The Fear In/Of The Closet: Coming Out in the Classroom
from the Perspective of Two Queer Male Secondary Teachers

By

Patrick Callegaro

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Abstract

LGBTQ students need out queer role models in order to feel supported and understood through the homophobic bullying that can affect their academic and personal development. The research study is based on a qualitative study that sought to understand the effect of LGBTQ teachers, both in coming out and being out, on students’ personal development and self-perceptions. The semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with two queer-identifying male secondary school teachers in Toronto, revealed three outcomes of having queer teachers in the classroom with analysis through the lens of a combined theoretical framework that utilizes queer theory and transformative learning theory. First, by disclosing personal information, such as their identities and issues at home, it was shown that queer students feel more comfortable with out queer teachers than traditional resources, such as guidance counsellors. Next, systemic attitudes and beliefs carried in society shift toward acceptance over time, but religious and cultural beliefs of the family allow this shift to be negated in passing these attitudes on to the children of the family. Finally, the decision to come out is difficult to make and requires thoughtful consideration of different factors, including but not limited to age, environment, and personal views. Recommendations stemming from this study are made to the Ontario Ministry of Education, faculties of education across Ontario, and administrators that outline the need for more discrete language in policy documents, integration of pre-service teacher education into schools, and availability and diversity of resources for LGBTQ students and staff.

Key Words: LGBTQ, transformative learning, coming out, teacher-student relationship, queer role models
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction - Research Context

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ)\(^1\) people make up about 5% of the Canadian population (Carlson, 2012). With a population of approximately 35 million, this means that there are more than 1.5 million queer-identifying people living in Canada who require the same rights as non-queer-identifying Canadians (Taylor & Peter, 2011). In 1982, The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enacted legislation in Canada to protect queer people from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. In 2005, gay marriage was legalized with the Civil Marriage Act, stating that marriage was “the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others”. This trend put Canada at the forefront of the LGBTQ rights movement.

Despite these legally entrenched rights, secondary schools continue to be seen by many as unwelcoming to queer students (Smith, 1998; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Homophobic bullying is still a trend in secondary schools, with queer students receiving a slew of verbal and physical attacks that go against the values the Charter upholds (Walton, 2004; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Programs are established by boards in schools in an effort to end the unnecessary torture many LGBTQ students endure, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). GSAs have positive impacts on LGBTQ students who attend schools with these programs in place (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010; Taylor & Peter, 2011). The climate of the school improves with the existence of these programs, whether or not the queer-identifying student is a member (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). The impact teachers and administration make upon the views students carry, is of great importance.

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\(^1\) In this paper, queer and LGBTQ are used interchangeably when speaking about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identifications and the LGBTQ community. While LGBTQ is used, the reader should also be aware that this is a short form of the entire acronym: LGBTQQIP2SAA. This stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, androgyous, and asexual.
Many teachers serve as role models to their students, allowing for a variety of personalities, opinions, and lifestyles to be shown in the school context (Lumpkin, 2008). In seeing identities and points of view that differ from their own in the classroom, students can learn of personal biases they may possess toward LGBTQ communities and work toward a more inclusive and accepting climate in their high schools. This inclusive climate, however, relies on the efforts of the teacher. Policy makers have made an effort in this regard, for example through the Ontario School Code of Conduct, stating teachers must “help students work to their full potential and develop their self-worth” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012c). Bill 13 of the Accepting Schools Act emphasizes the impact of bullying, and outlines the need for positive and inclusive school climates (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a). Bill 13 also details specific teacher responsibilities, such as reporting of bullying incidents to administration by the end of the school day (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a). With these different policies, both the emotional and physical needs of all students are kept in mind. Are teachers adhering to these policies, supporting each and every student in their day to day activities? School boards with anti-LGBTQ harassment policies allow teachers to feel more comfortable addressing LGBTQ issues in class (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). In looking to the current climate, needs of students, and effort required on behalf of the teachers, we can see a problem emerging.

1.1 Articulation of the Research Problem

The bullying queer students experience can affect their academic and personal development (Smith, 1998). While there are programs in place in an effort to eliminate this harassment, homophobic bullying is still prevalent in Canadian high schools. With this, many queer students feel that they lack emotional support from educators and administration (Bellini,
2012). The efforts being made are currently not enough for queer students. So what can be done to improve the situation? Two things come to mind: addressing queer issues in high school classrooms and ‘normalizing’ LGBTQ lifestyles. This puts the emphasis once again on the teacher, who may fear a reaction from students and parents as opposed to administrators and colleagues when addressing LGBTQ issues in class (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). This may limit the degree to which LGBTQ issues are discussed in the classroom.

To ‘normalize’ LGBTQ lifestyles, students would need to see out queer teachers in the classroom and school. There are a few issues with this idea. There is no clear appropriate way of coming out in the classroom (Khayatt, 1997). Revealing one’s sexual identity could cross the line in giving too much personal information in the classroom (Khayatt, 1997). A declarative statement seems forceful, yet the ambiguity of any other approach may defeat the purpose. If we, as educators, addressed these fears and agreed upon a way of coming out in the classroom, how would students and parents react to a teacher coming out in the class? The fear of the unknown reactions may lead many teachers to stay in the closet. This fear is mirrored by the fact that only about 30% of LGBTQ students know an out teacher in their school (Taylor & Peter, 2011).

