how your sexual orientation has influenced your teaching.
3. Describe what being a teacher means to you?
4. Please describe how your sexual identity has affected
    a. the ways you teach. How has that made you feel?
    b. your professional relationship with students. Describe your emotions.
    c. your professional relationship with parents. Take me through that experience.
    d. your professional relationship with staff. Describe your feelings.
    e. the ways you deliver instruction. Describe how this has affected your teaching method.
    f. the curriculum you teach. How has that made you feel as a teacher?
5. Describe which aspects of your job you find most rewarding. Most challenging.

Interview #2

Before we begin, do you have any thoughts, comments, questions, or concerns about the first interview that you would like to share?

The following questions will focus on current issues you may face as a teacher.

1. Describe your school and school district.
    a. Describe your experience in the school district as a self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher.
    b. Describe your experience at your work site as a self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher.
    c. Describe the climate of your school in terms of how it relates to you as a self-identifying LGBTQ educator.
    d. In terms of protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation, describe how your place of employment works to protect sexual minority teachers.
2. Tell me about your experience of being a self-identifying LGBTQ public school educator.
    a. Describe what "out at work" means or looks like to you?
        i. How does that make you feel?
    b. Describe your experience with students in terms of your sexual orientation.
        i. Are you out to your students? Describe your decision.
        ii. Do you specifically teach LGBTQ-themed curriculum? Describe your decision.
    c. Describe your experience with administration in terms of your sexual orientation.
        i. Are you out to administration? Describe your decision.

ii. Do you feel supported by administration in terms of your sexual orientation? How does that make you feel?

d. Describe your experience with other faculty members in terms of your sexual orientation.

i. Are you out to other faculty members? Describe your decision.

ii. Describe how your relationships with colleagues have been affected by your decision to either leave or remain in the closet. How has that made you feel.

e. Please explain the barriers or challenges you have faced as a result of your sexual orientation as a public school teacher?

i. Describe a time when you felt discriminated against in your work environment. How did that make you feel?

Interview #3

Before we begin today for the final interview, do you have any thoughts, comments, questions, or concerns about the previous interview that you would like to share?

The following questions will focus on future experiences you see occurring while at work.

1. Describe the past experiences of your first teaching job as a self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher.
2. Describe your current experiences at your job as a self-identifying LGBTQ public school teacher.

   a. What has changed? Please describe in detail.

   b. What has remained the same? How has that made you feel.

c. Describe if you feel the public school teaching profession is getting “better” in terms of LGBTQ acceptance. How has that affected you as a teacher?

3. Tell me about who you are as a teacher.
4. Please tell me about how schools can make a more positive impact on and more safe working environments for self-identifying LGBTQ public school teachers.

Interview Probes

What do you mean?
How did that make you feel?
I’m not sure that I am following you.
Would you explain that?
What did you say then?
What were you thinking at the time?
Give me an example.
Tell me about it.
Take me through the experience.

Appendix D: Transcript Review

Title of Study: **"**Storied Lives, Unpacked Narratives, and Intersecting Experiences: A Phenomenological Examination of Self-Identifying LGBTQ Public School Educators."

Principal Investigator: Robert J. Bizjak, doctoral candidate at Concordia University

_____ (Initial) I was provided a copy of my transcribed interview and was encouraged to review the interview transcripts for accuracy.

_____ (Initial) I was given the opportunity to clarify and/or redact any of the statements that I made during the data collection (interview) phase of this research study.

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____ _____
Participant Name Date

_____ _____
Participant Signature Date

_____ _____
Investigator Name Date

_____ _____
Investigator Signature Date

Appendix E: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Robert J. Bizjak

Digital Signature

Robert J. Bizjak

Name (Typed)

August 15, 2017

Date