The Identity Illusion: The Impact of Heterosexist Microaggressions on the Identity
Formation of Teachers

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Abstract

This study focuses on identity formation as it relates to teachers and the heterosexist microaggressions that can be experienced. Using critical autoethnography, I reflect on, write, and analyze narratives written based upon both my own and my colleagues' experiences. Critical qualitative research on the experiences of queer individuals in education has grown in the past decade, however, more first-hand experiences need to be shared to expose the need for all individuals to examine their behavior and beliefs and how they may be attributing to microaggressions. Through my personal voice as a research participant (teacher) and analytical voice as a researcher, this thesis purposely incites chaos, disruption, and entangles perspectives and biases that are usually kept separate. Heterosexist microaggressions enliven the belief that heterosexuality is the norm and benchmark for society, othering those who fall outside of this measurement and shape their identity through different means. When this belief is unchallenged it threatens authenticity and inclusion for the genuine identity development of individuals to occur.   As a result of this critical autoethnography, considerations for future research are offered in the hopes of encouraging those living unspoken narratives to make themselves visible and heard in an educational context to promote future fluidity and transformation.

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Introduction

The Fading Shine of a Diamond

2015

Slowly, one trembling finger at a time, his hand slid over the fabric that seduced him from across the store. Small, white diamonds exploded over the navy trousers: "Too loud," "flamboyant," "feminine"...voices blared in his head from predicted encounters. He imagined the stares, the raised eyebrows, the smirks. A finger recoiled. Whispers, comments, and conversations that students, teachers, and staff might have about the new teacher who dressed so *freely* attacked his ears as they violently flew around his head, weighting his feet to the floor. His hand lifted. He knew what was expected with the insider perspective he always felt both lucky and cursed to have. Growing up in a rural, Eastern Canadian town with parents as teachers, he knew all too well what it meant: be noticed for the right reasons by reinforcing societal norms, dress nice (but not *too* nice), keep your private life to yourself and separate from the school. Being the son of teachers assigned him a box to squeeze into long before his own teacher identity ever came into question. But, he was growing tired of how the box's edges pressed down and attempted to collapse his shoulders.

"Why are all of your friends girls? Why don't you hang out with the boys as you should?" He was interrogated sternly in primary school.

"Why hasn't a handsome jock like you ever had a girlfriend? Or do you have too many to settle down?" he was constantly joked to by teachers in high school.

His sense of self both shimmered and dissolved in the harsh lighting of any school he had been in; a remarkable paradox.

How can one shine and fade at the same time?

Did these simple trousers warrant such severe thoughts? Such consideration?

His haunted history began to dissolve his courage and with each turn of the price-tag in his weary hands, his mind was transported elsewhere and everywhere…

Thesis Overview

This thesis is a reflective probe of personal experiences in educational environments during my undergraduate education and within the first years of my professional experience as a secondary school teacher, between the years of 2014 and 2020. Developed from personal experience, journals, and witnessing colleagues' experiences, pieces of creative writing inspired from insightful reflection morphed into the many critical moments expressed through vignettes (like "The Shine of a Diamond" above) and act as the basis for analysis of this research. Through my experience, it seems that marginalized voices in society and research may be given the space to be heard but are not listened to with a truly perceptive and understanding ear, especially when those marginalized voices are representing a less visible and less identifiable minority. The voice of the non-stereotypical teacher, of a marginalized identity within any educational environment, needs to be valued for a deeper understanding to emerge and create a better workplace environment for all. It seems when these voices are given the space to be heard, when they highlight microaggressive behavior that exists in their environments, they are met with disbelief and dismissal (Nadal, 2012). In this thesis, I examine microaggressions and everyday experiences related to sexuality, gender, and identity expression. Microaggressions can be described as "brief, commonplace, and daily verbal, behavioral and environmental slights and indignities directed towards specific groups of people" (Sue, 2008, p. 330). A level of awareness and accountability is increasing the need to be politically correct and respectful of all people in society, making discrimination appear less overt and more subtle and underlying. Individuals displaying microaggressive behavior must be held accountable and the experiences of marginalized people need to be heard to understand the intent and outcome of language and actions. Marginalized perspectives are both being given and taking more space while pushing for

society to be held accountable for its wrongdoings. There is a crucial need to acknowledge and confront oppression around the world and scrutinize the development of societal norms that support a colonized, Caucasian, cisgender, heterosexual, male perspective and narrative.

Similarly, queer experiences in education have been overlooked and are one of the taken-for-granted experiences described in much hermeneutic work; one with forgotten meanings still to be uncovered (Jardine and Field, 1996). As shown in the vignette above, as a researcher and participant, I feel there are still many meanings that are yearning to be uncovered and that hold great significance for myself and the world around me. From a young age I consciously recognized that I was different in how I felt and thought; who I was attracted to and what I was interested in—I was queering the world around me before I even knew queer(ing) existed. I also did not realize that I was attempting to emancipate myself from the colonial influence in the places and spaces I occupied both publicly and privately. We are at a point in society that the oppression and pervasive structure of colonialism must be recognized and challenged. Colonialism is aligned with racialized and marginalized groups alike and encompasses a disenfranchised history shared by many. Hunt and Holmes (2015) describe a combination of these stances: "A decolonial queer politic is not only anti-normative, but actively engages with anti-colonial, critical race and Indigenous theories and geopolitical issues such as imperialism, colonialism, globalization, migration, neoliberalism, and nationalism" (p. 156). They view both decolonizing and queer as live practices that are interconnected and must challenge race, gender, and sexuality norms that colonialism embedded in our society. At the time these realizations occurred it left me feeling confused, shameful, malfunctioning, and produced such strong emotional and visceral responses that they can still be vividly remembered decades later. The

influence of colonialism and a queer politic is important to explore in more depth to reveal the norms created for sexuality, gender, and other social categorizations.

Queer reaches beyond the scope of the LGBTQ2+ acronym and aims to include all who transcend the expectations of societal norms for gender and sexuality expression. It aims to disrupt, dismantle, and destroy heteronormativity by making diversity in the expression of gender, sex, and sexuality the new norm (Jagose, 2006; Blackburn and Clarke, 2011). It will be used in this thesis as a term and political position in queering the world around us by critiquing, questioning, and expanding the rigid boundaries that exist. Also, for the purposes of this thesis, heteronormativity will refer to the standardized heterosexual expectations prescribed to students, teachers, and staff members in all places and spaces associated with the school and community. These unfair and often understated expectations further silence queer or questioning community members and limit choices of expression for all in making heteronormativity comfortable and normalized. When unchecked, heteronormativity greatly impacts one's ability to truthfully express identity and can encourage heterosexism. Heterosexism is defined succinctly by Plummer (2004) as "a diverse set of social practices from the linguistic to the physical, in the public and private sphere, covert and overt, in an array of social arenas […] in which the homo-hetero binary distinction is at work whereby heterosexuality is privileged" (p. 19). Through the 'hidden curriculum' that is learned through a school's structure and institutionalized beliefs, often negative attitudes and beliefs against queer individuals develop and act both implicitly and explicitly. In schools, heterosexuality is privileged in curriculum decisions, in relationships within the school, and is the dominant narrative for how life should be in the private world. In line with the queer perspective described above, the traces of heterosexism and heteronormativity need to be realized in schools so community members can be held accountable

and learn how to grow into a version of themselves that influences their school to dismantle this discriminatory, normalized history.

It is not the aim of this research to just fill gaps in academia but also to contextualize and add to ideas that have been found in past studies relating to queer experience and identity formation. It is to firmly acknowledge that educational places and spaces need to be queered in order for all expressions of identity to be actualized and established. It aims to disrupt and dissolve control over identity through the rigid binaries of gender expression and heteronormative and heterosexist values and beliefs. As Butler (2004) believed, the overarching power of the queer lens is that there is no requirement for labels, definitions, and boundaries to be created in advanced. A queer lens gives space and acknowledgement for constant redefinition and transformation and the constant disruption of what is considered normal. This research aims to encourage the disruption of normalcy and both the intentional and unintentional uses of language to diminish queer individuals. The lack of equitable dialogue, normalized terminology, and space for discussing queer issues within all aspects of society has led to a silencing and systemic discomfort with all that fall outside of shifting societal norms. The ability to identify these insidious uses of language and the systemic erasure of queer experience from history is growing in depth and taking back power in educational places and spaces through written and spoken language. The main manifestation of the insidiousness of language takes the form of microaggressions that both silence and cause sexual minorities to vanish—disqualifying their experiences daily. Research has demonstrated the mental health implications for all victims of microaggressions—yet—as a Caucasian, cisgender, able-bodied, able-minded, gay, Canadian male, I can speak only of my unspoken narrative, of my specific experiences; to reflect on both privilege and discrimination and not on others' experiences identifying with a sexual minority or

for those of more visible minorities. I can speak only of my own experiences and of those I have witnessed of others in the many contexts and educational environments I have been in. This acts as both the valued uniqueness and limitation of my research. I am intentionally not panning my environment to directly include outside perspectives or the experiences of others, rather, I am zooming in on my personal experiences, using a voice developed from the places and spaces I have both filled and not been allowed, or permitted myself, to fill.

Though social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion education has become more prominent in Canadian universities, there is still a relative "discursive silence around queer matters in education" (Dejean, 2010, p. 234). This is a complex idea as it relates to the varied openness of public and private identity and how it limits the opportunity for marginalized voices to break that discursive silence. Taylor, Campbell, Meyer, Ristock & Short (2015) completed a Canadian study of 3,319 teachers and found that 21% of lesbian, 15% of gay, and 6% of bisexual participants were out to their whole community. Other findings in the study included being far more likely to be out to a colleague than administration and one-third of participants had been warned by other educators, friends, or family against coming out at school. Similarly, Gates (2005) completed an American study that found that though 90% of queer participants were out in their personal lives, only 25% were openly out to their colleagues (p. i). These numbers matter. Effective teaching must include authenticity and a sense of wholeness that hiding a valuable and important aspect of your identity can jeopardize.

Whether on a conscious or subconscious level, everyone is in search of authenticity. Halliday (2006) describes this sense of authenticity as "when people take hold of the direction of their own lives without the direction being determined for them by external factors" (p. 114). Perhaps the pull toward objective knowledge and information in the history of research has led to

the glorification of transferable and quantifiable data when exploring education and the experiences of teachers. Yet, this approach can limit and exclude the fluidity needed to include all voices and stakeholders. Though the fluidity of unpredictable discoveries that leads to new knowledge exists in objective research, lived experiences still deserve to be treated as new sites of knowledge in research. Our lived experiences hold an immense amount of power and knowledge to guide our future actions. As stated, our histories are brimming with integral moments, that when critically analyzed and considered from an academic viewpoint, have the ability to transform into evocative educational opportunities. The first and most important step is to give yourself the time to analyze your history and attempt to understand our existences in a more insightful way. This thesis openly and enthusiastically invites the audience to step into the many lived experiences included to share meaning and connection through story; to articulate a sense of the practice of life, investigation, and meaning within the history that I belong to (Field, 1996). The power of language and the importance of specificity leads to both the examination and reexamination of moments in teachers' lived experiences to connect with shared meaning and collaboration to gain a shared understanding of the identity formation of teachers. Language fosters this identity formation and is used by human beings daily, "contain[ing] the story of who we are as a people. It is reflective of our desires, our regrets and our dreams" (Smith, 1999, p. 39). It is the intricacy of single words, phrases, and connotations that truly drives the research of this thesis and the usage of history I belong to in evaluating how language co-constructed meaning in those experiences. These dynamics of power certainly have an influence on student-teachers and educators in all phases, but particularly, at the beginning of their careers. This power, institutionalized through both heteronormativity and cisnormativity, has influenced the lack of literature on queer teachers and how they are impacted; most research investigates

student risk and 'Otherness' but not teachers' experiences (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 33). Like the ever-changing nature of identity, spaces that seek to be truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive need to be in flux and adapted mindfully to consider who is harmed, excluded, and othered by spaces and practices in their control (Kumashiro, 2002, p.38). To date, research is still limited on experiences of queer student-teachers and teachers in the early stages of their careers. The hope is that this qualitative research will be amongst the literature that furthers, deepens, and reimagines the conversation on fluidity and identity, specifically for the experiences of queer educators.

Autoethnographic Voice

By illuminating the experience of a queer teacher in a variety of heteronormative and heterosexist environments, both rural and urban, British and Canadian, the diverse vignettes act as a natural process of triangulation of geographical space and power with multiple stories and contexts adding to data saturation. This saturation further reveals the need to queer experiences that have been mainly interpreted and studied from a limited perspective. These spaces are selected simply because I started my teaching career in England and now continue my career in Canada. The comparison reveals the power heteronormative narratives have been given historically and is scrutinized and critiqued through the inclusion of multiple narratives from the range of places and spaces to give a depth of understanding to my single queer experience as a student-teacher and teacher. Chimamanda Adichie, an author and oral storyteller, speaks openly on the danger of a single story, on the importance of speaking the unspoken narratives that exist in society:

> Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity (2012).

For the entirety of my life, I surrendered to and prescribed myself silence as a form of self-protection and self-preservation in the spaces of society that were not flexible and open enough for me to be a genuine version of myself. This is heavily influenced by the reality that there were not many visible versions of myself to idolize in an Eastern Canadian society struggling to remove the colonial stain of the past. The narratives were left unspoken; there was only a single story of being queer and it was not a positive or sought after one to identify with. It was a narrative that contained the stigmatized language of being a 'faggot,' a 'pussy,' of being effeminate and considered less human for wanting to participate in such 'perverse' and unnatural ways of life. Mainly, it was being a 'queer,' a term that I now understand and proudly use to signify my desire to question the world around me and challenge the poisonous use of language to disempower and control instead of properly expand the boundaries that societal norms create. It was also a narrative that was not privileged as a site of knowledge or understanding amongst the dominant, heteronormative and cisnormative narratives that devoured all spaces. Adopting the sentiments of Adichie and my personal want and need to queer culture, autoethnography became the method of choice to break the self-prescribed responsibility of managing silence and alienation. By positioning myself at the center of my research, it may result in limitations that will be addressed in the 'Methods' section later, but it also results in an unspoken narrative being analyzed and dispersed for other queer teachers to powerfully connect with their own experiences and disrupt the ideals of normalcy. Tami Spry (2008) describes this sense of self and power that is created through autoethnography:

> Autoethnographic texts express more fully the interactional textures occurring between self, other, and contexts in ethnographic research. I have begun creating a self in and out of academe that allows expression of passion and spirit I have long suppressed. [...] So, in seeking to dis-(re)-cover my body and voice in all parts of my life, I began writing and performing autoethnography, concentrating on the body as the site from which the story is generated. [...] [It] has encouraged

me to dialogically look back upon my self as other, generating critical agency in the stories of my life, as the polyglot facets of self and other engage, interrogate, and embrace (708).

I am also seeking to "dis-(re)-cover my body and voice" and for the first time I have found a path, through finding autoethnography, to focus on my own lived experiences as valuable and critical sites of knowledge. In the past, I was rarely permitted the opportunity to create a self in academia that included passion and honesty. My academic self relied solely on objective, quantifiable truths to represent interactions occurring between self, other, and contexts in research. My academic self-looked to research that occurred outside of my own experience, research like ethnography and structured interviews that could be observed and extracted from a separate research participant. Yet, as Spry (2008) describes, autoethnography can be a "vehicle of emancipation" from all of the scripts that have structured my identity to date, including the academic script that disempowered qualitative and personal approaches (p. 708). The sharing of this journey is also to invite others to learn. Identity and the act of critically reflecting on how it exists both personally and professionally is crucial for all human beings to have serious and thoughtful conversations about. Creswell (2012) contends that "people live storied lives. They tell stories to share their lives with others and to provide their personal accounts about classrooms, schools, educational issues, and the settings in which they work" (p. 501). Without this act of sharing, the real issues faced by teachers remain theoretical and philosophical in nature and without tangible roots to impact daily practice. Through this personal topic and approach, that dissolves the researcher and participant binary, the hope is to start the transformative and continual process of actively hauling up issues and realizations surrounding identity from the roots, having my fingers deep within the fresh soil of academic reflection that leads to implications for professional practice.

This approach begins with a literature review in the 'Introduction' section that reveals the history of identity formation and consideration in society and the teaching profession. It details the evolution of heteronormativity and microaggressions while considering the history of teacher marginalization in Canada.

In the 'Methods' section, autoethnography is rationalized for the purposes of this discussion. Autoethnography is the sole method that illuminates the dominance and heteronormative and gender normative narratives and why it is crucial in this context to illuminate unspoken narratives and experiences of marginalization.

The 'Analysis' section includes three main sub-sections that denote the major themes of this work: 'Self-Preservation and Protection,' 'Place and Space,' and 'Power and Privilege'. This major analysis section expands upon the vignettes included and positions their meaning in research and educational contexts.