Queer students in particular need out role models and LGBTQ issues education in order to feel supported and understood. It is here that a gap in the research exists, which my work seeks to fill. This is the purpose of my study.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

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2 In this context, ‘normalizing’ is meant to emphasize the effort to increase the visibility of the LGBTQ community and the variety of queer voices and identifications being seen, not to strength the normal/abnormal binary.

3 Being out, or being out of the closet, means that a person is open and vocal about their personal identifications (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer). An out queer teacher is a teacher who has come out of the closet in the school or classroom context.
The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the effects of LGBTQ teachers, both in the act of coming out and in being out, on LGBTQ students’ personal development and self-perception. I hope to see a positive effect, allowing for an easier and more fulfilling personal development in queer students, inspiring teachers everywhere to come out to their students. The emphasis here is not solely on the act of coming out, but on the process of coming out and being out as pedagogical practice. Proof of modelling as an effective emotional growth tool may ease the fear that in coming out, teachers are sexualizing themselves, encouraging an emphasis on identity instead of sexualization. This, in turn, would lead to more positive views of the LGBTQ community in students and a healthier personal development for queer youth. The multilayered effects of experiencing the process of coming out from the point of view of a teacher will hopefully help queer students at the different points in their own journey of self-discovery.

1.3 Research Question

In looking at the available literature and current research, I found a significant gap that needed to be addressed. My main research question stems from this: How does having out LGBTQ teachers (or a lack thereof) affect LGBTQ students’ personal development and self-perception? The majority of current research addresses two things: coming out in the classroom at the college or university level (ie. Khayatt, 1997; Turner, 2010), or homophobia and its effects on LGBTQ students (ie. Smith, 1998; Bellini, 2012). Why is there a lack of literature related to LGBTQ teachers and their roles as educators and role models in the high school setting? This lack of research drives my study, while looking for possible causality between out teachers and their students. With this, I have subsidiary questions to help focus my research, while trying to pinpoint different elements that may work against the desired effect.
1. Are there barriers in place that prevent LGBTQ teachers from feeling comfortable being out in the classroom? If so, what are they?

2. Do LGBTQ teachers have an impact on non-LGBTQ identifying students’ personal awareness, views, and possible implicit bias towards the LGBTQ community? If so, what is this impact?

3. How might we identify ‘appropriate’ coming out procedures for teachers, or are there multiple ways of achieving the same goal? If so, what is it / are they?

With these research questions, this study works to address the missing piece of the puzzle in our understanding of the coming out process and its effects.

1.4 Background of the Researcher (Reflexive Positioning Statement)

I came out of the closet when I was 13 years old. When I told my family, they took no issue with my personal identity, embracing and accepting me for who I was. While I expected that my parents would have a positive reaction, there was still a lingering fear. What would happen if they did not accept this part of my personality? Before I came out of the closet, I met a teacher in my high school. This man came out to us, telling us about his marriage to his husband and how happy he was. I knew I was gay at this point, but had not felt comfortable being public with a declarative statement. Seeing how comfortable he was with his sexuality and how it made him no different than anyone else in the room eased my fears. I could see myself living a happy life, full of moments I had thought would be taken away from me due to my sexuality. Though I did not recognize it at the time, this teacher served as a role model to me, allowing my personal growth and comfort in my sexuality progress at a much faster rate than if he had not come out in the classroom.
As someone who felt more comfortable coming out by having a strong queer teacher role model in high school, I developed an interest in learning the impact of having LGBTQ role models in the classroom on the personal growth, development, and comfort of LGBTQ students. My high school teacher served as a mentor to me, giving me guidance when I would ask for it and checking in with me almost every week. As much as family and friends could sympathize with my feelings and what I was going through, having someone who could empathize with my situation, coming out and handling society’s perceptions of my identity while developing my personal views and thoughts of the world, impacted me positively. I had someone looking out for me, whom I could turn to if I needed to talk. I do not know what I would have done without this queer teacher role model since my school did not have a Gay-Straight Alliance. I am aware that this may cause me to look for a positive correlation between out LGBTQ teachers and students’ personal growth and development in my research and will work to remove as much of my bias as possible.

1.5 Preview of the Whole

To respond to the research questions, I will be conducting a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two LGBTQ teachers about their experiences coming out in the classroom, the climate of their schools in relation to sexual orientation, and the effect this has had on their students. In chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of history of LGBTQ rights and homophobia, specifically in high schools in Canada, anti-discriminatory laws, practices, and programs, the role of the teacher in the classroom, and the trials and experiences of LGBTQ teachers and students. Next, in chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research.
literature. In chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, and point to areas for future research. In the following chapter, I outline the literature as it relates to queer issues in schools, the role of the teacher in the classroom, coming out in the classroom, and queer theory and transformative learning theory, which make up my theoretical framework.
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in the areas of homophobia in the classroom and school, the role of the teacher in the classroom, and the differing points of view when discussing coming out in the classroom. I begin by reviewing the literature in the area of LGBTQ student needs, bullying, and current policy. Next, I review research on the place of the teacher in the classroom in relation to the student in order to understand the expectations of teachers and the needs of the student. Then, I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of coming out in the classroom as illustrated through different research and relevant literature. Finally, I outline the theoretical framework through which I will analyze my data.

2.1 Homophobia in Education

Schools can function as a microcosm of society, encapsulating for students what is seen as ‘normal’. Heterosexist and cissexist narratives are perpetuated in schools, where “heterosexual identities and relations are normalized” (Walton, 2004, p. 26). This causes the “construction of sexual otherness as inferior… [marginalizing] LGBT individuals” (Walton, 2004, p. 26). LGBTQ students are more than twice as likely to be harassed, either physically or verbally, when compared to their straight peers (Bellini, 2012). Why is this inherent hegemony of heterosexuality pervasive in the schooling system? Why do some students view being gay in school as isolating (Smith, 1998)? Walls, Kane, and Wisneski (2010) raise these questions in their research, stating “sexual minority youth often report feeling socially and emotionally isolated in their lives and in their experiences of the educational system” (p. 309). This sense of isolation is the foundation of the inherent homophobia that schools act to challenge. Through
legislation, programming, and consciousness of school climate, we can see the homophobia in education.

2.1.1 Legislation. In 2012, the Ontario Code of Conduct underwent necessary revisions to prevent bullying in schools with the creation of Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a). The aim was the “promotion of a safe, inclusive, and accepting school climate” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012c, p. 1) and to “respect and treat others fairly, regardless of… sexual orientation” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012c, p. 4) among other marginalizations. These ideas were furthered through the creation of Bill 33, Toby’s Act, which worked to protect LGBTQ students from harassment due to gender identity and expression (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012b). Prior to the Accepting Schools Act, there was a “conspicuous absence of homophobic bullying from safe schools agenda” (Walton, 2004, p. 25). Walton (2004) commented that zero tolerance policies (mandatory expulsions and suspensions, as outlined in the Safe Schools Act) do not address the psychological and emotional violence LGBT youth endure, and it was for reasons like this that the Accepting Schools Act and Toby’s Act were drafted. However, “despite numerous policies and initiatives, [LGBTQ] students continue to report incidents of homophobia and an overall lack of emotional support by educators and administration” (Bellini, 2012, p. 373). What are teachers doing to help this continually dire situation, if anything? Administrators have implemented various programs throughout the years in an attempt to reduce homophobia in schools.

2.1.2 Programs in place. The Triangle Program, launched in 1995, was designed to offer LGBTQ students a more open and welcoming community, in response to the homophobic
bullying seen in the school system. “The Triangle Program was designed specifically to meet the education and social needs of LGBT youth… [and act] as a “safe-space” for students whose educational needs are unmet in conventional school settings where homophobia is pervasive” (Walton, 2004, p. 27). Walton (2004) worried that “the separation of LGBT students… does not challenge educators about homophobia in their schools, nor does it require respect for sexual diversity among other students” (p. 27). While this program offers a place of refuge for queer students facing hardship, it was ideally created as a transitional program. Other programs, such as Gay-Straight Alliances, serve as more permanent responses to the problems faced by queer students. The research, however, is scarce on any programs stemming from Peer Learning Communities (PLCs), Professional Development (PD) or guidance offices or programs directed toward LGBTQ teachers.

Gay-Straight Alliances can positively impact the experiences of queer students in schools (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). In their 2010 study, Walls, Kane, and Wisneski found that Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) “decrease the level of homophobia in the school climate” (p. 312) and participants in GSAs noted “increased comfort with their sexual identity” (p. 312). The positive impact GSAs have on the school climate and personal comfort is necessary for queer students struggling in these mainstream schools. “The presence of GSAs in schools should have a positive impact on sexual minority youth whether or not they are members or active participants in the student organization” (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010, p. 313), showing the strength of presence GSAs provide. Programs like the Triangle Program and Gay-Straight Alliances work to combat the issue of homophobic school climate that still pervades today.
2.1.3 School climate. The social environment of a school, or school climate, can have positive and negative effects on its students. “A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours in interactions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012c, p. 2). The Accepting Schools Act was written in response to the bigger problem of “the climate of homophobia that exists in our school systems” (Walton, 2004, p. 31). Campus climate has a particular impact on queer students, where heteronormativity is pervasive and damaging (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). While this campus climate, “the general atmosphere of a school campus” (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010, p. 310), is college-specific in their study, I argue that these statements can be made into a generalization for campuses of any level of school. “The antigay rhetoric enters these students… as a form of consciousness for them, whether or not they are subject to direct attack” (Smith, 1998, p. 322), causing them to adjust their own development of their identity. The “social climate in Canada is uniquely conducive to tolerating, if not valuing, diversity” (Schneider & Dimito, 2008, p. 53), so why is the school climate different? Through inaction, school administration approves of activities such as graffiti and homophobic slurs, showing their implicit or explicit heterosexism and homophobia (Smith, 1998). Why does this “complicity in the everyday cruelties of the enforcement of heterosexist/homophobic hegemony” (Smith, 1998, p. 309) exist within the school system? While Smith wrote these statements in 1998, when the cultural climate in Canada was drastically different, his declarations still holds true. Why do 50% of LGBTQ teachers not feel comfortable discussing LGBTQ issues with students (Schneider & Dimito, 2008)? These are problems that need to be addressed, as teachers can impact the creation of a queer-friendly school climate (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). The role of the teacher is, in part, to facilitate this necessary change in our education.
2.2 The Role of the Teacher