Lastly, the 'Outcomes' section includes 'Future Suggestions,' 'Research Implications,' and 'Conclusion' subsections that illuminate the process of creating this thesis and the result of the autoethnographic procedure. The silenced and unspoken narrative now being heard and seen leads to many realizations, hopes, and suggestions to improve educational places and spaces in the future

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research is an approach widely used for exploring social and human issues while uncovering the meaning for individuals and groups. This process often involves "emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" while allowing the role of the researcher to be a primary data collection instrument and a positive influence on the research as a whole (Creswell, 2012 p. 32). Qualitative research is the most appropriate methodology for this thesis as it is my aim to focus on the process of utilizing lived experiences and blur the lines between researcher and research participant. It is not my goal as a researcher to produce data that is generalizable but rather to deepen the conversation on specific queer experiences in educational places and spaces that I have lived in. The data that will emerge from this process will be descriptive and evocative narrative fragments that aim to make sense of only my own lived experiences. Scholars have critiqued the self-indulgent nature of some qualitative methodology and its lack of generalization which will be addressed in the 'Methods' section, however, adopting post-structuralism as a crucial paradigm further confirms that qualitative research is the most applicable for the context of this educational issue.

Structuralism was criticized for its rigidity and reductionist perspective in analyzing education and social institutions but can be applauded for initiating relational analyses of the world (Mason & Clarke, 2000). In extension, as a paradigm, post-structuralism aims to "unmask the illusions of modernity" and "move away from seeking universal truths and absolutes in recognizing and accepting the multicultural spaces we now inhabit in an increasingly globalized world" (Mason & Clarke, 2000, p. 175). Post-structuralists began to recognize that language is

socially constructed and entrenched in cultural and historical values and assumptions; educational notions of truth, progress, and emancipation were forever changed with this linguistic shift. Human beings use language to create and engage with social roles for themselves, to communicate with one another, and to attempt to shape their own realities. Access to a shared language to begin to understand each other's experiences is a privilege and also a barrier. Understanding how even the slightest usages of language promotes certain cultural values and beliefs is not readily explored by all community members. We regularly use phrases and wording that we do not bother to trace the origins of and do not understand the cultural implications that using particular words and phrases might have. Stigmatized language used toward the queer community has long kept a culture of fear and encouraged invisibility present in many work environments. As shared above in the vignette, representation of and language used for queer individuals in a rural, Eastern Canadian environment was not created to build bridges of understanding but rather create boundaries and further strengthen divides. Using language that highlights effeminacy as a malfunction of identity and associated with terms like 'faggot,' 'fairy' and 'that's so gay' showcase the insidious nature of some commonly used words and phrases that often remain unchallenged in mainstream society. Much language is still commonly used that has racist and homophobic undertones in daily life that is not noticed by the average individual. The importance of specificity of language and recognizing the immense power that language holds is integral to this research. Exploring the impact of microaggressions and how language is used to position and maintain power is a significant aspect of any marginalized experience. Post-structuralism is the paradigm to help me understand and embody the need to question who has held power and the right to historically determine meaning and importance in the education system. Power can be used as "a point of resistance and a starting

point for opposing strategy" and in the context of education, it is the hope of this research that we will start to question why queer issues have largely been left out of the educational world and why the voices of queer community members have been silenced (Foucault, 1977, p. 101).

Furthermore, post-structuralism's tripartite association with literary theory, philosophy, and critical theory turned me from other epistemological views. Many post-structuralist thinkers were attempting to discover a new and emancipated way of describing their way of thinking and being. This paradigm encourages the development of a critical viewpoint that moves to break barriers and limit theoretical visions that can be found in other views like positivism and structuralism. The focus on subjectivity, authorship, and identity fit the aims of this research perfectly and elevates the approach to value personal experiences and shed any fear of subjectivity. Post-structuralism, working through feminist and queer theory, frames this thesis and its critical nature. The incidents included in this thesis will be analyzed through these theories to represent the disempowered and to disrupt commonly-held values surrounding identity and possibilities of expression in the educational world. Furthermore, feminist theory has focused on the physical body in connection to gender expression and expectations which guide ideas surrounding power, privilege, and gender (Butler, 1997; Diprose, 2003; Young, 2005). Feminist writers were among the first to study gender and sexuality and openly critique its social construction in society. The power relations associated with how society interpreted gender and sexuality were of great importance to feminist scholarship though it was not until queer theorists entered academia that sexuality was given the same importance as gender. Feminist and queer theory intersect in that they are calling for the world to be interpreted beyond a male, heterosexual, cisgender, perspective. This theoretical framework strives to encourage members of society to consider their perspective on gender and sexuality and how it came to be through

oppression and societal norms. In considering how identity norms have developed and how they are so deeply influenced by heteronormative values, it is crucial to assess gender in an educational context. Queer theory also presents an integral lens as it pushes for the refusal to accept heterosexuality as a benchmark for identity and social norms; challenging rigid binaries to make space for all. It is the combination of these lenses, in conjunction with my own lived experiences, that critical autoethnography is carefully selected to craft a unique and new perspective on teacher identity to best represent my experiences.

Considering the importance of keeping the researcher as an integral part of creating and conveying knowledge in this qualitative research, critical autoethnography was the most appropriate choice. Critical autoethnography can be defined as a "self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts" and values "coherence, verisimilitude, and interest" while shifting its focus from data accuracy to truth and experience (Barbour, 2011; Spry, 2004, p. 710). The merit in autoethnography is in personal experience being explored and acknowledging that facts were lived experiences from interacting individuals (Denzin, 2014). Furthermore, critical autoethnography is the methodological framework selected as it best fits the aims of my research, attempting to decipher meaning from my personal experiences in educational environments through analytical reflection. The very premise of this is built upon the idea that, as human beings, we find existential meaning through story (Andrews, Squire & Tambokou, 2008). In sharing the stories of my personal experience with the educational community, I hope to encourage further thought to move toward true inclusivity and a more flexible workplace that loosens its grip on identity and the rigidity of labels. As stated above, I am adopting Spry's (2004) hope to "dis-(re)-cover my body and voice" which guides the core value of this deeply personal, emotional, and intimate research.

In an attempt to "dis-(re)-cover" my voice, it was crucial that I transport myself back to the personal experiences and sites of knowledge that held value and impact in my life. Ellis (2004) promotes the idea of emotional recall and how transporting yourself back to the frame of reference is most successful when researchers complete this mental time-travel while still close to the experience to truly harness the intensity of the moment. Ellis warns against being farther removed from the moments themselves and inadvertently viewing them from an outsider's perspective. Other critics of autoethnography point to memory as a major flaw and believe the method can lead to researchers being self-indulgent and narcissistic in the retelling of personal stories while evocatively and artistically revealing a version of their history. Yet, the self cannot be separated from the other, they are intertwined in meaning and purpose (Ellis, 2009). Through my early Master's degree work, I started journaling and recording experiences that were personally impactful, and often, traumatic. Through various courses that required me to be critical of my experience, I started to analyze and record experiences as both a student-teacher, and eventually teacher, that held meaning in shaping my identity. It is these very journaled moments that morphed into the vignettes for this thesis. The act of reflecting and deciphering experiences that held personal meaning came naturally to me and was instantly useful through my Education degrees and into teaching.

Once I learned of the inductive process of analysis involved with autoethnographic work I had the revelation that this method best matched my research goals and would elevate the rebirth of my academic style and experience: "The qualitative researcher uses inductive analysis, which means that categories, themes, and patterns come from the data" (Denzen and Lincoln, 2005, p. 389). I have always had a pull toward reflecting on my experiences and identifying themes in the world around me. As stated above, I was attempting to queer the world around me

before I could consciously understand that it was occurring. A personal mantra of mine is that everything does not happen for a reason but you can find reason in everything that happens. With this mantra in mind, I extracted themes and motifs from my experiences. For this research, I coded for themes and patterns from the narrative data included and allowed that to guide how I created the vignettes and deem what was important in relation to my research question and the findings and analytical sections of my thesis.

Furthermore, critical autoethnography encompasses a sense of transformation and critical reflexivity. This approach comes with a deep examination of culture and how experience is situated within that culture at that specific time. It involves depth, heart, and introspection that encourages empathy through the research process (Ellis, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). An autoethnographic text enlivens the researcher's collaboration with "people, culture, and time"; experience is combined with language and places emphasis on the unknown that can be revealed through story. Other methods require that the researcher fully remove the self from the process of discovery in an attempt to promote objectivity and quantifiable results. Yet, in qualitative research, and especially autoethnography, the self and the subject cannot be separated. The most universal truths that can be discovered are believed to be within the researchers' experience and it is through their personal development and use of reflexivity and empathy that these lived experiences can be treated as sources and sites of knowledge to generate themes and implications for the future (Spry, 2008). To truly enliven my own experience with 'people, culture, and time' is to unlearn my colonized beliefs and perspectives and queer the norms that have been presented to me as universal truths and objective facts; these influences have killed both curiosity and confidence in myself as a reputable source of knowledge and truth. Rigorously scraping past experiences for meaning while fully immersing myself into the evocative learning of each

moment was challenging, but necessary, in surrendering to the duality of the researcher and participant combination. This analogy relates to the inclusion of both analytic and evocative styles of ethnography. Analytic ethnography can be considered closer to the traditional norm of research being rooted in objectivity whereas evocative ethnography is aiming to extract empathy and instill a deep and meaningful response from the audience (Adams, Linn, & Ellis, 2015).

Furthermore, qualitative approaches permit a more creative and transformative style of writing and research that allows the researcher to be more vulnerable and explores issues of direct personal interest. This strengthens the voice for both qualitative research and critical autoethnography as writing the vignettes to elicit an emotional response was crucial in allowing the audience to understand the gravity of the experiences included and their impact on identity formation. The usual impersonal and unemotional academic voice is gladly pushed aside to achieve this and use language that promotes an evocative experience for the audience to develop their own sense of empathy and understanding. This creative and transformative style can be particularly important for marginalized individuals seeking to solve systemic issues in relation to modern-day identities. Hall (2003) notes the transformative nature of modern-day identities and clarifies that culture, history, and language impact identity formation but that it is in a permanent state of becoming and transformation. Critical autoethnography and its qualitative assets enable my research process to be fluid and transform into evocative vignettes that allow the audience to experience the authenticity of the included issues. Vignettes were carefully constructed and then probed for meaning through academic analysis. These vignettes are written for the audience to experience a transfer of emotion upon connecting with the experiences of the teacher(s) described and also to instill a want to self-reflect and disrupt a thought pattern on identity and

how it exists in the world they live in; likely one that needs to be challenged and queered on personal and systemic levels.

Terms Defined

As a term, queer attempts to transcend the social and political spaces considered normative in regards to sexuality and gender. Queer reaches beyond LGBTQ2+ individuals and aims to include all who transcend the expectations of societal norms for gender and sexuality. It aims to disrupt, dismantle, and destroy heteronormativity by making diversity in gender, sex, sexuality, and expression the new norm (Jagose, 2006; Blackburn & Clarke, 2011). Adopting the views of early researchers, heteronormativity is "the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientation that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as sexuality—but also privileged" (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548). Heteronormativity has led to the institutionalized privileging of heterosexuality and all of the assumptions that follow with that sexuality. In analyzing the critical incidents with the influence of queer theory, the aim is to challenge the notion that sexuality does not impact educational experiences and accept that heterosexuality has detrimentally led to privilege at the expense of queer identities being forced into the peripheral. Queer is used in this thesis both as a subject position and as a politic inspired by Morris' (1998) definition: "Queerness as a subject position digresses from the normalized, rigid identities" and "queerness as a politic, challenges the status quo, does not simply tolerate it, and does not stand for assimilation into the mainstream" (p.277). I use this term to refer to potential teacher identity as opposed to the LGBTQ2+ acronym in an attempt to be more transparent and include all potential teacher identity formations to dismantle the traditional straight/gay binary that exists as the only conversation surrounding sex, sexuality, gender, and expression. Similarly, queer is used as a politic in discussing theory (Queer theory) and also

educational and societal institutions from a queered perspective. Queering education and analyzing educational places and spaces from a queer perspective is about dismantling the norms that exist and reconsidering existing structures.

To accurately consider the complexity of the issues included in this thesis the concept of intersectionality must be defined. In research, accounting for the ways that race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, citizenship, ability, and age among other social categorizations, influence power and inequality in society and identity development is crucial. When considered effectively, "intersectionality opens up conceptual spaces to identify the gaps and silences of single-category analyses and approaches, as well as the mutually constitutive relationships between categories" (Tefera, Powers & Fischman, 2018, p.vii). Without queering the society around us, heterosexism and heteronormativity remain unchecked and unchallenged. It is important to distinguish heterosexism from heteronormativity. Heterosexism exists as an undercurrent in many of the critical incidents represented in this thesis and breeds microaggressive and homophobic behavior when it goes unchallenged. Heterosexism, as defined by Audre Lorde, is the "belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving and thereby its right to dominate"; of course, for our society, this would be true of heterosexuality (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988, p. 245). This heterosexist ideology acts as a systematic display of homophobic views and socializes individuals to believe in the binaries and norms that exist and privilege heterosexuality. Heterosexism differs from homophobia in that it is not by intent and design but rather by neglect and omission. For my purposes, Plummer's (2004) description of heterosexism applies: "...a diverse set of social practices from the linguistic to the physical, in the public and private sphere, covert and overt, in an array of social arenas […] in which the homo-

hetero binary distinction is at work whereby heterosexuality is privileged" (p.19). It is that very

neglect and omission that creates space for miseducation and the evolution of microaggressions.

Research is growing on microaggressions and they can be defined as "brief,

commonplace, and daily verbal, behavioral and environmental slights and indignities directed

towards specific groups of people" (Sue, 2008, p. 330). Microaggressions are often born of

systemic social justice issues and are gaining in recognition and credit. Sue, Capodilupo, Torino,

Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin (2007) identified three classifications of microaggressions

through their work: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. It was Nadal (2013)

who then applied these categories to the experience of queer individuals and highlighted the

negative impacts on mental health that follow.

The concept of othering will be referred to in this thesis and holds great importance. With

the major influence of globalization, metaphorically shrinking the world, societies are becoming

increasingly diverse. Still, rigid categories for race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, and

class hold relevance for many people and their daily interactions (Taylor, 2004). Educational

places and spaces are political spaces that uphold the historical power balances of that particular

governing system (Althusser, 2008). Othering firmly establishes differences between individuals

and groups, creating a collective identity amongst group members to recognize their similarities

in the face of others' differences (Crisp & Turner, 2007). Like microaggressions, perpetrators

can be very unaware and unconcerned that their behavior is connected with the majority of a

certain aspect of society and leads to exclusion and loss of power and status for others; many just

consider this the inevitable dynamics of life. Critical researchers have highlighted the sense of

control that the powerful majority groups use in society while simultaneously using language and

social currency to diminish other groups. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) viewed the

negotiation of identity as a result of inequality and the restrictions it places on individuals in society. Many critical researchers have taken an interest in expressing their concern over the growing rate of social inequality and othering in relation to gender, race and ethnicity (Butler, 1993; Lin, 2008). In particular, Lin (2008) describes identity as a game and postulates that powerful players in social, economic, and political spheres encourage the playing of this game. Though educators have a daily decision to maintain or disrupt hierarchies—still—hierarchies exist and make genuine diversity and inclusion challenging, leading to groups being considered as 'other'. Critical theory sets out not just to identify power imbalances and issues of justice but aims to position individuals to overcome those imbalances related to the concept of othering and aspects of identity like race, gender, sexuality, class, and other social constructs (Creswell, 2012). The presence of othering itself needs to be challenged through a critical theory lens through open dialogue on personal experience and reflections on experiences of being othered and disempowered (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Lastly, it is crucial to identify the difference between what will be referred to as educational places and spaces by implementing Certeau's (1984) definitions. Educational places will be used as a term to refer to those places that are intentionally established on a systemic level: location, the physicality of buildings and classrooms, objective elements and dimensions. Places have a sense of intentionality and a disciplining of ideology associated with them and often a backing of law through policy and human rights. Places are often discussed more and can be used to tangibly showcase social justice and inclusion consideration. In contrast, educational spaces will be used to refer to elements that are in flux, fluid, and not attached to physical elements preventing their mobility. Crucial in determining comfort and safety, spaces may be less intentional and all-encompassing. Educational space is not married to the physicality of a

building or linear nature of a school schedule. They exist informally during moments in hallways, classrooms, change rooms, sports fields, parking lots, libraries, and staff rooms. They include all educational moments and opportunities that cannot always be controlled, or, more accurately, planned.

Literature Review

There are numerous perspectives within the literature on the role of identity in education and the various frames it can be analyzed through. To Olsen (2008), a lens to examine aspects of teaching and the balancing of tensions within the career; to MacLure (1993) a tool people use to justify their existence and self to others (p. 311). In an attempt to maintain a level of control and power, society has long been riddled with numerous styles of labeling that are changing with the sophisticated level of diversity that seems to increase with time. Identity, as a state of being oneself, has historically been rigidly forced into categories, encouraging individuals to select a form to fit into or have one forced upon them. Teachers enter the work-force aware of teacher archetypes that exist, shaped by their experiences as students themselves. The control of power and support of heteronormativity within educational places and spaces reveals an uneven and unethical imbalance of power for teachers who do not adhere to the norms. A Foucauldian view of power would have us interpret it as a technique, as something that is not owned or possessed, but rather, exercised. Extending a Foucauldian perspective to identity calls the very essence of the 'self' into question. Foucault rejected the idea that a true or core self-existed and he moved toward a post-structural model of identity. This Foucauldian perspective pushes us to challenge the traditional idea of identity as a fixed and inherent quality and interpret identity as a cultural experience that is ever-changing as one attempts to communicate oneself to the world (Foucault, 1977). Teachers attempt to communicate themselves to the world every day while also trying to

support identity formation by mentoring the students around them. The rigid nature that norms instill in society can often leave individuals feeling stunted in their identity formation and self-expression. The places and spaces associated with any school should foster creativity, exploration, and dissolve boundaries—not strengthen them. Historically, boundaries that norms create in influencing meaning making have a negative impact on society. Structuralism can be applauded for opening relational and constructivist analyses of the world and encourage reconsidering historical systems of meaning making (Clarke, 1978).