Many educators view their roles differently. Some view themselves as instructors of curriculum, others view themselves as nurturers to the students. One thing remains clear to all teachers, though, that “students evaluate the character of their teachers based on how they are treated and taught” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47). This evaluation of character is critical to a teacher’s ability to keep a class engaged and on task. The teaching and learning relationship relies heavily on trust between student and teacher. “Trust replaces apprehension or fear with confidence and openness”, “[building] self-confidence in students as they learn to depend on their teachers to help them grow and develop” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47). Without this trust, the role of the teacher may be lost on students. Aside from teaching the necessary material, teachers have two main aspects or roles, as shown in the literature, to fulfill in their profession: role model and protector of students. These roles apply to all teachers, but I emphasize the impact they have with LGBTQ teachers and students.

2.2.1 As role model. The Ontario Ministry of Education document regarding Provincial Code of Conduct (2012c) uses the term ‘role model’ when describing teachers and other school staff. This term circulates throughout the literature, but is never defined. Khayatt (1997) believes that “one cannot decide to be a role model for anyone” (p. 137). If the definition is ambiguous and the role impossible to adopt, why is this expectation carried for teachers? Teachers can focus how they wish to be emulated, “[serving] as role models of character” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 45). Schneider and Dimito (2008) believe that “LGBT teachers… [serve] as positive adult role models” (p. 50) through normalizing the lives of LGBTQ people. By changing our lens and
adapting the focus as we see fit to the situation, LGBTQ teachers allow their students to see qualities and characteristics they may wish to imitate. This idea is highlighted by Cockerill (1999) when he said that “the teacher's influence on the student is in proportion to his ability to inspire the student's respect and desire to emulate him” (p. 7). Khayatt (1997) fights these “pressures often imposed on lesbian and gay teachers to be role models for their students” (p. 128). If she previously stated that a teacher cannot choose to be a role model, how can this position be imposed upon LGBTQ educators? “Some students need to see a person of a similar sexual identity for them to feel included and represented; that is not the same, however, as the teacher being a role model” (Khayatt, 1997, p. 136). If we look back to this idea of focusing how we wish to be emulated, I can understand Khayatt’s phrasing. An LGBTQ teacher could prefer their students to model their generosity or kindness instead of their ‘outness’ or comfort with their sexuality. However, this still allows students to normalize the experience of sexual minorities. Is this not, in effect, what being a role model is about: showing characteristics we wish to see in the everyday lives of our students? Lumpkin outlines the characteristics she wishes to see in her students, and how they can be modelled. Teachers “model integrity by choosing to do the right thing, even when no one is looking” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 46), “display honesty by telling the truth and acting in an honourable way” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47) and “respect is earned through treating others the way you would like to be treated” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 48). This idea of characteristics mirrors that of lenses, emphasizing certain qualities we wish to present to our students. Bellini (2012) outlines that “not having consistent counselling, role models, or supportive teachers in schools has created many problems for these [queer] teens” (p. 383). In such, we can idealize taking the aspect of being a role model and reading it as presenting the qualities, characteristics and outlooks we wish to instill in our students. Out LGBTQ teachers
could act as role models and leaders for all students, regardless of their sexuality, working to protect them every day.

2.2.2 As protector of students. If all students had strong role models in education, the role of protector of students would be less of a burden in the teaching profession. However, this is not the case: “the needs of gay and lesbian students are not [being] addressed in terms of emotional support” (Bellini, 2012, p. 390). One might immediately turn to bullying and homophobia between students, but Bellini (2012) believes otherwise, stating “if [LGBTQ] students were not being protected and emotionally supported in schools, it would only make sense to question the teacher” (p. 381). Teachers, according to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012c), are responsible for “maintaining a safe, inclusive, accepting, and respectful learning environment for all students” (p. 6). Why then are the emotional needs of LGBTQ students not being protected? It is with the teachers who aim to build an inclusive environment for all students that we may see more student needs being met. The first problem is that “[students] do not know to whom they might turn for support as they work through identity development processes” (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010, p. 309). Bellini (2012) adds to this problem, writing “many teachers did not feel comfortable, have the knowledge, or feel it necessary to talk to gay students about being gay” (p. 374). With this lack of knowledge and discomfort in talking to LGBTQ students about their needs, it is not surprising to see that these students feel their emotional needs are not being met. How are these teachers meeting the expectations of the Ontario Ministry of Education, protecting them on a daily basis?

If teachers do not have the knowledge, perhaps we need to look back to the education they received. “Teachers felt unprepared to deal with [LGBTQ] issues once they started working
since it had not been covered in their training” (Bellini, 2012, p. 384). Theory related to teaching, child psychology, and classroom management are presented in teacher education programs, but is there a missing class related to protecting the emotional needs of students? Bellini (2012) believes this is so, and that education programs “must provide safe schools training that included the prevention and management of homophobia” (p. 380). “When gay and lesbian teens are given the same emotional support as their straight peers by educators, they are as mentally healthy” which is done in “[normalizing] their experiences in adolescence” (Bellini, 2012, p. 382). However, if this emotional support is not given by teachers, “they [send] the message that homophobia is acceptable… through their silence” (Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012, p. 255).

Walton (2004) reiterates the thoughts of Vega, Crawford and Van Pelt (2012), expressing “educational leaders are complicit through their inaction” (Walton, 2004, p. 29). Teachers need to “help students… develop their sense of self-worth” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012c, p. 6) and this is done through action. If we move teachers to act, the emotional needs of not only LGBTQ students, but all students, will be met on a more consistent basis.

Are there other problems at play aside from a lack of understanding and education? According to Vega, Crawford and Van Pelt (2012), teachers avoid discussing LGBTQ issues in class due to fear of a reaction from parents. “Teachers participating in proactive behavior to counter heterosexism predominately report receiving support from their school district, professional development, and teacher education programs” (Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012, p. 258). With support from within the school, teachers should be armed to support the emotional needs of LGBTQ students. However, 68% of LGBTQ teachers say resources are not visible or accessible in their school (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Schneider and Dimito, in their 2008 study, only surveyed queer teachers. Would heterosexual teachers have the same views as these
LGBTQ teachers in regards to school climate, support and availability of resources? This paradox of support in discussing the issues, but lacking the resources is the heart of the problem.

To be a true protector of students, teachers need three things: ongoing education to handle the discussion of queer issues in the classroom, resources and training to support the emotional needs of queer students, and continuous support from their administration when facing concerns from parents. LGBTQ teachers additionally need comfort in being out in the classroom through support from their administration and school community. If these four changes occur, the role of protector of students is met, giving way to role models students of any sexuality can emulate.

2.3 Coming Out in the Classroom

The decision to come out in the classroom is complex as there are many distinct people, processes, and points of view to consider. “Gay and lesbian students and educators often exist in isolation, all within the same building” (Bellini, 2012, p. 383). This statement outlines a need for teachers to come out, asserting their identity to build a community. Coming out is not limited to a declarative statement or speech, and is not solely about the act itself, but the process as well (Khayatt, 1997; Rasmussen, 2004). There are non-verbal cues and more ambiguous ways of assuming one’s sexuality. “Does it not perpetuate the invisibility of gay and lesbian teachers and students” (Elliott, 1996, p. 698) to not come out with a declarative statement? “How is it possible to state one’s outness in the classroom without freezing one’s identity” when identity is seen to “change and transform over time” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 148)? These are some of the questions asked in the literature addressing coming out in the classroom. The literature is split between explicit and implicit coming out acts, and those for and against it. Rasmussen shows this
contradiction in the material when he says, “dominant discourses relating to lesbian and gay politics tend to offer no moral alternative BUT to come out” and the “notion that sexual identity is somehow essential becomes conflated with the idea that coming out is also somehow essential” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 146). Is coming out a necessary act or a choice that can be made by the teacher? A division between public and private lives comes into question. “The construction of divisions between public and private spheres must be constantly renegotiated by teachers and students who are not heterosexual identified” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 147). “Who we are matters to our teaching every bit as much as what we teach and how we choose to teach it” (Turner, 2010, p. 287). Should teachers be asked to carry two identities with them, one public and one private?

Coming out is a different experience and has a different meaning for everyone (Khayatt, 1997; Rasmussen, 2004). “The decision to come out is pedagogically sound and interpersonally healthy” (Russ, Simonds & Hunt, 2002, p. 321). In the end, there is a “need for gay and lesbian educators to come out” (Bellini, 2012, p. 390), but “the decision whether or not to come out in class must remain with the individual teacher” (Khayatt, 1997, p. 141). The support for and opposition to coming out, addressing homophobia and heteronormativity, and supporting LGBTQ students are the three main points of concern when coming out in the classroom.

2.3.1 Support for and opposition to coming out. According to The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct written by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012c), teachers “have the right to be safe, and to feel safe, in their school community” (p. 2). I would expect this to carry in all facets of their being, including their sexuality. Coming out in the classroom is seen as both an act to embrace and an act to fear. Sixty-four percent of LGBTQ
teachers do not believe they need to be closeted to protect their jobs (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Why is there any fear when policy has been in place for years to protect teachers from this exact situation? Teachers and students alike may choose to ignore their homosexuality in order to avoid the issues they would face. This ‘policy paradox’ emphasizes the perceived safe space mantra, while the LGBTQ experience is much different (Bellini, 2012). Is there truth to these fears? Once the act is done, a teacher cannot return to the closet or undo the act, and “sexuality inevitably becomes part of the classroom context” (Turner, 2010, p. 296). Didi Khayatt (1997) posits an uncommon point of view, countering the all or nothing view Turner (2010) carries: “coming out is not simply the opposite of being in the closet” (Khayatt, 1997, p. 131). The view that coming out is all or nothing “[conceals] the complexities inherent in self-describing according to contingent sexual and gender identities” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 145). “The act of not coming out may be read as an abdication of responsibility” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 146), but it is a personal choice that could align with the teacher's views. If the teachers who choose to stay closeted were instead heterosexual, would they discuss their personal lives with their students? Most likely not, but a sense of shame and guilt is pushed onto those queer teachers who choose to remain closeted (Rasmussen, 2004).