Post-Structuralism

The influence of structuralism can still be felt in educational institutions around Canada as we move into an age of accountability and a global awakening for upholding anti-oppression education and the direct promotion of diversity. The rigidity and static nature of social phenomena that was created from empirical methods of science and quantitative research influenced historical decisions surrounding standardization in education. Recognizing the complex relationship that exists between the "economic, political, social, and cultural factors involved" encourages researchers to uncover their individual way of being in the world and their personal use of language that shapes their realities (Mason & Clarke, 2000). This complex relationship leads researchers to uncover their individual way of being in the world and their personal use of language that shapes their realities. Marginalized educators that struggle to find versions of themselves in the curriculum they teach and the work environments they exist in need to adopt a post-structuralist lens to challenge the reductionist norms that impact their ability to express themselves freely and allow their identity to develop professionally. This can start with challenging the purpose and usage of language as most educators and members of school environments and communities do not recognize the power and that language can have:

"Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (Weedon, 1997, p. 21). Foucault (1977) describes this construction as a type of negotiation that exists for educators that want to encourage diversity in thought and have a yearning to learn about how the present and future can be improved by considering personal histories and experiences as sources of knowledge and power. This is particularly important for educators in our current society as they encourage themselves and their students to challenge oppression and queer their perspectives to unlearn key concepts from voices and perspectives that have historically been given more weight and space. Feminists played a major role in beginning to question the understanding placed on the physical body in society and questioning how masculinity is privileged in society.

Post-Structural Feminism

Similar to post-structuralism and the need to dismantle narrow constructs of normality, feminist theorists have majorly contributed to shifts in belief about knowledge and identity formation and put gender expression under the spotlight. Valuing the author and researcher as a source of knowledge that is no longer separated from the research itself cannot be done without the influence of feminist theory. A refusal to keep the researcher and research separate along with valuing the practice of reflexivity are common themes shared by feminist scholars. The author's and researcher's position is viewed as an asset and moving beyond the singular, usually heterosexual, male voice that dominated scholarly work and dialogue. Marginalised voices and scholars, like feminists, pushed for tightly controlled ways of knowing in academics to expand their willingness to learn and give space for other voices and means of gaining knowledge (Brigg & Bleiker, 2009). Feminist theorists emancipated themselves from silence by beginning to pay

attention to their own personal narratives and histories. Many feminist scholars purposefully

used the term personal narrative as opposed to more popularly used terms in an effort to value

new sites of knowledge and place new value on journals, diaries, interviews, letters, life-stories,

autobiographies and more working-class experiences (Cruikshank, 1992). In the 1960s, Betty

Friedan identified issues that many Caucasian middle-class women were experiencing at the time

in not being able to develop personally, work outside of the home, or have support systems

(1964). Though this offers a limited and privileged perspective within a particular race and class,

still the identification that women were not getting an opportunity to communicate with one

another and had no means of sharing their individual stories is important. It is the turn and focus

on writing to act as a form of therapy and emancipation for women's isolation that is noteworthy

and indicative of future social change. Writing as a form of therapy is still a readily used option

and need for marginalized individuals in academia. Writing and taking control of language as a

form of emancipation is a powerful act that qualitative research enables, bringing a level of

intimacy and individualism that has long been removed in favor of objectivity and the outsider's

perspective. The importance of sharing individual stories and having a sense of communication

amongst any community is crucial in considering the needs and the experiences of community

members. When an environment of silence and internalization is encouraged, whether implicitly

or explicitly, harmful societal norms are kept firmly in place leaving community members

unaware of the harm that their involvement on a personal, societal, and procedural level in

marginalizing a person or group causes. In completing this thesis, I undertook the most powerful

form of therapy that I have experienced yet. The profound purpose that I discovered in writing

and sharing my own experiences deepened my ability to both communicate and empathize with

the world around me which is a privilege that I think everyone deserves to experience and be guided through.

Using language as a form of emancipation also lead to exposing harmful experiences and key feminist theorists started to question the social construction of gender. Lorber (1993) contends that "gender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced" (p. 41). It was the second wave of North American feminism that led to women's studies in academia and formally addressing gender differences, both biologically and socially. This includes how men and women are treated and how gender and meaning is attached to people physically. Mirroring a Foucauldian interpretation of power, feminists also started to question the power placed on the body to construct crucial elements of identity like personality and psyche and to further acknowledge the cultural construction of both the female and non-normative body (McLaren, 2002; Bordo, 2001). The gender oppression that existed because of dominance over the regulation and management of bodies in daily life severely influences identity development. Through these foci it is clear to see that feminist theory and queer theory share the same epistemological foundation and goals (Marinucci, 2010). Like queer theory, feminist theory seeks to fracture the assumption that natural categories and behaviors exist in relation to genders; that how one is treated is dependent upon sex and gender. Butler (1999) clarified that gender is ever-transforming by a variety of actions that are outside of the self. It is not something a person is born with but constructs in association with societal rules, practices, and norms that rigidly force masculine and feminine roles to men and women. It is to the credit of Feminist scholars that the need to question societal expectations and interpretations of the body and its position and importance was exposed. Feminist scholars exposed the idea that

tendencies of how one is treated is related to the physical body and the socially constructed ideals that were placed on it were not genuine to the body itself. The importance of tackling gender norms in places and spaces associated with schools is growing in importance and urgency. Gender norms that were historically enforced cannot be blindly accepted as a benchmark or a means to judge community members by. Rather, fluidity is needed, accompanied by an authentic search for individuals' narratives and lived experiences to dismantle the toxicity that norms have created. Elizabeth Grosz highlighted that feminist theory has been an analysis of the past and present to learn how knowledge discriminated against women and helped to structure a society that continuously harmed women. But she calls for researchers to be more interested in the "abstract and non-determinable, not in what has been and is, but in what could be and does not yet exist" (Grosz, 2010, p. 49). Queer theorists are similar to feminist theorists in their want to disrupt societal norms; queering society is important to consider to understand the current state of our society and identity formation.

Queer Theory & Identity Formation

We must refuse to accept heterosexuality as the benchmark for identity or social norms. One of the key concerns of queer theory is challenging the rigid binaries that exist to eradicate difference and inequality. By using a lens in accordance with queer theory, it is my aim to dismantle the notion that sexuality does not impact educational experiences; heterosexuality has detrimentally led to privilege at the expense of queer identities being forced into the peripheral. Many queer theorists have begun the quest to explore what impact heteronormativity has within the field of education by observing and reporting how individuals express their sexual identity. The works of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault have deeply impacted my understanding of identity as something that is ever in flux, like most aspects of education. Yet, our educational

environments still tend to be static and less open to change, impacting the lens under which we explore opportunities. Society is shaped in a way that only allows straight subjects to fit in, isolating experiences that fall into the 'other' category and distancing any identities other than heterosexual identities from those in that environment (Ahmed, 2006).

Individuals and their sense and understanding of self should be interpreted with a post-structuralist lens and encouraged to be in flux and constant transformation. Jagose (1996) contends that identity is always under construction, in a state of permanent becoming, and when speaking on queer identity she said it is: "an identity category that has no interest in consolidating or even stabilizing itself" (p. 131). It is not to say that all individuals who fall into one of the majority or dominant categories of society have an easier time in forming a genuine identity, they could also be victims of the pressure from traditionalist identity prescription, but marginalized identities, specifically sexual minorities, have long been victims of skewed identity formation. Judith Butler would agree with Foucauldian views and asserts that practiced and repeated behaviors in a society adopt the appearance of being inherent (Butler, 2004). Internalized heteronormativity has led individuals who associate with a sexual minority to repeat certain behavioral trends over time to fit into secure and visible areas of society. For my purposes, Plummer's (2004) description of heterosexism applies: "a diverse set of social practices from the linguistic to the physical, in the public sphere and private sphere, covert and overt, in an array of social arenas […] in which the homo-hetero binary distinction is at work whereby heterosexuality is privileged" (p. 19). In extension, some individuals may even consciously mimic these repeated behaviors to feel a sense of normalcy, whether in their private or professional lives. Warner contends that "a whole field of social relations becomes

intelligible as heterosexuality and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy" (2002). The danger that exists when one type of identity is considered the norm is the disappearance of authenticity and a true sense of self for anyone in any context.

Despite a separation of the professional and the private, sexuality transcends both and has a certain power within the social and political aspects of society. In the educational environment of a school, there is a clear attempt to forcefully separate the private from the professional. Teacher identity is viewed to be not only stable and fixed but also one that should be an exemplar for all of society—held to an unrealistic standard of 'perfection' (MacLure, 1993). Unfortunately, for teachers who associate with a sexual minority, the stronghold of the teacher exemplar is often felt daily. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick (1990) describes the infamous moment of coming-out as a daily occurrence for queer people. A power exists in the culture of a school in knowing how a teacher identifies sexually—with that teacher coming out each time they change schools or meet new teachers, if they come out at all (Sedgwick, 1990). Post-structuralism ideals applied to sexuality show that it is ever-evolving and a major part of a person, showing that it is not something that should be explicitly or implicitly left out of a teacher's experience in their school environment. As Fuss (1991) saw it, "to be out is really to be in—inside the realm of the visible, the speakable, the culturally intelligible" (p. 4). What is so important in the spirit of anti-oppression and creating a more inclusive and safe space for all human beings in the future, is fracturing the poisonous impact of the teacher exemplar and myth that everyone in school is heterosexual; allowing all teachers to be intellectually and emotionally connected to their school. When a teacher feels a sense of vulnerability or shame in accordance with their identity at school, they may isolate themselves from the school culture, and as teaching

is considered a moral and personal profession, emotion has the power to expand or limit one's possibilities and success (Zembylas, 2003). Teacher identity formation needs space for dynamism in the context of teaching and education, to shift over time under the influence of a wide range of factors (Flores & Day, 2006; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Sachs, 2005; Van Veen & Sleegers, 2006).

We all view the world with particular biases and this is what makes the world an exciting place of diversity and opportunity. Yet, when we cannot use language to create a social reality that avoids the creation of oppression then a deeper issue exists. The current and commonly-used language in school environments is heteronormative (Stonefish and Lafreniere, 2015). Furthermore, heterosexism is institutionalized with marginalization occurring through the hidden curriculum that silently exists in the school and more explicitly through curriculum choices and discourses. The mere absence of negative attitudes towards anti-homophobic policy does not automatically create a positive culture, but rather, a culture of silence (Stonefish and Lafrieniere, 2015). In these silent, seemingly "don't ask don't tell" environments, queer professionals have simply developed the survival skills to exist and tolerate the heteronormative world that surrounds them, creating a sense of resiliency and furthering the legacy of being in a contradictory closet. Most research in education in the area of queer identity is on the student experience—however—the codification of teacher identity and marginalization of sexual minority teachers needs to be more thoroughly addressed. Many would think of this as an issue of the past since society now seems much more accepting of minorities in general. Yet, whether explicitly in the structure of schools or implicitly in the culture of the school, this negative impact on teachers not only has the potential to create an unsatisfactory work environment but also extend negative messages to nonconforming, marginalized students (Kahn and Gorski,

2016). Khan and Gorski (2016) expose a call to action for the recognition and dismantling of heteronormativity and cisnormativity and any attempts to marginalize teachers of any identity through the normalization of privileged identities and ways of being. They proactively highlight that it is not just about the marginalized and how they are treated but rather how the people doing the marginalizing are treated. It is time to take an inward look at our preconceived ideas and values and how they are institutionalized in our schools. The world is experiencing a global awakening and a culture of accountability needs to be undertaken by all on a personal, social, and procedural level.

In creating a culture of accountability, it is crucial to practice reflection and self-accountability when societal improvement is being considered and valued. Autoethnography and narrative studies encourage reflection and questioning power relations, detailing the often-troubling experience of queer teachers including Catherine Thompson-Lee's *Heteronormativity in a Rural School Community* (2017) in which she unearths the discriminatory experience many teachers are faced with when their sexual orientation is not hidden in their school environment. She postulates that autoethnography is often chosen by the voices of the marginalized who otherwise feel silenced by the dominant discourse. Though some theorists claim the impossibility of writing the self, as it only produces a temporary snapshot, a call for more qualitative research exploring the context of identity formation of queer peoples' needs to be heard (Thompson, 2017). The narratives of marginalized individuals need to be documented with variety in voice, place, and over periods of time for it to become common knowledge for all individuals involved. The critical sharing of marginalized narratives can showcase the importance of learning about the systemic and institutionalized impacts of heterosexism and the lingering effects that are still impacting our schools that need and deserve to be addressed. A major marginalized narrative that

needs to be shared more readily to show the unfair system that still exists in Canada is that of the queer teacher.

History of Queer Teacher Marginalization in Canada

Though the historical influence of legislative changes in Canada have made vast improvements over time for the lives of queer individuals, queer educators have had varied experiences in how the protection of sexuality and expression in the law transpires in their workplace. Until 1969, Canadian law enabled the punishment of non-heterosexual relations; it wasn't until 2005 that gay marriage was legalized and acceptance began to grow. Nevertheless, there remains a culture of homophobia that threatens people physically and psychologically in all spaces daily (Grace & Wells, 2006). Similarly, since 1995, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was protected through the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, yet, many publicly-funded schools in Canada still found ways to continue their discriminatory behavior toward queer employees (Rau, 2019). Research has shown that despite legal advances, Catholic schools in Canada often do not respect these laws and treat their non-heterosexual employees in inconsistent and unjust ways (Callaghan, 2007). Gender and sexual minority groups lose their job security when they enter the workplace of some religious schools and when it becomes known that they are not adhering to the school's discriminatory expectations that are met with a range of actions including firing and exclusion. Even within a country that has legalized same-sex marriage, queer educators quickly realize that acting on their sexuality may lead to exclusion from job opportunities, or at the very least, directly calling professionalism into question. Teachers have been fired for not adhering to the religious values of the institution, harassed about their hidden sexuality to the point of quitting, and forced to remain closeted and take drastic measures to hide that part of their life. One of the most troubling aspects of Catholic

school boards around Canada that still openly include discriminatory expectations and values within their school ethos and employee contracts is that they reportedly get upwards of 70% of their funding from public sources (McKinney, 2008). The question arises, should practicing the right to freedom of religion and association allow institutions to include discriminatory expectations and values that infringe upon other protected Canadian rights? Many may hold the view that these teachers should recognize that their values and the values of the school do not align and should aim to find a school that their personal and professional identity can thrive. However, given that many of these schools are publicly funded, and not privately through Catholic resources, then it seems natural to expect a publicly funded institution to apply and listen to provincial and federal laws and receive applicants from individuals that do not practice their religion. In Canada there is a denominational right for Catholic schools to exist, however, this should not be interpreted and applied as a superior right that can infringe and absolve the rights of others. Similarly, the religious freedom that all Canadians are guaranteed through Section 2 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* cannot act as a justification for impacting human rights when that freedom is applied. Hiding behind this protected right and citing religion as the reason that values and expectations discriminate on sexuality and gender expression is not acceptable. Queer teachers, teachers that are not adhering to pre-marital expectations, and teachers facing many other discriminatory ideals live in fear that their personal lives will be exposed and they will be fired or excluded from their community. There is a clause in the *Charter* that allows a limitation on rights and freedoms if they are suppressing the rights of others. The idea that institutions exist that are so clearly and openly discriminating against the queer population in Canada is inconceivable and unknown to many. It is unjust that any employee in any workplace is made to polarize their identity and forcefully create multiple

identities that fit professionally and personally. Especially in professions that require a personal, social, and emotional investment, like teaching, the impact of splitting your identity in fear of being excluded or discriminated against is a traumatic action that can negatively impact job performance and mental health. In a profession that in part seeks to aid young adults on their path to self-discovery and achieve a sense of authenticity and purpose it seems awfully contradictory that their employees would not be extended the same privilege. It would be mentally taxing to enter your place of employment each day in fear that someone else's rights will trump yours for that day; that a religious belief could be held as more important than you having a job as a queer person in Canada.