There is an assumption that coming out is a valuable task that is beneficial to the individual and their peers (Rasmussen, 2004). What value does coming out have in the classroom? “The decision to ‘come out’ has proven to be associated with significantly less anxiety and depression” (Russ, Simonds & Hunt, 2002, p. 321) and “may bring solace, alleviation of guilt, group acceptance, personal growth, [and] even self-transcendence” (Elliott, 1996, p. 698) to the life of the queer teacher. The weight of keeping this secret is too much for some teachers to carry. While the act itself can be viewed as simple, there is more to coming out
than revealing one’s sexual identity. Racial and ethnic backgrounds, age, religious affiliations and familial threats regarding the withdrawal of financial support can contribute to this fear of coming out, for students and teachers alike (Rasmussen, 2004). The “emotional and physical tolls of public self-disclosure that most coming-out narratives reveal” (Elliott, 1996, p. 694) are often not seen or discussed, with teachers handling this in private. “The process of coming out to students through the use of a declarative statement… may be pedagogically unsound” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 148). Russ, Simonds, and Hunt (2002) found that “homophobic students often feel psychologically distanced after their teacher discloses that he/she is gay” (p. 318). Is this risk worth the discussed rewards? Schneider and Dimito (2008) believe so, stating that “the individuals who were more out were more likely to be active, to report harassment, to be aware of resources, and to feel supported and protected” (p. 64). This benefit to both teacher and student is clear, but what about the negative aspects of staying closeted? “Passing and secrecy are destructive to self-acceptance and political change” (Elliott, 1996, p. 698) and “only further perpetuates the myth that homosexuality is bad and something of which to be ashamed” (Bellini, 2012, p. 386). The need to address heteronormativity and combat homophobia may be the most relevant case for coming out.

2.3.2 Addressing heteronormativity and homophobia. One of the most effective ways to change heteronormative and cis-normative attitudes in schools is through frequent, multi-faceted contact with queer people in order to normalize LGBTQ lives and disrupt traditional queer stereotypes (Rasmussen, 2004; Waldo & Kemp, 1997). These authors show “coming out as [a] prime method for reducing negative attitudes and acts of prejudice against sexual identity minorities” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 145). Waldo and Kemp (1997) performed a study to see if
these statements were accurate. They found that “students in the gay instructor’s course section exhibited improved attitudes” (Waldo & Kemp, 1997, p. 79) with respect to sexual minorities whereas “the attitudes of the students in the heterosexual instructors’ course sections did not significantly change” (Waldo & Kemp, 1997, p. 87). Waldo and Kemp (1997) articulate that both teachers carried the same value system regarding homosexuality in order to show the causal factor being the sexuality of the teacher. Would the same effect be seen if the out gay teachers were instead in the closet? Would students’ attitudes only change with an out queer teacher?

While coming out works to fight the prejudice faced in the classroom, homophobia is still pervasive in our school system, as argued earlier in the chapter. However, all of the studies are taken from the context of colleges and universities. There is a noticeable gap of studies directed at secondary schools, specifically the effect of a teacher coming out in a high school setting. “Schools seem to work from the assumption that all individuals, students and staff are or should be heterosexual, which leads to inequitable practices” (Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012, p. 258). The importance of having out queer teachers in a school's faculty is necessary for LGBTQ teachers and students to validate their lived experiences and normalize this diversity (Elliott, 1996; Smith, 1998; Turner, 2010). This “challenges dominant thinking and institutional heterosexism” (Elliott, 1996, p. 698) seen throughout the secondary school system. The literature emphasizes coming out in the classroom as the most effective tool to combat students’ homophobic attitudes, speak up for equal rights, reduce prejudice and biases, bring about social change, fight stereotypes, validate diversity, encourage openness, and create a positive atmosphere, humanizing the classroom (Bellini, 2012; Khayatt, 1997; Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002; Turner, 2010; Waldo & Kemp, 1997).

These ideas aim to show that coming out is a necessary act, one that must be done for the
benefit of the community. “The closet is a function not of homosexuality, but of compulsory heterosexuality” (Khayatt, 1997, p. 140). Should we feel the need to come out of a construct imposed upon us by the sexual majority? “The ambiguity of the teacher’s sexual orientation could prove to be more pedagogically challenging for students than the teacher’s coming out with a declarative statement” (Khayatt, 1997, p. 135). “The direction of the act is always from the gay or lesbian speaker to the straight listener” (Elliott, 1996, p. 705) and “heterosexuals make no equivalent declarative statement; therefore, when [LGBTQ people] come out, they are effectively reinforcing the hegemony of heterosexuality” (Khayatt, 1997, p. 140). This hierarchy of sexuality is necessary to keep in mind. If the act of coming out is only done from homosexual to heterosexual, is there any effect of coming out on other queer people, specifically students? The act of coming out must thus be used as an attempt to dismantle the need for a heterosexually-constructed closet and a need to come out at all. If this act were seen as unnecessary in the future, the hegemony of heterosexuality would cease to exist, destroying the heteronormativity seen in the classroom.