Queer Geography-Based Identity

In considering queer experience with a sense of accountability in a Canadian context the need to decolonize our society and perspectives is integral in understanding geographical implications of living in any area of Canada. Cindy Holmes describes decolonization as "actively challenging or disrupting systems of knowledge that do not fully account for the lives of Indigenous people, queer and trans people, and many others whose lives are erased through epistemic and material violence" (2015, p. 159). Queer theory is amongst the disciplines interested in the concept of decolonization in recent years with a particular focus on gender and sexuality. There is a relationship between colonialism and binary thinking that our non-secular education system once embedded in society. Identity formation undoubtedly happens as a process for students from as young as 4 years old as they enter school for the first time and start to learn systemically from their school and teachers while leaning on their previously-held family-based knowledge. Before denominational schools were created, our values and binary thinking stemmed from the influence of Christianity and the role it was given in creating a school's ethos, beliefs, and rules

surrounding gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, there still exist religious schools in Canada that often receive government funding such as Catholic Schools in British Columbia and Alberta that infringe upon the rights of Canadians. We must critique the "politics of inclusion" that exists in Canada that leads to ignoring institutionalized, hierarchical power relationships that stem from "White, colonial, gender, and sexual norms" (Holmes, 2015, p. 155). Until the White-settler narrative and its influence on society is considered abnormal, many norms will remain unchallenged. The influence that Christianity has had on the culture of Canada is deep and widespread. For Indigenous people, it worked against fluidity in their beliefs on being Two Spirit, forcing a binary for gender and sexuality. This comes as no surprise given that the purpose of colonization was to rid Canada of the people who are native to it and discredit their experiences as valid sources of knowledge. The idea that geographical space deeply influences experience is often brushed over with less severity than it deserves. Decolonization pushes to recognize the disconnection that our Canadian society has from the ongoing colonialism in our lands and communities in which we live (Holmes, 2015). Schools that still have Christian affiliation, still named after religious figures, still modeling their ethos after religious morals and text, are leading to a rigidity of accepted gender and sexuality expression. Students and teachers alike are having their rights infringed upon over the freedom of association and religion aspect of our rights as Canadians. Due to the protections of minority-religions and resting educational decisions with the provinces, denominational schools received protection in the Charter and are publicly funded. Newfoundland and Labrador (in 1987) and Quebec (in 1997) both moved toward a public school system that erased denominationally based schools. Apart from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, all denominational schools are independently and privately run and funded. A major issue with protected, Catholic separate schools is the legal protection of the

inclusion of prayer, religious-based curriculum and services, symbols, and the mistreatment of teachers and the expectations for their public and private lives. Catholic teachers and students have attempted to employ their Charter rights and challenge the denominational restrictions on their freedom of belief, thought, expression, and assembly, among others. Yet, the Catholic faith and decisions stemming from the Vatican give the school boards the rights of dismissal of their employees and students for gender and sexuality expression that public schools have moved beyond. The formal Catholic Church's perspective greatly influences the decisions of Catholic School Boards and gives them a different sense of authority to make decisions that disregard their employees and students' right to express themselves and explore their true identity in both their public and private lives. The loss of Constitutional protection in Newfoundland and Labrador has led to heavier scrutiny over the protection that still exists in Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan from the separate Catholic school system that exists. This one aspect of a Canadian society reveals a deep need for challenging and a queering of the traditional heteronormative narrative that still shapes our society. The geographical difference and implication of provincial decisions surrounding the application of the Charter greatly influences the ability to openly develop a queer identity without fear of expulsion from a school or loss of employment. In areas that are still upholding the original protection of denominational schools, the province is ultimately supporting colonization and the binary thinking that has followed since. There is a great need to recognize that anti-oppression needs to be adopted and implemented; queering the world and engaging with how our institutions and structures came to be as Canadians through colonization and the entrenchment of Christianity needs to be more readily addressed. Rather, it becomes yet another taboo topic that is inconsistently recognized

and understood. It becomes another implicit part of society and the educational world that leads many to internalize beliefs and emotions.

Microaggressions

It is widely accepted that political correctness has increased and made discriminatory acts more "subtle and covert" making it difficult to understand if someone is motivated by discrimination in their usage of language or actions (Nadal, 2013, p. 40). Although Microaggression Theory was first applied to race, it has now been extended to other minorities' experiences, in particular, women and queer individuals (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). Microaggressions are often born of systemic social justice issues and are growing in recognition and credit with a focus now being given to the negative impact of subtle incidents of prejudice, a massive factor in the daily lives of many minority individuals, including queer people struggling with a heteronormative world (Sue, 2007). Microaggressions have been classified into three main categories: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are the most visible of the three and have been described as "explicit [...] derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminator actions" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). Microassaults can be found in many places and spaces but especially in the existence of Canadian denominational schools and the treatment of employees' sexuality and the consequential actions that follow if it is found out that a teacher is queer or not adhering to other Catholic values and ways of life. The avoidant behavior that can follow from a community permeates public and private life and can lead to mental health issues from the experience of isolation and rejection whereas actually being fired from your job for being queer could easily be interpreted as a purposeful discriminatory action. Secondly, microinsults are less visible and have more subtlety in that they are

"communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's identity or heritage" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). Many queer individuals receive microinsults as a result of their appearance, tone of voice, how they like to dress, and the reaction they receive when being seen with their partner in a professional setting. Many communications occur without perpetrators realizing that are rude and insensitive to queer individuals in their workplace. These communications may not always be directed at that queer person but rather a comment on being queer in society, yet, they still have serious implications for the comfort and sense of belonging for queer individuals and their safety. Lastly, microinvalidations are the least obvious and are described as communication disregarding the victim's thoughts and feelings, negating their experiences (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). These are perhaps the most common and equally the most difficult to identify from an outside perspective. The belief in the power of narrative fragments and sharing personal experiences fully supports all attempts to make microaggressions and their impacts legitimate. Without the sharing of a personal experience, or the support and safety to express one's opinion, a perpetrator may never know that they disregarded the victim's sense of self. This will be seen in the vignettes featured below that had long-lasting impacts on victims' decisions in regards to their appearance, actions, and how they express their beliefs. Without the sharing of experiences in a constructive manner that mediates trauma for all, microinvalidations and microaggressions are often not identified, and consequently, never worked through.

Sue (2010) contends that queer individuals face seven (equally harmful) sexuality microaggressions: Oversexualization, Homophobia, Heterosexist Language/Terminology, Sinfulness, Assumption of Abnormality, Denial of Individual Heterosexism, and Endorsement of Heteronormative Culture/Behaviors. Sue puts emphasis on one major difference for those dealing with microaggressions in relation to sexuality in that they are invisible in nature; usually

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one cannot physically identify sexuality and its nature. As highlighted by many other theorists, combating microaggressions is a daily "coming out" as the choice to fight against that microaggression is in extension a choice to disclose one's sexuality or not, making it unique to experiences of other minorities who do not experience the same masking of identity on a surface level and the additional negative impact of the microaggression itself. Extending from Sue et al., Nadal, Issa, Leon, Meterko, Wideman, & Wong (2011) specifically examined how LGB individuals deal with sexuality microaggressions. Through their research and the reactions of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, they asserted that three categories exist: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. Emotional reactions can include anger, betrayal, hopelessness, exhaustion, and a range of impacts depending upon the relationship with the perpetrator. Constantly experiencing microaggressions and feeling isolated can lead individuals to feel misunderstood and cognitively start to seek self-protection and preservation or develop resiliency. Behaviorally, victims of microaggressions are constantly deciding whether to confront their perpetrators or passively retreat and attempt to cope in the face of trauma (Nadal, 2013). All community members of educational environments need to be aware of the impact of oppression and heteronormativity to start holding themselves and those around them accountable. The victims of microaggressions can no longer accept that perpetrators are often unaware of the impact of their actions; intent and outcome must be reflected on, understood, and addressed for anti-oppression and diversity, equity, and inclusion to authentically exist in the spaces and places of schools.

Methods

Qualitative Research

  In pursuing a research topic that is personal and reflective, it became clear that qualitative research was the appropriate methodological choice. Through qualitative methodology, the researcher can endeavor to explore behaviors, perspectives, feelings, and experiences, along with the complexity of a situation through a holistic framework (Holloway and Gavin, 2002). Furthermore, descriptive research enables the discovery of new meaning while describing what currently exists and potentially verifying the extent to which something occurs (Holloway and Gavin, 2002). With the importance of intentionally including the lived experiences of the researcher as the main points of analysis, having narrative elements to this qualitative research became integral. Creswell (2012) highlights three factors that Cortazzi (1993) suggest influenced the development of narrative research: an increased emphasis on teacher reflection, teacher knowledge, and how educators empower the voices of teachers to tell their stories (p. 505). This is integral to the research I will conduct as its goal is to illuminate the institutionalized silencing of non-heterosexual voices in education through personal reflection and knowledge. The main source of inspiration for this thesis is derived from reflecting on past experiences that influenced my identity as a teacher in the beginning stages of my career. Similarly, the knowledge that I currently hold is changing and influenced daily by the many experiences that I share with my students and colleagues which are constantly evolving. The emphasis on reflexivity and the need to shift views on acceptable sites of knowledge in education pushed me to search for an area of qualitative research that valued the power and potential of language and embraced the value and uniqueness of individual, lived experiences.

In reviewing the many areas of qualitative research, it was clear to see that many methodologies would fit the topic of identity formation for teachers and each brought its own advantage and value. A major consideration while exploring options was to consider, "how much emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researcher's self and interaction with others, traditional analysis [...] as well as on power relationships" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 24). Many methods such as ethnography, narrative ethnography, reflexive interviews, layered accounts, and many more, work synonymously with sensitive topics and emotionally-charged research, where, arguably, the emotion is the site of knowledge discovery. Firstly, ethnography was considered as it includes the opportunity to observe and create the narratives and lived experiences of teachers. With methods like narrative ethnography there is also the opportunity to combine and layer the personal experiences of others with the experiences of the researcher. However, given the timeline of conducting research and the importance of it including queer issues, the challenge of observing a teachers' identity formation in various educational places and spaces seemed both unrealistic and contradictory. This thesis pushes for educators and readers to accept that each moment, no matter how small, can contain the most complex and integral meaning; teacher identity is constantly formed both inside and outside the walls of the classroom and school. This presents problems for observation and would change the ethos and purpose of this thesis. Identifying these limitations, the next qualitative method that was considered was surveying. There have been Canadian studies that survey school environments to learn about the climate and how queer individuals feel in terms of safety, acceptance, and other factors. Adding to this field of research with surveying techniques that highlight the experiences of queer educators could be very power and impactful. However, the major limitation of this methodology would be taking steps away from including the subjective and personal views of

the researcher as the research participant while also removing reflective insights that this thesis aims to include. From highlighting these limitations, interviewing seemed to solve the problems previously identified. Interviews could be conducted to learn of the experiences of queer teachers, both in their university training and first years of teaching, to generate multiple narratives that showcase how identity formation is (or is not) impacted. This would support the philosophy of expanding the types of knowledge sources that are given importance and also seek to extract reflective memories and experiences from the research participants. Reflexive interviewing is a methodology selected for researchers that still want to offer their insights and voice but the focus is still on the participants' experience and story. In considering this approach a main limitation still existed that the researcher was not the focus of the research, using their own lived experiences as important pieces of knowledge to be analyzed and shared. The triangulation and saturation from interviewing multiple participants and comparing their experiences initially seemed like a major strength of this methodology, however, upon reflection, as a participant myself, I realized that my experiences triangulated themselves geographically. The lived experiences I would eventually include in the vignettes created were from various rural and urban parts of Canada and England. This provided me with a strong sense of triangulation and data saturation that I was comfortable moving forward with to represent my specific lived experiences in colonized spaces. It became glaringly obvious that the goal of this thesis was to understand an individual experience that embodied queer identity formation, zooming in on my particular experiences and transformation. Trusting my personal experiences as important sites of knowledge was a methodological and philosophical transformation from my previous studies and work. Critical autoethnography would provide me with the opportunity to authentically

explore and attempt to understand my individual experience and its significance in education (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

Critical Autoethnography

Critical autoethnography becomes both the method and phenomena of my study to position my lived experiences at the center of my research and to fully immerse myself into the inquiry process. The act of writing personal stories to be included in a critical autoethnography can act as a form of therapy for the author as they attempt to make sense of the world around them and how it is connected to their experiences. An important part of this inquiry process is to personally learn why queer identity issues for teachers have not been more readily explored and expressed on a personal level in academia. Narrative inquiry can and should aid in revealing valuable information that has been silenced and held by individuals who are victims of microaggressions and othering (Pinnegar & Danes, 2007). Individual experiences need to act as new sites of knowledge and be valued as intimate moments to better understand queer identity and queer teachers' experiences before improvements can be made. There is a need to move beyond just recognizing that queer teachers exist in schools and actively give space for their voices and experiences to be shared to result in an elevated understanding of mistreatment, discrimination, and systemic issues that continue to impact society. Developmental psychologists have used narratives to decipher individual experiences, particularly life transitions, and my research is centered on the life transition that all teachers experience, from pre-service to service, within the context of queer individuals and the development of a genuine identity (Lieblich et al., 1998). This methodology is more than just a free-form, descriptive take on the reflection of an experience, it is the amalgamation of experience, storytelling, description, and environment (Lieblich et al., 1998). Clandinin & Connely (2000) describe critical autoethnography as

"characteristically begin[ning] with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*" (p. 40). A major interplay in my own research puzzle occurs between microaggressions and narrative fragments. The very nature of microaggressive incidents requires the victim to share their experience and for everyone else to value the level of subjectivity involved in truly understanding and learning from a microaggression victim. The initiator of this research was personal experience and marginalization in society; the aim is to create "insightful accounts of processes which go beyond the particular story" of queer teachers and their identity (Pring, 1999, p. 6). This aim results in selecting methods that are open-ended in nature and more free-flowing than some research processes may traditionally be. Extending on the usage of personal writing in the methods of this research, Richardson (2000) shifted the interpretation of writing in asserting that "writing is also a way of 'knowing'— a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 923). In this research, reflective writing will be a medium to evoke connection, analysis, critique, suggestions for the future, and self-discovery. Qualitative research, especially writing, must be a creative process that is dynamic and allows for deep analysis into our world. Richardson (2000) says, "its meaning is in the reading"; qualitative research must be written in an evocative manner to instill interest and emotion in the reader to lead to real change (p. 924). A crucial element of selecting narrative inquiry to dive into the experiences of queer teachers was to let the narratives "unravel as life does" and not attempt to fit them neatly into a preconceived category of results or expectations (Gabriel, 2003, p. 181). Coined by Hayano (1979) in reference to anthropological studies by individuals of their own cultures, autoethnography has since adopted various methodological meanings and definitions. For my purposes Ellis and Bochner's definition applies:

> [An] autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of

consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations (2000, p.739).

I have always viewed the personal connection I have to the research topic as a valuable tool and advantage in navigating through the important issues related to my research questions. As Ellis and Bochner describe, exposing a vulnerable self is identified in this thesis as a personal strength and goal. Of course, this leads to some limitations as the findings are not particularly generalizable but rather deeply personal, individual experiences uniquely dictated by environment and geography. Even the conventions and style of writing become unique and rich with colloquialism and emotional expression from the writer. (Gergen and Gergen, 2002).

In selecting autoethnography, I am enhancing my research as I can include my own experiences and interpretations of experiences; I can look at my own experiences through the same lens that I would interpret the experiences of research participants. As Behar (1997) so beautifully writes, autoethnography allows the researcher to "map an intermediate space we can't quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life" (p. 174). This is the major value and attraction to both qualitative and autoethnographic research as it models how to step beyond rigid boundaries and encourages participants to purposefully step into the unknown and 'borderland' to genuinely consider themselves as an integral site of knowledge.

Similarly, narrative frameworks in psychology also support a critical revisiting of disrupted narratives that have negatively impacted the development of identity and need reconstruction to allow for a healthier coherence. Narrative therapy also rests on people as experts of their own experiences and being in the powerful position of interpreting and

reevaluating their own conflicts (Wallis, Burns, & Capdevila, 2010). Narrative therapy promotes externalizing problems so we avoid the self-destructive internalization that is so common and subconsciously exists, further disrupting identity formation and preventing a healthy sense of self (White, 2007). When one undertakes the complex task of writing the self, it is impossible not to include others. As much as people like to believe it, we do not exist independently as isolated islands. Rather, we are the products of our interactions with others and our environments (Burr, 1995; Shweder, 1990). In recognising that personal experiences are valuable sites of knowledge I start to create a new academic and personal voice that recognizes the importance of using my lived experiences as moments to be reconsidered, analyzed, and hopefully reconstruct a new and more complete version of my identity. Narrative therapy exists within the post-structural paradigm and supports the post-structuralist belief that knowledge is developed through personal experiences.

Autoethnographic Voice

The major aim of this research is to create a critical but evocative voice that helps readers empathize, empower their own self-discovery, and identify previously unknown problems (Friedan, 1964). By creating a voice that is critical and powered by emotion I hope to highlight other problems that may exist in relation to oppression and power in society that have been cloaked in secrecy like many queer issues have. However, **I** do not want to write as a cynical researcher, one that is an "omniscient narrator claiming universal [...] knowledge" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). Critical autoethnography was selected to push the binary of researcher and research participant, to keep my personal, subjective voice as close to the heart of the thesis as possible. I aim to uphold a healthy sense of skepticism that allows me to think critically while investigating and questioning the world around me and the power of my lived experiences. I

want to fully embrace both my researcher and teacher identity and add my perspective to the current state of educational environments instead of attempting to objectively exist as a removed researcher looking from the outside in. The voice presented in the vignettes and the motivation behind this research is not in the spirit of pessimism, or furthering a divide through an us vs. them mentality that cynically expects the worst out of human behavior. Rather, it hopes to be evocative and critical, not cynical and pessimistic, and hopefully lead to optimistic and realistic suggestions for future research and ideas that can be applied in improving educational places and spaces for all members of a community. Creswell (2012) describes a new "critical" approach to ethnography: "Critical ethnographies are a type of ethnographic research in which the author is interested in advocating for the emancipation of groups of marginalization in our society" (p. 467). Critical researchers are often politically minded and seek advocacy against "inequality and domination" which is exactly what matches the incentive of my research (Creswell, 2012, p. 467). Through personal reflection on my experiences during my Bachelor of Education and the first few years of teaching, I hope to find behaviors, beliefs, and language to act as the base of my research methods process. A call to action for the injustice of queer teachers and the lack of freedom that I believe exists in the formation of identity is needed and supported by this thesis. In justifying the use of autoethnography, John Fiske said, "any personal negotiation of our immediate social relations is a necessary part of our larger politics—the micro-political is where the macro-politics of the social structure are made concrete in the practices of everyday life" (97). The healthy skepticism that I aim to take through being critical of the world around me is in the hopes of showcasing how valuable and important subjective moments and personal experiences can be in academia. Too often we voluntarily diminish our own experiences and feel self-indulgent in reflecting on our daily experiences and conflicts. In the smallest actions, in the

micro-political moments, is really where we implement our learned behaviors and beliefs about how the world should work and how we should be treated. It is in the variety of moments we let go in the staff room, hallways, and in informal conversations with colleagues riddled with microaggressions and heterosexist remarks in which we often select silence instead of dialogue or confrontation. With this ethos, themes will hopefully emerge from this critical autoethnography that create questions for other aspects of research that will identify "changes that need to occur, advocate for specific changes, and advance a plan for change" (Creswell, 2012, p. 479).

Furthermore, the use of a critical version of autoethnography will allow me, as the researcher and subject, to peer through a unique window to the world, to the critical issue of identity formation, which can only be experienced as a researcher-participant. The level of reflexivity that the autoethnographer must engage in makes this style of research unique and steps away from other methodologies and the objectivity that is attached to them. There is less neutrality in the researcher as all personal experiences are reflected upon and not separated from the culture or society that they take place in. In reflecting on personal experiences, the autoethnographer sets an example of how to learn from one's experiences, not in an attempt to extrapolate or generalize findings, but to offer a unique voice in the sea of dominant narratives that already exist, to offer a detailed and qualified 'weight'. This research is being conducted in an attempt to further right the wrongs of history and maximize the volume of silenced narratives. The voices of queer individuals have been systematically silenced throughout history, and in the realm of education, heteronormativity is still blaring loud and steady. Critical autoethnography will give space for my personal experiences to be considered as a site of knowledge and further show improvements that need to be made for the educational environments to be inclusive and

open for all. By allowing zoomed-in moments to guide the analysis of this research the method inherently places importance not on generalizability but for profound and evocative experiences to be valued and for the reader to learn from. It is my hope, as an inspired researcher and member of the queer community, that I can empower the silenced and alienated voices of queer teachers to bravely step onto new platforms and express their experiences, concerns, and suggestions for the future.

Criticism & Ethical Considerations

Adopting a post-structuralist viewpoint of identity, being permanently in flux and shifting with time, presents a complication for autoethnography. In a sense, it is impossible to truly write the self; the researcher is ultimately only providing a temporary snapshot, creating a paradox of the subject (Butler, 1993). Yet, writing the self still holds great importance. Language is power— it constructs social identity and meaning rather than just passively reflecting it. It is important to consider relational ethics and to maintain one's social network of friends and family, co-workers and students, administrators and boards of governors, and the institution itself after the research is complete. Many critics note the ease of tracing individuals and places from autoethnographic accounts even when they are protected through pseudonyms or removing characteristics such as gender, race, name, appearance, and other traceable descriptions. Critics note the importance of being able to live in the world of relationships that exist for the researcher and that they are included by relation through their narratives. Some researchers may feel moved to show their work to those related to the narratives included if the content is of a particular sensitive manner to get their feedback and input on its inclusion. Many theorists have suggested caution when including others, encouraging sensitivity, the usage of pseudonyms, and a sense of anonymity of place (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, 2007). The vignettes featured in this thesis are based upon personal

experiences and the experiences I have witnessed of other teachers. In an act of self-protection and the protection of other unknowing and potentially unwilling research participants, I have used pseudonyms and omitted names for the people included as it does not impact the meaning or the evocative nature of the narratives. I have also chosen to remove the names of schools and specific locations and identify the country and the region for some context to help with the determinant of more urban vs. rural experiences. The retelling of these experiences is an attempt to become an enlightened witness that is empathetic, critical and caring; one who sees self-inquiry and reflection as an integral and ongoing process (Harro as cited in *Readings for Social Justice,* 2008). The narrative voice created through the vignettes is a combination of multiple perspectives and experiences to move toward representing the voice of an enlightened witness: a process that is never-ending.

Analysis

The Making of a Diamond

2014

"I know many of you are nervous as you leave our classroom, begin an internship, and eventually teach in one of your own! But I assure you, you have nothing to worry about. It will be an enriching and eye-opening experience for all of you. Are there any final questions about your internships before we end class?"

Like puppets on strings, hands rapidly raised in every direction. Looks of concern and wonder smeared across his classmates faces.

"How can you judge what is appropriate and inappropriate to wear at school?"
"Does the age you teach really influence that?"

The answers about clothing seemed to be common-sensical in nature but they were only postulating the extremes. Yet, entering schools that were public and without a uniform, students still used clothing as a form of self-expression. Did teachers? Or were most still crippled by the traditional teacher archetype, by the overshadowing weight of normalcy?

The professor flippantly told stories of having to send student-teachers home to change when he was a principal as they donned t-shirts branded with logos for alcoholic drinks or their skirts or dresses were too revealing. Laughter echoed through the room—but he refrained—

uncomfortable with the materialistic beating individuality and self-expression were taking in this naive conversation.

The remnants of laughter that danced in the air instantly froze and evaporated: *"What about tattoos? It still seems taboo to freely expose them"* a confident student asked with two sleeves of colorful and artistic images masterfully painted down her arms.

His professor paused, carefully calculating the response that was about to come. It was clearly not as straightforward as he felt the clothing question was.

"That is a personal decision. One that teachers make for different reasons and have different actions based upon the climate that they are in."

He nervously readjusted himself in his seat, his tattoos burning from his arms, screaming to be heard like a hidden secret. Thoughts of concealing his tattoos when he coached, when he was not as confident in his own self, consumed his mind. He envisioned himself in front of middle and high school students, teaching from the whiteboard, arms extended, gesticulating, writing on the board. As his imagination carefully crafted his arms in mid-air, his forearms—usually tattooed— now bare.

His decision. His camouflage.

"What about piercings? Should I consider removing my nose ring? Or lip ring?" a flustered classmate added.

Again this question was answered with a politically correct version of our professors saying: "Yes."

With a nervous cough to clear his throat he said, "Look. When I was a principal I would expect teachers to be role models for students and a part of that might be deciding to remove their piercings and hide their tattoos. However, it all depends upon where you are teaching and how comfortable you are in that environment"

And with this the class offered him mixed reactions. Those with their hair dyed 'unnatural' colors, or with piercings and tattoos, discussed why they would be *uncomfortable* hiding a part of themselves.

As he sat there listening, he thought about how trivial it was to discuss the physical body. How backward it was to consider tattoos and piercings inappropriate and to not be given the same status as role model based upon a materialistic choice. He sat there naive and unaware of how close this would hit his future home, but aware that deep within, a seed was planted. A piercing discomfort with not only himself but the world around him.

As he reached for the door handle of that Junior High School the cold steel sent a shock through his body—a caution. Merely one step inside and already the warmth from the stage lights caused his brow to sweat.

He had never felt so observed, so onstage, so watched. It was as if his every move, every wave of his hair, and every pitch and tone in his voice, every molecule of his being, was being scrutinized—because it was.

Every teacher was as you expected them to be. Clearly masculine or feminine. Heterosexual.

And he was not about to offer them something new, something that they needed to understand was normal and accepted. Not openly, anyway.

Instead, he opted to hide behind his carefully crafted identity through sports and coaching. With no noise he screamed to the world that the only normal way to be was heterosexual and traditionally in your societally-constructed gender role.

"You dress so nice for a guy. Are you a model?" "Where do you shop? It can't be around here?" students and teachers asked alike and suddenly he could feel every movement of his skin below the intruding clothing.

And just as his professor predicted, he hid his tattoos, he hid the real version of himself, dressed more conservatively, and certainly hid his sexuality. He willingly stepped underneath a cloak of invisibility—forgetting how to find light to be seen amongst the darkness.

Self-Preservation and Protection

It is not an uncommon element of any workplace (or aspect of life) that individuals seek approval. Human beings are in a constant state of comparison to achieve self-validation, but in the workplace, they naturally look to their superiors for that validation in their attempts to impress in various contexts. This behavior encourages societal norms to be firmly established and grow roots in the expectations of what is deemed worthy and what everyone should be striving toward. Yet, this is paradoxical in nature and completely ignores the natural and evolving individuality of the human race that exists; this is an idea based upon power and initiates the dissolution of a genuine sense of self in public, creating an identity that is calculated and prescribed by the reassurances and validation of norms. Norms are created to enable human beings to interpret one another concretely. Yet, inherently normalizing aspects of identity establishes uneven social experiences and disrupts individual safety and security in identity formation (Leonardi and Saenz, 2014).

Gender is a major norm in society and within social practices. Butler (2004) contends that "norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce" (p. 42). It proves difficult to discuss being separate from and outside of the norms of gender without understanding and using the norms themselves. One must still have a relationship to society's version of a "normal" man and woman, of what masculinity and femininity stereotypically represent (Butler, 2004). Teachers are particularly challenged with the balancing act of tensions within their careers and are usually left without a choice but to use identity to physically justify their existence to others (Olsen, 2008; MacLure, 1993).

In his theory surrounding "impression management," Erving Goffman explains that individuals make constant adjustments to their identity, both physically and psychologically, to impress and match a variety of situations (1959). Clothing, posture, facial expressions, voice, hair color, and unfortunately the list can go on to include many identifiable aspects of identity. Goffman's ideas surrounding impressions can be applied from the moment student-teachers enter the classroom on their internships or practicums and have to think about themselves being on stage, as described in the narrative "Puppet Strings" above: "the warmth from the stage lights caused his brow to sweat." Depending upon the climate they are entering and the characteristics of the places and spaces included, student-teachers start their careers wondering about how they should safely present themselves. The varied experience of teachers in the workplace suggests that our identity and being valued is contextual; happiness and success in the workplace are largely due to social inclusion and the ability to be understood (Butler, 2004.) In the *History of Sexuality* Foucault declared that,

> the self is not something that has to be discovered or deciphered as a very obscure part of ourselves. The self has, on the contrary, not to be discovered but to be constituted through the force of truth (168).

This truth that Foucault calls on us to constitute involves a certain level of normativity that guides us in our identity formation and discovering our true selves. Norms in society give us directions for our actions and ways to act and speak to one another. Yet, it is the sway over particular aspects of life that the process of normalization holds that creates tension. Though we must admit that we cannot do completely without norms, we do not need to accept them as they are or as fixed entities of society (Butler, 2004). Whether realized overtly or as an indirect outcome, impression management still extends to students. As students are the individuals that teachers interact with the most, student-teacher relationships are arguably the most valuable and

integral to a teachers' feeling of success and pride. Steps that teachers take to prescribe themselves an identity that impresses on a professional level may leave them feeling inadequate on a personal level and as a role model for their students; consciously and subconsciously selecting inauthenticity. Butler (2004) also contends that gender is performative and "the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance" (p. 42). For some student-teachers, teaching is the first time they are experiencing the microcosm of being on a stage, of having all eyes on you—on *all* aspects of you. It may be the first time in their lives that they are realizing the impact that societal norms have had on their identity and personal experiences to date. The growing need to queer experiences and perspectives mentioned earlier is integral in breaking down norms surrounding gender and transforming expectations and impression management for all members of an educational community.

Life being described as a stage is a common and popular metaphor made infamous by William Shakespeare and used by many authors, including Walt Whitman, who described life and people as having the ability to create a verse in the powerful play that is life. Yet, what happens when the verse is already written for you in that play? Butler's (2004) beliefs on performativity and Goffman's theory easily extend to the traditional teacher archetype, described as acting, as wearing a costume and following the lines that are both written for and expected of you through dominant narratives and expectations. This conflict occurs for all teachers, but especially recently trained teachers, when they are meeting expectations of the job but are unorthodox in their appearance. As shown in "The Fading Shine of a Diamond" vignette, when one does not perfectly adhere to gender norms or is a part of a sexual minority, even something simple like a pair of dress pants can cause immense insecurity, reflection, and anxiety. Perhaps some teachers have an unbreakable spirit and march fiercely toward being a genuine model of

individuality and confidence in front of their students, but the identity of the teacher featured in the many vignettes in this thesis felt his 'shine' dim and fade until he was alienated from his real sense of self—invisible. Becoming aware of the script and the costumes that norms surrounding teacher dress encourage, does not make it disappear and lose impact; each performance will vary depending upon the director, the interpretation of the script, and the influence of the audience and stage. Constantly, teachers are forced to make decisions in favor of self-preservation and protection. One of the main decisions made is infamously described with the metaphor of a closet, being inside that closet and keeping society in the outside realm becomes a normalized construct that too many live by (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). As described by Adams (2008) the act of being in or out of the closet provides a concrete label and understanding for others:

> The hidden, inaccessible characteristics of same-sex attraction make some people uncomfortable: lacking definitive, permanent aural and visible characteristics, it must be pinned down and negotiated through discourse and action; I can say that I am queer today, straight tomorrow, and bisexual the next, and there will be no (visible) trace of my transition (p. 90).

This lack of visibility can make some uncomfortable as it is harder to step into that moment of fluidity without a label to better understand identity. Rhetoric and language both matter and are sources of power that influence connection and bonds. We must unlearn our constant desire to label and seek labels as a means of understanding the world around us. We have been miseducated and miseducate others on using labels to categorize and reduce for personal convenience.

Through interviews with preservice teachers at Memorial University, McLeod & Stevens (2010) found that student-teachers had strongly developed opinions on professional dress from the culmination of their experiences and felt a vast amount of pressure to fit in during their practicums. The educational places and spaces shaped by culture and the dynamics of a

workplace drastically range from one experience to the next—yet—a key idea that the researchers unearthed is the overarching concept that dressing like a teacher may be very important in *becoming* a teacher. In the metaphoric spirit of life being a stage, one cannot fully become the character without the costume. Though the lines can be memorized and delivered impeccably, without that final dressing room moment, without the physical costume, the actor will not fulfill their obligation and fully step into their role to engage the audience. All participants in the study voiced that "one function of dress was to communicate about self," some "resisting the notion of what is 'normal'" but believing that the option to be different should be supported and encouraged (McLeod & Stevens, 2010, p. 11). These interviews further strengthen the existence of Goffman's impression management theory and Butler's beliefs on the performativity of gender: receiving validation as a 'good' teacher is confused with conforming to a normative method of self-presentation and surrendering to one way of being deemed appropriate and professional. The irony involved in this situation is that when one receives that validation and complimentary comments on their physical dress, inherently they are receiving validation for what feels like the wrong reasons, and in a sense, a validation that their true self is not appropriate or welcomed. Psychologically, a narrative is created and internalized that leads to uncertainty and questioning the intent and outcome of personal experiences. As described in "Puppet Strings," pre-service teachers can display a sense of confidence and desire to disrupt oppression and systemic norms of gender expression, appearance, and sexuality, but, once they walk the halls of a school with other teachers and students, for some, that goal becomes distant and feels unachievable. Hiding tattoos, refraining from dying hair, removing piercings, wearing more conservative clothing: all reflect an act of self-protection. It is easier to play into the "don't ask, don't tell" culture and accept oppression and heteronormativity if one dresses in accordance

with masculine and feminine expectations. Though many may not realize it, or may not have attributed an emotional response caused by a gender norm to the act of enforcing a sense of normalcy to gender acts, this applies to not only all teachers but all people in the world. It is only recently that dialogue surrounding the socialization of gender has existed in the spaces and places of school. Still, many members of society remain uneducated, unaware, and unwilling to understand the difference between sex and gender and to acknowledge the assigning of gender that happens at birth in most societies. For most societies, the situation is oversimplified: if you are born male then you are male and should not exhibit characteristics and elements associated with being female. It can often lead to an uncomfortable exchange for cis-gender, heterosexual individuals who have never succinctly had to consider how their gender identity fits into the world around them, as it has never caused tension. However, perhaps the tension has always existed and like non-cisgender and non-heterosexual individuals it gets internalized, it gets placed on a shelf with the enforced gender norm often winning the battle for that day. Perhaps somewhere within everyone's psyche and subconscious there have been many moments of tension surrounding the various gender norms of society that they live in but their 'internalized shelf' never becomes full enough for it to topple; the individual never reaches a breaking point where they refuse the gender norm and actualize into the version of themselves that feels natural and normal for them. Gender, and the history of the roles it has enforced in any particular society, desperately need to be reconsidered for members of any educational community to improve. It is crucial for teachers, new and experienced, to consider how gender has evolved in their life and what aspects of gender were learned and forced in various phases of their lives. Many would probably realize that some of their behavior and characteristics have evolved in a certain way just because this is the way it has been—a dangerous philosophy of legacy thinking

that promotes stagnancy and does not lend itself to a flexible understanding of being human, and in extension, being a teacher. Butler (2004) believes that we need to be concerned with survival and creating a different world: "to create a world in which those who understand their gender and their desire to be non-normative can live and thrive not only without the threat of violence from the outside but without a pervasive sense of their own unreality" (p. 223). The creation of this kind of world cannot be considered without considering the words we speak and reaching an understanding with one another about our everyday use of language (Habermas, 1982). However, it is more than just the language that is used in the workplace to signify and recognize those that defy societal norms.