2.3.3 Supporting LGBTQ students. Does coming out in the classroom as a teacher serve as a tool to support LGBTQ students? This question is answered with a resounding “yes” from most of the literature, for different reasons. Didi Khayatt (1997), however, disagrees with the view that “coming out… supports lesbian and gay students” (p. 128). She asks the question, “How does a teacher’s revealing her sexual orientation provide support to students?” (Khayatt, 1997, p. 133) This question carries value in that it is necessary to answer in order to defend the act of coming out as a form of support. By coming out, queer students have a model, a person for support that can “increase a sense of belonging as well as to increase the likelihood that the
student would officially report incidents of harassment or assault to school officials” (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010, p. 311). To “[facilitate] the unlearning of prejudice” (Elliott, 1996, p. 698) for all students, the process as well as the act of coming out should be emphasized by queer teachers. Schneider and Dimito (2008) imitate this idea, stating that “LGBT teachers… [are] the source of first-hand information” (p. 50). The act of informant is vital to LGBTQ students. “[Queer students] need out role models in their schools who know what they are going through and can perhaps offer some advice or wisdom” (Bellini, 2012, p. 390). While heterosexual teachers may sympathize, having that lived experience sets out queer teachers apart. This allows for a healthy dialogue for many students, strengthening the relationship between teacher and student. “It is not acceptable when even one child in [the teachers’] care goes home disenfranchised, uneducated, failing, or forgotten” (Turner, 2010, p. 296). Rasmussen (2004) enforces this idea, that “coming out … [increases] the well being of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals” (p. 145) and that “the act of not coming out may be read as … [shake] in their inherent gayness” (p. 146). This idea of pride is carried throughout the literature, which can come as a point of difference between queer teachers as discussed earlier in the chapter. Is it shameful to not come out explicitly in the classroom? Does it show you are ashamed of your sexuality, or does it show that they may carry different values than the teachers who choose to come out? In the end, the pros outweigh the cons: “instructors who come out in the classroom have the potential to validate the self-worth and self-esteem of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students” (Russ, Simonds & Hunt, 2002, p. 321). While Russ, Simonds and Hunt (2002) found that this applied to American college students, does the same statement carry for Canadian high school students?
2.4 Theoretical Framework

I will analyze the data I have collected with the use of two theoretical frameworks: transformative learning theory and queer theory. I will outline the two theories individually before discussing how they work together and how this aggregated framework applies to my work.

Transformative learning theory is a theory of adult education that was developed by Jack Mezirow (1981, 1994, 1997), taking influence from Paulo Freire and Jürgen Habermas. Freire described transformative learning as a ‘conscientization’, the raising of students’ consciousness (Dirkx, 1998). Freire’s ideas are rooted in political liberation and freedom from oppression, where people are subjects, not objects, in constant reflection to improve the world in which they live by making it more equitable for all (Dirkx, 1998; Taylor, 2008). Thus, Freire’s ‘conscientization’ is a call to social action through this raised awareness. Mezirow (1994) expanded upon this idea when he stated: “Learning is defined as the social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to action” (p. 222). Through Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, students undergo perspective transformation, or changes in frames of reference, through critical (self-)reflection and rational discourse (Dirkx, 1998; Mezirow, 1981, 1994, 1997; Taylor, 2007, 2008). Our perspectives are an accumulation of the beliefs, values, and assumptions we use to interpret the world in which we live (Dirkx, 1998; Mezirow, 1994, 1997). We have a tendency to reject ideas that do not fit into our frames of reference, but critical reflection, discourse, feedback, and action can re-construct key assumptions of these perspectives (Dirkx, 1998; Mezirow, 1981, 1994, 1997; Taylor, 2007, 2008). In his 1991 book *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Mezirow outlined the 11 steps for transformative learning:
1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, sometimes turning to religion for support
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisionally trying out new roles
9. Renegotiating relationship and negotiating new relationships
10. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
11. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective

By working through these 11 steps, learners are able to undergo the transformative learning that Mezirow (1991) seeks. Transformative learning “mov[es us] toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). This perspective transformation is context-dependent, enduring, and irreversible (Taylor, 2007). In the end, transformative learning aims to helps learners to develop autonomous thinking: the ability to interpret the world through our own perspective instead of someone else’s (Mezirow, 1997).

While transformative learning theory is a tenet of adult education, I will be applying this framework to childhood education, specifically at the secondary level. In order to accomplish
transformative learning, teachers need to prepare their students to engage in this style of learning with their classes (Taylor, 2007). Mezirow (1997) furthers this idea when he stated: “To facilitate transformative learning, educators must help learners become aware and critical of their own and others’ assumptions” (p. 10). This necessary student awareness and readiness can also be seen in the work of queer theorists, as critique of social order and categorization requires prior understanding before discourse.