The normalcy associated with certain gender norms has created the space for microaggressive behavior. The vignette above shows the main character as experiencing a fractured identity in which he decides to hide important and expressive elements of his identity. Whether he realized it or not, this was possibly his first experience of a heteronormative microaggression as a teacher. Though he was receiving a compliment of sorts (you look good and dress nice) the undercurrent of the comment was a question of sexuality and gender expression. The main difference for sexual minorities experiencing microaggressions is that the nature of sexuality is less visible, fostering the ability for those who identify with a sexual minority to mask and disguise that discriminated against the aspect of their identity (Sue, 2010). However, clothing has long been used as a way to enforce gender norms and ridicule those who step outside of them—even slightly. The archetype of the too-masculine, spinster female who dresses in non-feminine attire and does not fit into the traditional womanly, dress-wearing ideal has been negatively reinforced over time. Similarly, the metropolitan clean-cut man whose appearance is likened to the 'he takes longer than a woman to get ready in the morning' joke;

pants too tight, colors too bright, hair too 'perfect,' results in immediate negativity and stigma. These stereotypes apply to heterosexual and queer individuals alike, but ultimately, start to hint at the sexuality of the person. These microaggressions can lead heterosexual individuals to express themselves less and step back in line when it comes to their gender identity. For a queer individual, it makes the pivotal moment of officially coming out of the closet anti-climactic as there still remain daily choices to potentially reveal one's sexuality through breaking gender norms associated with appearance.

Hennen (2008) refers to an "effeminacy effect" that involves placing the stigma of femininity on gay men. He describes effeminacy as "a historically varying concept deployed primarily as a means of stabilizing a given society's concept of masculinity and controlling the conduct of its men, based upon a repudiation of the feminine that recognizes it as a 'present absence'" (p. 48). This effect has historically shaped some of the rigid identities associated with gay men and reveals the complicated dynamics associated with masculinity, and in extension, with gender expression for all. This effect hints at a societal disappointment in same-sex desire and a failure in masculinity. With the weight of impression management, gender performativity, and the responsibilities of one's job, sexual minorities also decide whether or not they should come out daily in the various situations and environments they experience. This decision unfairly leads to many teachers experiencing a sense of alienation from their genuine self and their work self as they attempt to learn who their authentic self even is. Though it can be argued that this split is a natural part of teaching, when it happens at an extreme level, it can lead to many mental health implications: traumatic and depressive symptoms, suicide, suicidal ideation, lower self-esteem, lower levels of psychological well-being, anxiety and binge drinking, and emotional intensity (Nadal, 2012). Some of this mental turmoil is shown through the decision-making

process of purchasing a potentially "too flamboyant" pair of paints or appearing too feminine in the vignettes; being questioned about association with females as a child and a lack of relationships as a teenager. All of these microaggressive behaviors accumulate within the mind of the victim, constantly pushing them to either consider coming out in that environment or to continue being silent and invisible without confronting the microaggressive incidents. The other aspect of being a victim of microaggressions is that it is common for the perpetrators to be well-intentioned individuals who are not fully aware of the impact of their statements or behavior (Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993; DeVos & Banaji, 2005; Sue, 2010). Subtle, covert behaviors and interactions by well-intentioned and trusted colleagues who do not recognize their position in holding social power is also mentally harmful for the victim because they may not want to confront them and carry the burden of educating them on their behavior without leading to additional trauma and discomfort in the work environment (Lewis, 2009; Meyer, 2003; Sue, 2010). As experienced in the vignettes so far, the perpetrators were not insidious in their comments and were not seeking to harm the teacher; rather, they were ignorant of the social power that their language holds. Nevertheless, they have an impact. They encourage identity to fall into the expectations of gender norms and the rigid and fixed views of what a teacher should be. This undoubtedly impacts all members of that educational community. Representation for individuals of all ages is important but especially teenagers who are starting to take risks and explore their genuine sense of self. If students only have role models and teachers to observe that strictly adhere to gender norms and expect those around them to adhere to gender norms then their development may be tainted and permanently stunted. As Butler (2004) describes, "the thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity" (p. 232).

Educational places and spaces need to make fluidity of identity a necessity and need to be

working closely with their staff and marginalized members of the community to create a sense of

comfort and institutionalized protection for the authenticity of all versions of identities and

expression. Educational places and spaces need to intentionally create an environment where

everyone can know themselves to be possible, where everyone can become possible.

The Cuts of a Diamond

2015

With each step towards the dressing room weighted worries disappeared.

The fabric slid up his legs like a welcomed paint. Brushstrokes forming to his body as if created by an artist that had finally found them their home. A traditional white collared shirt to match. A combination that would make more of a stir—both within and around him—than he could ever predict.

He confidently walked out of the store with a receipt for the new work outfit and a receipt for his new identity: a teacher.

The sweat that formed on his neck that day was a combination of the welcomed sun and intruding anxiety. New country, new curriculum, new vernacular; first staff, first set of students, first version of himself as a teacher.

He strutted into that rural British academy feeling the closest to a genuine version of himself that he ever presented to anyone in the world. He was confident and eager. He found himself surrounded by an abundance of young teachers that were open and carefree.

"You are fabulous! I love your trousers" a friendly and genuine colleague remarked as they both walked into the Teacher Orientation session.

He smiled as he bashfully placed his hands into his pockets: "Thanks!"

There was no hidden meaning, no side smirk, no underlying intent to discover what lies beneath her comment on his appearance. It was a positive reaffirmation that he was exactly where he was meant to be in that moment.

"What are *those*?" a notoriously controversial and uncontrollable student yelled as he walked into the classroom. His legs in a squat position, sitting back as if lounging in a chair, arms suspended in the air for effect.

He now wished that the navy trousers with diamonds that once created electricity in his step would melt away into the floor, leaving behind no evidence of their complex existence.

"Sit down, please! Let's not start the day like this" he breathed deeply, summoning each ounce of patience and humility left inside his hollow core.

Miraculously, the student agreed to sit, but would not let the trousers go. He would not let what he deemed an effeminate decision by his male teacher just be. It made him uncomfortable and gave this comedian some rich material for his next roast.

As he ironically passed copies of "Caged Bird" by Maya Angelou to the table he carefully crafted a loud whisper: "He probably wears those gay trousers cruising for guys on the weekend."

Selectively deaf and mute. A common theme in his brief experience as an openly gay male: solitude and silence. He pretended not to hear even though the fire in his eyes was surely dimmed to smoking embers; he pretended not to hear though the redness in his face was a sign of shame, was stained for all to see. He pretended not to hear even though the eyes of other students caught his in…disgust? Embarrassment? Pity? Wonder.

As he read that poem to his class line by line, unbeknownst to them, he was both that cage and that bird. Though he felt like a "free bird [that] leaps on the back of the wind" [...] who "dips his wing in the orange sun" he did not "dare to claim the sky." Rather, he was also the "narrow cage" with "bars of rage" forcing the bird to stalk and be still.

He, of course, knew why that caged bird sang but failed to remember the melody or chorus for himself.

A colleague hustled into his classroom, exhaled forcefully, and asked: "Did you hear what has been happening to Dan?"

He shook his head, immediately concerned.

"Year 11 boys have been running by while he is teaching and just screaming: 'Grindr!' and 'Gay!'" she exclaimed in a moment of gossip and disapproval.

Dan was in his 40s, an experienced teacher and administrator, and being ridiculed for his sexuality.

Grindr is a social app that allows gay men to freely chat with people nearby.

He couldn't imagine students somehow seeing a teacher on Tindr (a normalized dating app amongst both heterosexual and queer individuals) and use it as a form of ridicule and method to disrupt a hierarchy of power.

As if removing an unwanted stain from clothing, he feverishly ripped his phone out of his pocket and scrubbed away the blemish of dating apps and triple-checked that the privacy settings on his social media were secure.

He couldn't handle a verbal drive-by shooting.

"You cannot scream *'faggot'* across the atrium and not expect there to be consequences" Dan screamed into the face of a defensive student.

"What does it even matter? I didn't mean anything by it and was speaking to my friend!" the student responded, gaining confidence as others stopped to notice the confrontation.

Dan walked away. The student followed and yelled at him like *he* was the offender, as if the student was the victim.

His body morphed and shrunk in that moment. His arms collapsing into clipped wings; feet into talons tied by fear and disbelief; the school, society, homophobia, everything that seemed easy and normal—the cage. But he did not sing, he did not stalk; motionless.

He never wanted that moment. He could never picture himself laying his sexuality out for all to see and confronting homophobia. He did not feel he would ever be supported in that moment and he never followed up to see how Dan was out of denial and fear of association.

Two fractured identities yearning to be whole.

2018

Rushing down the staircase of his urban, Western Canadian school with his colleague and friend, he was pleased to see a familiar face from another department.

"Good Morning!" Mr. Stone said with a smile too wide for a Monday.

"Happy Monday" he released with a sarcastic and playful roll of his eyes.

"Same to you! Wow. Look at those pants! They're so...*fun.*" Mr. Stone said with a little laugh that seemed to escape rather than willingly enter our conversation.

"Thanks. You could easily wear a pair as well!" he replied, genuinely.

Mr. Stone laughed before he said, "Oh, I could never. They make you look like you're on the cover of a magazine but on someone *else* they would look *crazy*!"

He reluctantly let a single laugh leave his mouth, menacingly echoing in the empty stairwell.

His colleague and friend allowed her eyes to sneakily meet his own; scanning his face for a reaction, for reassurance that his comments held the weight that she thought.

He sighed. "These pants have been causing drama for years now. I had no idea a few small diamonds would cause such a stir amongst so many different people. And to think that these are conservative for me. If I only dressed how I really wanted to I think the school would just fall down" he joked.

She laughed and said, "But, all gay people are just so *fun."*

Someone understood.

2019

"Amazing! This is really exciting now that we have laid it all out" he energetically said to his colleague and closest friend at school. "Grade 9 is going to be so enjoyable to teach."

"I love that we are starting with deconstructing perspective and really getting the students to figure out how they view the world and why" she replied, matching his energy.

"I know. It's ambitious. In one of my Education courses during my Master's degree we completed a critical autobiography reviewing how literacy developed in our lives. It was intense

to have such a deep look inward and dissect integral, personal moments. In a sense, they will be doing the same thing" he replied.

"Yes! It's very similar to the experience that Grade 12 students get on the Encounter retreat. So many emotional and personal experiences come up that surprise both the students and those around them" she added.

"I think it will be so important for us to model the product and especially the process of critically reflecting on our experiences and how they influence our perspective" he said, fully knowing where this would take him.

"Absolutely. I don't even know if I have considered how my perspective came to be. It'll be an interesting exercise" she agreed.

"I don't think I could be genuine in mine though. I still don't think I would be comfortable standing in front of my classes and talking about how one of the major influences on my perspective is sexuality and not being a part of the majority in relation to gender expectations" he admitted.

"Really? But it would be so powerful and important for them to hear." She replied.

"I know. I think it's integral that we keep diversifying the perspectives they experience. I guess I've just subtly and subconsciously learned over time that if it does not fit into the

heteronormative expectations then it should not be discussed in school. That's how it was when I was a student, listening to adults talk negatively about other teachers or witnessing how students talked about teachers that didn't perfectly fit into gender and sexuality expectations. I guess I am still carrying that. I guess I'm afraid" he sighed.

Breath in.

Afraid.

Breath out.

Still.

Place and Space

Whether welcomed or not, elements of society that marginalize while creating privilege and power need a place to live. As defined by Certeau, there is a sense of objectivity attached to a place and that objectivity often comes with rules attached to location. Place is attached to a sense of pre-planning and intentionality based upon pre-written rules. For a school, these rules are often associated with a location and situated within the society that the educational place exists in. These places are only extended to certain marginalized groups when the majority or when the administrative body invites, permits, or includes a particular group in the physical space, policy, law, or event. In a Canadian context this is represented through colonization and the deep impact it still has to date. The act of colonizing privileged Christian beliefs and is still impacting the inner workings of society to date. Though educational places are attempting to grow in diversity and inclusion, anti-oppression education is still not widespread and does not encourage community members in all spaces associated with schools to question the world around them and critique the forms of oppression that exist.

In England, the educational places I taught in lacked diversity in gender and sexuality expression, and the demographic was of a middle to lower socioeconomic status. The British educational system prioritized standardization, the accountability of teachers based upon observation and meeting standards, and evidence-based learning that objectively showcased student growth and level. The foci of these systems valued replicability and this sentiment extended to identity. In England it had only been legal to discuss being gay in an academic setting for twelve years, and when I moved there, revealing aspects of a personal life that went against heteronormative norms was still largely taboo. The school as a place reflected the values of rural England and the community itself was mainly lower class and Caucasian. Conversations

surrounding diversity and inclusion were limited; conversations about anti-oppression were non-existent. In England, school as a place was not viewed as an environment to discuss sexuality or gender expression as it was still being treated as a personal issue of morality and ethics. Heterosexism deeply impacted the behavior of students and teachers alike and promoted a culture of silence and forced invisibility for any members of the educational community that did not adhere to gender and sexuality norms. There was no discussion around inclusive places within or associated with the school, the schools' stance on gender expression or sexuality of staff and students, inclusive bathrooms, change rooms, or really any acknowledgment that there are forms of identity that fall outside of the norm. As a new teacher this led to discomfort, silence, and in many ways, accepted invisibility for who I really was. In a profession that lends itself to personalization and acting as a role model for younger people, it was debilitating and toxically consumed energy for the wrong reasons, creating a constant struggle for authenticity.

In contrast, my experiences in Canadian schools were more flexible. In each Canadian school I worked in there were objective places for queer teachers and students through Gay-Straight-Alliances, more emphasis on equitable policy, and an approach to teaching and learning that was not so heavily influenced by standardization and replicability, creating more opportunity for a flexible curriculum and the inclusion of anti-oppression and diversity, equity, and inclusion education by individual teachers. Schools had professional development opportunities, sometimes held events that paid homage to queer issues, had anti-bullying policies for students, and had counseling services onsite. Yet, these were all student-based services. Though the rural Eastern Canadian schools I trained and worked in still acted as places that reflected the non-diverse societies they existed in, still, there was more of an openness to gender expression and sexuality. However, there was stigma placed on what you participated in and sponsored as a

teacher and it was assumed that queer teachers would be the ones involved with Gay-Straight-Alliances and to tackle issues of sexuality that were present in the school. But these places were not carved out for teachers like they were students. Still, in the Canadian schools I worked in there was hardly any mention of supports and the existence of queer places for staff members. Though there was policy and written protection for discrimination against sexuality it still seemed more of a taboo subject within the walls of the school.

Furthermore, in England, there were no safe spaces intentionally created for queer students or teachers and hardly any mention of the existence of a queer community associated with the school. There certainly were no supports put in place to make potential queer staff feel supported and empowered or have a connection with the queer community in the area. It was very much a 'don't ask don't tell' culture that seemed to leave all community members in the dark. This clearly reflected the community in rural England that had the threat of homophobia and sexism hanging over the undercurrents of the actions and beliefs of the demographic. My experience in Canadian schools differed; aside from the very identifiable and concrete places, there exist unlimited educational spaces. This thesis is a culmination of data and learning from educational spaces. Spaces that taught me as a cisgender man that how I acted made me effeminate and inferior. Spaces that taught me that being gay was not something to be proud of or to share in a formal setting; queerness was unprofessional. Educational spaces exist in all aspects of society and as human beings who are ever-changing we often do not get to decide when we learn from an educational space or from one being taken away from us. Students learn from both subtle and overt rhetoric and actions surrounding gender and sexuality: at school with peers, through all media, through conversations with their friends, family, mentors—we are constantly in an educational space. There is still a need for these fluid educational spaces to be

more formally recognized so they become educational places and more intentionally inclusive. A real educational place has room for all educational spaces because its boundaries and restrictions are emancipated from oppressive societal norms and expectations as it starts to embody real inclusion. These educational spaces include online realms, formal and informal conversations, and reflection. These spaces are all-encompassing and include any areas, philosophical and physical, that teachers enter into and that influence their identity. In many ways, this thesis acts as a step toward broadening educational places and spaces. Unspoken narratives and the sharing of stories can help redefine experiences and flexibility in school and educational places and spaces that could benefit from a redefinition of binaries, beliefs, structures, and procedures (Certeau, 1984; Morris, 1998).

Historically, gender role expectations were birthed from the promotion of standardization in school environments: teaching being feminized and firmly upholding notions of a particular exemplar to hold all teachers against (Kahn & Gorski, 2016). The cultural model that was created for education as a result of this is highly politicized and leads many to silence their true narrative and create a fake persona. In a profession that has been shaped by morality and often unrealistic standards of character, teachers who associate themselves with a less identifiable minority are often expected to sacrifice their morality while lying to students and colleagues, explicitly or implicitly, through adhering to their school culture (Mallozzi, 2014). Both the teacher exemplar and the privilege and power associated with it need to be dismantled and dissolved in order for a fluid and inclusionary environment to exist for all. Any attempt to marginalize teachers of any identity or form of expression needs to be fought against and dismissed. Heteronormative messages need to be changed publicly through language, policies, and practices that are used and promoted by schools before the more implicit behaviors can be

improved and addressed. As shown in the vignettes above, challenging heteronormativity is often

a constant in the lives of marginalized teachers. Teachers associated with a sexual minority in

particular often cope through resistance and advocacy. Queer individuals often develop a set of

survival skills when living in a heteronormative world, transforming their experiences, whether

negative or positive, into actions of resilience and perseverance (Wright, 2016; Szymanski et al.,

2017). While resistance to the heteronormative world can result in confrontation, often the

increase of empathy and respect for the minority experience leads individuals to a larger

commitment to social justice and informs activism and self-awareness. Perhaps this will be the

new version of what morality means in education for teachers: promoting an environment where

students and teachers alike have the freedom and space to find their own voices—challenging

harmful binaries and discrimination to change the cultural dynamics of schools. The promotion

of this type of an environment comes with the restructuring of the models and frameworks we

use for justice, for dialogue, for curriculum decisions, and for intercultural fluency. Culture is

personal and complex and is often told through personal narratives and experiences. Those who

deviate from the cultural model that exists in many Canadian educational environments should

not be alienated or negatively impacted by the profession. Rather, they should be celebrated and

the diversity they bring should be infused and intentionally given space and time to be heard and

to influence students to be more aware of and informed on their own identity. Students remember

the substance of their teachers as people first; they remember their individuality, style, and

selfhood (Dejean, 2004). Sexual minority students, and teachers alike, quickly learn that they

need to be the agents of their own change and liberation (Grace & Wells, 2006). In "The Cuts of

a Diamond " vignette we see teachers take advocacy and change into their own roles in the

school environment, supported by colleagues and administration or not. We also see teachers that

act out of fear and shame and purposefully disassociate themselves with other queer colleagues in fear of association before they are ready to be an agent of change. This greatly increases the psychological pressure and dimensions of teaching that other teachers who inherently fit into heteronormative ideals do not have to consider or experience. There is both a sense of power and powerlessness in being out as you are constantly self-identifying, confirming or denying, and have to step into a particular realm of labelling and identification that may not always fit your genuine identity. To be out truly is to be in and gives others a sense of objectivity that they can naively grasp in understanding you as a professional and person. The unknown and undefined falls outside of the usual structure of power and privilege that exists in many environments in society that involves social currency and capital to establish prestige and behavioral patterns. As mentioned before, recognizing that these aspects of society exist and have a crucial impact on identity formation and well-being does not mean that they cannot and they should not be challenged and dismantled.

Power and Privilege

Power

Identity, in any aspect of society, becomes problematic when it is interpreted as fixed and static. Foucault's perspective on power and identity challenges all to consider identity as a cultural experience, as an entity that is ever-evolving as we all attempt to communicate who we are to the world (Foucault, 1977). Rigid labels have existed in society as a means to maintain a level of power—yet—with a growing focus on anti-oppression and diversity, equity, and inclusion, these labels are slowly being dismantled and challenged. Foucault (1997) interprets power as a technique and something that is exercised instead of owned; something larger than oneself that provides a status that hovers above, not within. This status hovers above teachers both inside and outside of the walls of their school. Formed by their appearance, behavior,

interests, and how they maintain or disrupt the norms and expectations of their institution. Foucault would have us reject the idea that a true or core self-existed and rejected the very idea of identity and viewed it as an act of domination over the boundaries of expression while keeping individuals safely inside them. He viewed this existence of power and domination as leading to gaining of knowledge over someone or something, that they can never know themselves. In an educational context, this exists readily for queer teachers. When one decides to attempt to combine the private and public and "come out" in the workplace, many scholars believe it is actually an act of "coming in" (Sedgwick, 1990). As Fuss (1991) saw it, "to be out is really to be in—inside the realm of the visible, the speakable, the culturally intelligible" (p. 4). Until that moment of "coming in" many teachers suffer under the weight of invisibility and against the turmoil of finding a space to belong and feel safe. They are 'othered' and alienated from social interactions and from expressing part of their identity in their work environment. This sense of powerlessness over one's identity can have many negative implications and create unfair dynamics in the workplace that many may not be aware of. In *Narrating the Closet* Tony Adams identifies a major issue:

> The hidden, inaccessible characteristics of same-sex attraction make some people uncomfortable: lacking definitive, permanent aural and visible characteristics, it must be pinned down and negotiated through discourse and action; I can say that I am queer today, straight tomorrow, and bisexual the next, and there will be no (visible) trace of my transition (p. 90).

The lack of this visual trace that he identifies leads to individuals needing to declare through language or action that they are queer. This can be both empowering and disempowering; in the act of 'coming in' it can feel like an admittance of being abnormal or different from a discernible set of expectations. The undersexualization of individuals is listed as a form of microaggression that members of sexual minorities may experience and this fits well into any 'don't ask, don't

tell' culture (Nadal, 2012). The invisible nature of sexuality leads many teachers to feel that

oppression of their true self in the workplace is both necessary and mandated through

microaggressive behavior from often well-intentioned but ignorant colleagues. Furthermore,

these microaggressions are often left unconfronted as the individual would be risking damaging

the professional relationship, safety, loss of social support, and ultimately, reveal their sexuality,

which may not be favorable to the environment (Sue, 2010; Burn, Kadlec, & Rexer, 2005). The

paradoxical bind that can stifle a sexual minority teacher in that silence permits the

microaggression to exist and does not challenge its inappropriateness, however, acting on that

microaggression includes disclosure of an otherwise personal and private aspect of their identity.

Sue (2010) highlighted many themes associated with sexuality and microaggressions including

an endorsement of heteronormative culture, sinfulness, homophobia, heterosexist

language/terminology, over-sexualization, under-sexualization, and microaggression as humor.

Many of these themes are woven through the vignettes included in this thesis and the experiences

of the narratives drawn from for this thesis. In a qualitative study completed by Platt and Lenzen

(2013), they interviewed 12 individuals to expand upon Sue's findings. One participant

confessed: "I'm an elementary education major and I always worry about what it will be like

when I'm a teacher someday. I just don't know how it's going to be. There are going to be

parents that will be like, 'Oh, you're a lesbian? I'm not comfortable with you teaching my child.'

That's my biggest fear" (p. 1022, 2013). The existence of heteronormative values in a school's

environment breeds deeply seeded fear over how the members of that community will respond.

The theme of under-sexualization that Sue points out is experienced by many sexual minority

teachers when they are not asked if they are dating someone or have a partner. This type of

microaggression is often described as the most hurtful and diminishing: "It's easy for people to

dismiss your sexuality if there's not somebody there" (Platt & Lenzen, p. 1025, 2013). Many of these problems are heightened by being associated with an "invisible minority" coupled with attempting to deal with relatively invisible microaggressions. The "The Cuts of a Diamond" vignette showcases my inability to prove that the regular comments on my trousers were linked to microaggressive behavior and heteronormative values even though I could identify and feel the themes that Sue highlighted. The complication that it created for him, in both Canada and England, in disclosing his sexual identity, early on in the development of his sexual identity journey, made him less confident and comfortable as a professional. The combination of microinsults and microinvalidations experienced by teachers in the vignettes matches findings in the research that amongst the vast number of mental outcomes of microaggressions, lower self-esteem and lower levels of psychological well-being are prominent.

Historically, teachers have been forced to consider the space that they are in, the social power that exists, and make logical decisions about how to represent themselves in these spaces. When this 'other' category is created the expectations and allowances for that teacher shift. The status of power can become so inherent in teachers who fit into the majority of society that they are not challenged to consider how their perspective and identity has been developed over time because it (more often than not) comfortably fits into places and spaces of their world that are allotted specifically for them. As shown above in "The Cuts of a Diamond" vignette, the main characters' colleague did not have to consider how her perspective was developed and did not feel uncomfortable modeling the main influences that developed her perspective and identity in front of her students. This moment acts as a microcosm for the power that comes with heteronormativity. Despite acceptance, or more accurately tolerance, of diversity in educational places and spaces, heteronormativity still empowers those that are heterosexual and have a

conventional identity. These individuals can speak of their relationships, families, and act as a model of normalcy and expectation for students without the consideration of fear or shame. They will readily find themselves in shared narratives, in the curriculum, and find an abundance of their equals inside the walls of any school. This gives power; the power of comfortability, confidence, ease of existence, and open and visible relatability from student to teacher and the reverse. When faced with this in the manifestation of homophobia many teachers, both queer and not, do not know how to react. The most common recorded action was uncertainty with teachers feeling severely restricted by curriculum and pace in content-driven environments. However, there were teachers who did not respond in uncertainty or silence and rather attempted to integrate social justice issues within their curriculum and classrooms (DePalma and Atkinson, 2006). Is it fair that marginalized teachers are the ones solely responsible for identifying and combating oppression? Many teachers still believe that sexuality is a private matter that should not be discussed in school, that it is an issue of morality and political stance; traditional teaching and learning trumps diversity and inclusion (Ferfojila and Robinson, 2004). Amongst the issues included in social justice education many teachers hold the belief that sexuality sits low among the priority list and this may be a result of it being sidelined in some university education programs (Ferfojila and Robinson, 2004).

Butler (1994) believed that student teachers do not address queer issues in meaningful or outwardly ways resulting in the silence surrounding both being queer and homophobia, indicating deeper societal issues (DePalma and Atkinson, 2006). Ferfojila and Robinson found that when teachers do address homophobia in their classrooms and schools that they are often assumed to be queer themselves (2004). This can obviously be a very intimidating issue for queer teachers in deciding whether or not they should come out to their educational community

and also heterosexual teachers who are uncomfortable with expression of their gender or sexuality, and do not want to battle stigmatization. This represents a massive underlying struggle and disparity of power. To think that truly modeling authenticity in your profession and modeling diversity and inclusion for youth comes with stigma and is avoided for that reason is a massive injustice in and of itself. Educators, in all aspects of their career, should feel and be prepared to address any social issue head-on. Nevertheless, many institutions lack in anti-oppression and diversity, equity, and inclusion education leaving many teachers unaware of the power associated with their identity and the influence it can have in the places and spaces they occupy. Without the practice of sharing narratives and seeking qualitative and personal experiences as sites of knowledge, the queering of common perspectives will not occur and heteronormativity will continue to influence the privileged narrative.

Privilege

The power that heteronormativity and other oppressive social categorizations instill naturally leads to a particular privilege and position. van Langenhove and Harre (1999) viewed positioning as a social role that participants take. Though participants may not keep the same role over time, moving from speakers, to passive or active listeners, to opponents—still it reveals a lot about the community it is applied to. Positioning is defined as "the discursive processes whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Davies & Harrre, 1999, p. 37). In schools, teachers collaborate and collectively work to maintain cultural and historical practices in their community and classrooms. Teaching and learning is dependent upon participation and recognizing the importance of relationships with members of our educational community. This also happens to be majorly impactful on identity formation, whether one is positioned by another member of

their community or by themselves (Davies & Harre, 1999). There is a sense of curricular injustice occurring in the average school in that teachers and students are not encouraged to understand life from other points of view and also readily find positive versions of themselves in the curriculum. Harro describes the need for a cycle of liberation that leads to a critical transformation; envisioning a better world and creating it (Harro as cited in *Readings for Social Justice,* 2008). This is echoed in the vignettes above with experiences described in rural England with homophobic students and the struggle for openly gay teachers. Ironically, the power was released by taking the same privilege as other teachers and being open and genuine about oneself. This enabled unchallenged homophobia and homophobic actions by students as they could target the marginalized existence of sexuality. An act that should have been empowering and emancipating by allowing one's true identity to exist resulted in conflict, negative reinforcement, and an unfortunate reminder that limited space is available for diverse expression in schools. Yet, when identity is not treated as fluid, as an entity that is in a permanent state of flux and transformation, repeated and patterned behaviors become the most widely accepted norm (Butler, 1997).

In an attempt to maintain a level of control and power, society has long been riddled with numerous styles of labeling that are changing with the sophisticated level of diversity that seems to increase with time. Identity, as a state of being oneself, has historically been rigidly forced into categories, encouraging individuals to select a form to fit into or have one forced upon them. Extending a Foucauldian perspective to identity calls the very essence of the 'self' into question. Foucault rejected the idea that a true or core self-existed and he moved toward a post-structural model of identity. This Foucauldian perspective pushes us to challenge the traditional idea of identity as a fixed and inherent quality and interpret identity as a cultural experience that is ever-

changing as one attempts to communicate one's being to the world (Foucault, 1977). An unwarranted level of power and privilege is naturally awarded to those that feel they fit into a traditional identity that is accepted in a school environment. Those who embody the fluidity of identity, one that is ever becoming, are often forced to conjure up performative acts that express a falsification of their true self through social and cultural channels. The erasure of heteronormative and gender-normative exemplars for teacher identity needs to be a full-school and societal priority. Through anti-oppression education, members of all educational communities need to be trained and guided through aspects of identity and social categorizations that privilege certain experiences over others. Empathy and intentional reflection cannot be fostered without the realization that many individuals are impacted by others' privilege. The power and privilege that heteronormativity gives certain individuals is an extreme benefit and can be a determinant of happiness and success in the field of teaching. A teacher that feels vulnerable and displaced may withdraw from the school community in order to defend or protect themselves; an emotional investment in teaching has the ability to severely limit or extend opportunities to connect with students and thrive in their work environment (Butler, 1997; Zemblayas, 2003). It should be an aim of all members of an educational community to not only support an open and inclusive climate but to be a part of the reason why it exists. It is not enough to identify it as an aspect of our educational environment that should exist—we need change-makers that are going to remain restless until it does exist.

Outcomes

In researching and expanding an understanding of marginalization in relation to teachers' identity, it is clear to see that a deepened sense of intersectionality is needed. Though I am technically separating myself by illuminating specific and unique experiences, still, I am hoping this thesis will bring members of any educational community together in reflecting on and analyzing how and why their identity exists and how it impacts the identities of those around them. I am hoping to incite curiosity and urgency in exploring the very inner working of any work environment and how places and spaces are socioculturally permitting individuals to exist.

Though we have all been influenced by different sociocultural elements, and are currently on different stops along our identity formation pathways, we are all interconnected. We all have narratives associated with gender and sexuality and perhaps very different from the narratives included in this thesis. If those narratives have been readily available through media representation, role models, colleagues, and both supported and reinforced systemically by the structures that exist around you, then it is crucial for you to consider that that aspect of your identity is a privilege. Apathy associated with further investigating the privilege of space and the space that could have been either limited or taken away from others who are less privileged, needs to be released. There is an inherent contradiction in the above request as it assumes that those associated with majority spaces in society have positive experiences in their identity formation. Certainly, the opportunity for the illumination of negatively reinforced norms could occur for any individual willing to enter a space of vulnerability and critique their history. This thesis supports the notion that any assumption about one's identity is a frivolous act. This concept extends beyond just gender and sexuality and can include any form of marginalization. As a Caucasian person, I recognize the inherent privilege associated with my race as

predetermined historically by society before I ever had to consider it. Some aspects of my identity formation were unwavering because of this privilege; allowing my imagination to view the world as a place of endless possibilities. Through much probing, analysis, and listening to others' narratives I understand with the heaviest heart that the reverse of this experience is being marginalized because of race, of often struggling to find a positive version of yourself, of existing in spaces without the support of endless possibilities. Similarly, as a cisgender individual, I recognize and continue to explore the privilege associated with my sex and gender aligning from birth. I recognize that though many of my experiences and emotions from being queer may have complicated my gender expression. On a surface level, I was unknowingly granted social capital and additional social currency that my transgender and genderqueer allies were not. I recognize that for all marginalized identities we are in a space of constant learning and evolution—exactly as we should be. There still exist hierarchical issues from a society built on patriarchy and colonization that create systemic problems. The idea of inclusion is not one that can be created with a definitive deadline in mind but rather one that needs to be approached with an internalized attitude toward constantly improving in each and every moment.

The intersectionality involved in our identity development and the issues that can exist calls for a more serious and all-encompassing approach to making spaces inclusive for all community members. Though this thesis places emphasis on reclaiming space to amplify silenced narratives, it is also important to keep and include voices from the majority to genuinely make spaces inclusive and areas to thrive in for all. This cannot occur without a major trend in support of professional and personal development. Teachers need the chance to become genuine allies for their students and colleagues. They need leadership teams that will support and create opportunities for improvement in anti-oppression and diversity, equity, and inclusion education,

creating inclusive places and spaces, and also promoting personal reflection and facilitating the opportunity to illuminate ones' connection to identity formation on a personal and community level. Perhaps the most alarming realization is that once you feel a space is fluid enough for your identity it may not be evolved enough yet for another marginalized identity. This can lead to an endless cycle that never reaches a moment of liberation, and perhaps that is the nature of something as in flux as identity, but we must try. As educators, who are tasked and privileged with the job to work with impressionable and developing youth, we must listen; give space for all narratives and add to the changing tides of rejecting an idea of normalcy as something to ever be desired. It could be true that until educators analyze and decipher the evolution of their own identity they will not be as capable of aiding a positive experience of the identity formation of others and the spaces that encourage action.

The new teacher archetype should be a movement toward the idea of an anti-archetype, toward the idea that no single model, form, or moment of identity should be used as an exemplar. Rather, the process of discovery, the commitment to reflection, and being genuinely fluid and open to both self-development and the development of those around you should be the archetype— the sought-after educational model. This cannot exist without authentically using anti-oppression education to disrupt legacy thinking and unearth experiences that were influenced by a lack of awareness. We cannot model and lead authentically without starting with our own sense of self and how and why it formed. What is definite is that aspects of identity will continue to change and evolve into different forms. What is definite is that the teachers and students of 2020 will not be the same as 2021, 2023, or 2025. I hope that reflecting on the mistakes of the past, in relation to the marginalization of particular identities, will act as a

cathartic moment toward improvement, toward fluidity for teachers and students alike and the presentation, development, and actualization of a sense of self exists at school.

Furthermore, power should be transferred to spaces that are diverse and inclusive, that seek to dismantle all forms of oppression and enrich students' lives with difference and challenge their personal views by encouraging healthy skepticism. A curriculum that is more skill-based and less about prescribing content opens up the opportunity for teachers to be cognisant about the material that they include to help students consider their own identity and the identity of others in their school; to consider how diversity exists and the power and privilege that comes with certain majority identities. For true individual, community, and procedural change to occur school-wide commitments in creating a culture of accountability need to be established. Every place and space associated with the school must be empowered to dismantle normalcy and the expectations it instills. Teachers deserve the opportunity to be reflective and consider how their experiences act as a microcosm for the larger society and are valued sites of knowledge. This type of commitment requires fluidity and transformation; it is circular and chooses discomfort over complacency. Before any teacher can begin to lead students through their own journey of discovering intersectionality and making connections to power and privilege, teachers must allow themselves to start the journey personally and dismantle the negative influence that norms may have. The more positive teaching moments experienced by the main character of the above vignettes occurred in an educational environment that came with freedom in curriculum and allowed the teacher to try to let all students be seen and heard through their learning. Though one of the final vignettes revealed a frustration that sexual minority teachers have to consider their perspective and identity at a much deeper and critical rate than a heterosexual teacher, still there was a winning moment within that vignette in that the teachers had the freedom to have students

consider the development of their perspective and their position in the world. As teachers spend the majority of their time at school in their own classroom teaching, the classroom space is possibly the most influential to their overall professional identity. It is not to say that teachers associated with a minority or experiencing microaggressions should automatically be the sole champions of social justice but that an open curriculum gives the teacher space to make curricular choices that help allow all students to see a version of themselves and experience diversity that may help them further understand their teachers' position in the world. This allows the teacher to experience a version of their professional identity that steps away from marginalization and into a more visible realm that pervades invisibility, self-preservation and protection, and silence. Similar to the reactive nature and introduction of mental and sexual health initiatives and the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing in some provinces, a reaction to the flawed nature of identity formations needs to be officially addressed. Anti-oppression and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion education programs and resources should be federally created and mandated. It is time to have a healthy sense of skepticism as a full society and hold ourselves and those around us accountable. Education in a privileged country like Canada reaches the majority of our adolescent population until a particular age. Educators are currently missing a valuable opportunity to explore the search for an authentic self and what makes that problematic with their students. If teachers are trained and can critically identify microaggressions and the insidious existence of covert discrimination, then places and spaces will begin to shift in shape, promoting diversity of thought and experience. The teachers portrayed in the vignettes included were all English teachers working with Junior High and High School students; their classroom environments naturally dealt with sensitivity to diversity and the importance of perspective. Multicultural education, social justice education, queer narratives, and dissolving the us vs. them

mentality that exists in society is often explored through such Humanities courses. Growing freedom in curriculum resulted in a growth of innovation and creation for the English teacher in the vignettes. There were clear attempts and beginnings of a disruption of norms and a focus on the silenced, unspoken narratives of the world to encourage students to firmly step into the uncomfortable to truly learn and counter oppressive thinking patterns (Helmer, 2016). True curricular justice occurs when curriculum and programming choices in schools are 'organized around the experience, culture, and needs of the least advantaged members of the society' and use those unspoken narratives for 'richness rather than testability' (Connell, 2012, p. 682). Amongst the curricular competencies for English Literature and Language in British Columbia lie the importance of understanding the power of story and the process of ownership and the act of passing it on. Many teachers need to experience this competency in action and deserve the time to train and hear the stories of marginalized individuals and learn about their own story that may be so deeply embedded in their history that they no longer consider its impact, let alone pass it onward or relate to their coworkers and students with their own experiences in mind.

<center>**Future Suggestions**</center>

A Mirror; a Prism

2020

The steam from the iron relaxed both his wrinkled brow and diamond-filled trousers, sending his mind adrift...

Relief. Happiness. Sadness. Anticipation. Fear: an amalgamation of emotions hovered above him as he finished one of the final courses of his Education degree.

Diversity, Social Justice, and Teaching and Learning: the course and experience that inspired his feelings of rebirth, his determination, and eventual exploration into graduate work.

For the first time in a place or space of education, he saw himself in a role model.
A mirror.

This professor's openness and commitment to making students feel confident and comfortable in discussing aspects of society and diversity was reassuring and illuminating.

A prism.

For the first time in his experience as a student, he read queer articles in relation to coming out and the impact it has on teens and adults; negative, positive, inconclusive but constantly in a state of flux and growth. He listened to queer guest speakers discuss personal experiences with being both in and out of the closet at school and with students and the constant weight of privacy and transparency that exists.

It was both liberating and suffocating to be a part of educational experiences with professors and guest speakers who resembled who he wanted to be but who he was not giving myself permission to be.

He listened to members of his class, who openly and proudly identified with the queer community, respond personally to topics in discussions, to talk about a sibling or friend, and their queer experiences.

He listened to heterosexual classmates commit to be champions of diversity and inclusion and to be open and accepting to all students.

He listened but had nothing to say. Just like his own experience as a student; just like his first teaching experience. Silence. He sold his voice for comfort one last time. He watched as it circled down the drain with courage, pride, and justice. He knew he needed to be better but fear and uncertainty slinked around his shoulders, tightening their fingers around his porcelain neck...

      The steam from the iron wrapped his vision like silk bringing him back to the present moment: preparing for another week, another wardrobe to reflect his sense of self. Diamonds. One of the hardest known natural materials in the world. How fortunate and unfortunate that its edges have carved out his identity, have both sharpened his perspective and tested his spirit. How fortunate that they bridge an understanding for him to cross over his toxic experiences and see the problematic structures for what they are—to remember how to find light amongst the darkness. When light hits the surface of a diamond, a part of it is reflected back, like a mirror. And like the billion-year-old diamonds of our earth, his reflection still shimmers more than it dissolves; still, he shines more than he fades. Breaking the remarkable paradox. Prescribing himself an identity that is authentic, ever in flux, and finally—him.

Research Implications

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds
— Theodore Roosevelt

School climates are a unique entity that should not be considered from a standardized or replicable point of view. The climate of educational spaces is changing by the minute and ownership over a particular climate or space should be released, shifting that energy and attention to addressing inequities and challenges to keeping spaces positive and inclusive in the moment. Future research needs to be conducted by educators that are actually in school environments and are making daily observations and contributions to school climates in real-time; research needs to be conducted by those who are actually in the 'arena'. While writing this thesis so much has changed and shifted within my career and within the school climates that I have both been accepted by and struggled to feel accepted in. It is in essence immeasurable to track how many shifts, moments of growth, improvements, and crucial experiences have taken place within the one school climate I am now a part of. That idea is both the beauty and the curse of working with adolescents who are coming of age combined with the unpredictability of human relationships and dynamics. Teachers need to be empowered to share their experiences and use reflective practices to evaluate their school climate. Those whose faces are 'marred by dust and sweat and blood,' those who spend hours considering their responses, their reactions, and how their identity exists in relation to their colleagues, superiors, and students need to be researching and probing themselves to unearth the true meaning behind their experiences. A rebellious, disruptive narrative needs to be given the spotlight in which educators unite and call

for a new school climate and a new approach to the 'norm' of teacher archetype. More research needs to be conducted to truly evaluate teacher identity into 2020 and what it means for teacher education and prospective teachers in university. Specific research needs to be completed on the classic momentum loss that seems to exist for new teachers once the 'honeymoon' period is over and the 'pie in the sky' attitude starts to be devalued and jaded by the realities of school climate and expectations. Beyond their Education degrees, teachers, and staff members of schools, need to be constantly educated and given the time to engage with issues in real-time as they impact the climate that exists for that particular society. Engaging in therapeutic practices through narrative creation and sharing is essential for progressive teachers to understand one another and decipher the meaning of their experiences. Understanding and coherence needs to be bridged from the many toxic experiences witnessed and lived by teachers and staff members in order to promote the recognition of problematic structures and externalizing problems so they can be identified for the negative influence they have without internalization. Dialogue and engagement with the idea of identity and how it develops should be a constant topic explored amongst training and practicing teachers alike. The influence that teachers have on their students' identity development is obvious when you consider the amount of time they spend with students and the quality of their interaction. For queer teachers and students specifically, the opportunity to explore the process of their identity development can be crucial to having a positive experience. Egale, Canada's leading organization for queer people and issues, conducted an "Identity Conference Report" (2018) that highlighted this need of inclusion for queer people and queer issues in the workplace. In it they advocated for Canadian-based research to stop relying on data from the United States and other countries, an obligation on the state to adopt appropriate measures

(legislature, budgetary, judicial), and tangible steps taken by the government for workplace inclusion training and a national implementation strategy for Bill C-16.

Furthermore, in commenting on 'Safer Schools and Campuses', Egale noted that there was "increased need for training of educators and school administrators on how to create safer spaces of LGBTQIA2S+ students across the country, more research and data to better understand the current climate for LGBTQIA2S+ students and educators in Canadian schools, and "update the National Climate Survey on the state of inclusion for LGBTQIA2S+ secondary school students in Canada" (2018). They also noted that "better channels and procedures [are] needed for students to vocalize complaints within schools, paying close attention to the safety of LGBTQIA2S+ students in particular" and there was a need for national guidelines to be created for inclusion and safety with overarching federal guidelines for staff, teachers, and students in order to ensure meaningful access to education and a need for national guidelines to be created for sexual education curriculum (2018). This is an issue of importance that reaches beyond teachers, schools, school districts, and provinces. Federally, the Canadian government should improve guidelines and resources to be absolutely sure that staff, teachers, and students have access to meaningful and progressive resources and training to ensure that identity formation is improving and inclusive. This is a mission that will never officially end but rather one that needs a fluid structure that can transform with society and the culture of the school over time.

There is also a need to further research a decolonial queer politic. Colonialism is aligned with racialized and marginalized groups alike and encompasses a disenfranchised history shared by many. Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes (2015) describe a combination of these stances: "A decolonial queer politic is not only anti-normative, but actively engages with anti-colonial, critical race and Indigenous theories and geopolitical issues such as imperialism, colonialism,

globalization, migration, neoliberalism, and nationalism" (p. 156). They view both decolonizing and queer as live practices that are interconnected and must challenge race, gender, and sexuality norms that colonialism embedded in our society. This interconnection must be explored to further understand the influence that colonial structures are still having in our present and future society. Through the process of creating this thesis I have realized that colonialism and the existence of white supremacy in the roots of Canadian history greatly impacts my identity as a Caucasian, cisgender male who benefitted from aspects of culture in my upbringing that made parts of my identity formation possible and comfortable. Nevertheless, the association with counterculture and the need to queer the world around me caused friction that was set in motion by Colonial ideals that shaped Canadian society. There is an inherent connection between a need to decolonize and a need to queer the world to increase fluidity and openness that I hope is explored more in the future.

These outcomes and points of need will potentially not be embraced quickly as it calls for a complete overhaul and rejection of how schools have been structured. For too long it seems that most schools have structured a hierarchy based upon experience and not expertise. Many schools seem to confuse and blend the two; mistaking experience for automatic expertise. The danger of this mentality is that teachers feel that there is a chance to reach a safe place in their career when they have actualized their potential and have little need or desire to improve their craft. This idea is complex in and of itself and specific research needs to be conducted into leadership teams that embrace the constant and continuing professional development of their employees and how this impacts the workplace. As mentioned previously in this thesis, if individuals working in schools appropriately accept that all people, ideas, identities, concepts, and all aspects of the world, are constantly changing and in flux, then and only then, can they

recognize their true self and start to recognize how they need to both present themselves and

support the genuine presentation of those around them. Just one individual, at one moment in

time, not feeling welcomed, safe, or secure is all it takes to taint an educational environment. The

toxicity that can cling to one's identity is immensely powerful and can have permanent, or at the

very least, long-lasting impacts. This toxicity would rear its ugly head less if all members of an

environment were having the tough conversations and digging into issues that are uncomfortable,

and traditionally, remain unspoken. There is a need for future disruption; disruption of societal

norms, disruption of heteronormativity as the comfortable and sought-after creator of ideals,

disruption of a 'this is how it has always been' attitude; space for innovation.

Conclusion

"If still more education is to save us it will have to be an education
of a different kind, an education that takes us to the depths of things."
    — E.F. Schumacher

We cannot lose faith and hope in each other, as equals, that inherently care and yearn for connection. More specifically, we cannot lose hope in each other as educators, in the idea that teachers are doing what they genuinely think is best for the student, the best way they know. As coined by Harro in his cycle of liberation, for the enlightened witness there is a looming sense of responsibility to transfer knowledge and concerns; keep the momentum moving forward. A truly enlightened witness will recognize that the process of staying enlightened is constant, indescribable even, and certainly ongoing and ever in flux (Harro as cited in *Readings for Social Justice,* 2008). Philosopher Heraclitus believed that 'you can never step into the same river twice; for new waters are ever flowing' which is true of the educational experience. Acting as a true microcosm for society, the complex environment of a school changes daily—even more precisely—changes in each and every moment. It is in these moments that we must allow our identities to be deconstructed so we can truly question the structures that exist around us and allow our sense of self to be reconstructed through healing, sharing, and emancipation from internalizing fragments of our narratives that are disenfranchised and silenced. In his novel, *Each Moment is the Universe: Zen and the Way of Being Time*, Danin Katagiri speaks of each moment as being equivalent to the universe and says that,

> everydayness perfumes the depth of life, the huge ocean where all are
> interconnected and makes your life mature. Then a new life arises from the depth and
> appears on the surface. So, by taking care of everydayness, you don't make just the
> surface mature; you also make the depth of your life mature (2009, p. 162).

By taking care and embracing the 'everydayness' and its significance, the epiphany in the ocean of interconnectedness can be achieved. Narrative and exploring personal narratives can be a form

of therapy that empowers any person to become an enlightened witness and engaged researcher of their own experiences and their underlying meaning. If educators truly take a mindful approach to education, they will realize that like their classroom environments they too are ever in flux.

Too often in society it can feel like taking one step forward and an abrupt two steps back. Ideas surrounding identity and its form in post-modern life have been shifting in shape and meaning in recent years. In a North American society in which gender expression, sexuality, spiritual freedom, and all aspects of culture and identity are growing in diversity and acceptance, it should not be surprising that identity in any workplace is becoming (or already has become) a topic of debate or area of concern. With legal systems that are reacting to discrimination against identity and protecting individuals' rights to make decisions about their sense of self, it should not be surprising that employees around the continent are both expecting and demanding more from their employers. Acceptance can quickly slip into tolerance when approached from a stagnant viewpoint. We must continue to share our stories, to reclaim space, and listen to one another to learn—not to react. This is how we emerge from the isolation that identity formation often makes us feel and collectively recognize how deeply interconnected our histories and experiences truly are. An anti-oppressive educator should realize that striving toward making the world a better place, toward influencing students and members of an educational community to be changemakers, does not have a conclusion, a completed narrative arc. Rather, it exists around us like an aura, instilling the bravery to care and ushering in metamorphosis to match any form of discrimination, hatred, or injustice that exists; it floats above in solidarity with any minority struggling against the majority and norms of society. It is the hope of all those working toward a

more fluid, flexible, and in-flux version of society that it may not need to float much longer, that

it will find its place to permanently land.

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