Queer theory emerged in the late 1980s, drawing on the work of Foucault, pushing Lesbian and Gay studies of the time, seen as lacking inclusion of the spectrum of identities found when discussing sexual and gender identity, toward a more disruptive and discursive framework (Green, 2007; Stein & Plummer, 1994). Foucault’s work spoke to the ability of sexuality to form self-identity through the time and place in which it is built (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Green, 2007; Stein & Plummer, 1994). Queer theory simultaneously embraces and fights this formation and policing of identity (Green, 2007), “embrac[ing] the indeterminacy of the gay category” (Stein & Plummer, 1994, p. 181). Through critical analysis, queer theory unpacks the meaning of ‘identity’, resisting the “oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender” (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 620). As Green (2007) outlines, there are two streams of queer theory: ‘radical deconstructionism’ and ‘radical subversion’. Radical deconstructionism can be seen as the critique of categorization, with respect to gender and sexual identity, by ‘queering’ and dismantling the traditional understanding of identity labels, problematizing these categories in an effort to resist stable identities (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Green, 2007; Stein & Plummer, 1994). Radical subversion is the resistance to the hegemony of heteronormativity, “locating nonheteronormative practices and subjects as crucial sites of resistance” (Green, 2007, p. 28). This deconstruction and disruption is a form of politics, dismantling traditionally seen gender
and sexual binaries in an effort to strengthen the “other” (Stein & Plummer, 1994). Heteronormativity privileges heterosexuality, creating the binary between heterosexual and non-heterosexual, herding all non-heterosexual identities into one group without distinguishable differences, reinforcing hegemonic patriarchal power structures in society (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Queer theory, specifically radical subversion, works to fight this heteronormativity (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Where deconstructionism is the critique of category, subversion is the critique of the power structures given to these categories. Both streams “[aim] to ‘denaturalize’ dominant social classifications and, in turn, destabilize social order” (Green, 2007, p. 28). Stein and Plummer (1994) speak to three scholars in their overview of queer theory: Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and Andrew Parker. Butler (1990) spoke of the “unwritten and written codes of heterosexualized gender systems”, Sedgwick (1990) discusses “[the] paradigmatic case in the homosexual and the closet”, and Parker (1994) writes that “sexuality is constitutive of class categories” (Stein & Plummer, 1994, p. 181). These three authors outline important facets seen in the two streams of queer theory: that heterosexual identities carry power over non-heterosexual identities and that this power is utilized to designate social order. Queer theory emphasizes the instability of gender, as it is performed and created in society through learned action, and of sexuality, as it “chang[es] as the individual affects society and as society affects the individual” (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 621). By transgressing the traditional gender and sexual categories, queer theory normalizes queerness by putting it in contrast to the established norm and calling it deviant, denouncing the oppressive characteristics of heterosexuality (Kumashiro, 2003; Stein & Plummer, 1994).

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4 “Other” here is used outline the idea of minority as “other”. This emphasizes the strength of binaries as it relates to sexual and gender identity, where heterosexual and homosexual are two traditional categories, leaving all other identifications as “other”.
Both queer theory and transformative learning theory are rooted in social justice, with transformative learning seeing social change in the change of the individual and queer theory seeing social change in disrupting hegemonic patriarchal structures of education and society (Kumashiro, 2003; Taylor, 2008). Both theories aim to help the learner identify problems related to these power structures that have been internalized throughout our personal histories (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Mezirow, 1981, 1994). Mezirow (1997) emphasizes the discussion of ‘life histories’ as a method for enacting transformative learning. Queer theory, in this respect, can be seen as the ‘life history’ of the queer community. These ‘life histories’ can outline established societal norms with respect to gender and sexual identity, where a transformative learning facilitator “encourages learners to create norms that accept order, justice, and civility in the classroom and respect and responsibility for helping each other learn; to welcome diversity” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). Both queer theory and transformative learning theory aim to diversify societal norms, pressing both our personal and societal attitudes to their boundaries in an effort to enact justice (Green, 2007; Mezirow, 1997). The transformative learning teacher, through reflection and discourse, aims to help students determine the difference between truth and validity of beliefs they carry (Mezirow, 1994). This idea can be carried over to queer theory, where students are asked to critically reflect on the beliefs they carry, specifically with respect to sexual and gender identity, and then act upon these newly-formed thoughts. Some transformative learning scholars “place much greater emphasis on positionality (where one’s ‘position’ is relative to race, class, gender, sexual orientation) and its relationship to both the process and the practice of transformative learning” (Taylor, 2008, p. 10). Through this mutual approach to social justice through a sharing of personal histories to diversify our thoughts and actions which, in turn, disrupts societal norms and power structures, transformative learning theory embraces
the core concepts of queer theory. In my data analysis, I will speak to the implications of these theoretical frameworks to my data and they ways in which they can further the applications of my findings.

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review, I look at research on homophobia in schooling, non-curriculum based teacher duties that take place in the classroom, and the impact of coming out in the classroom. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to LGBTQ rights and the impact that these laws and views have. It also raises questions about the ever-changing role the teacher has in the classroom and points to the need for further research in this area. In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn about the impact of coming out in the classroom on high school students and the role it takes so that we can improve the emotional support and self-perception of queer students. In the following chapter, I detail the research methodology of the study.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the research methodology. I begin by explaining the research approach and procedures. I describe the instruments of data collection, providing support for the choice of instrument. I then outline the criteria for participant sampling and the procedure for participant recruitment. Additionally, I include participant biographies, giving an overview of the participants with whom I conducted interviews. Next, I describe data analysis procedures and ethical considerations relevant to my study. Citing the related literature, I detail the strengths and limits of the methodology. I conclude the chapter with an outline of the methodological decisions I have made, along with a rationale for these decisions, given the purpose and questions of my research.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review. The essence of qualitative research is in its naturalistic approach: studying people in their usual setting in an effort to make sense of the phenomena they experience (Jones, 1995; Marshall, 1996; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). By talking directly to people and observing their actions, researchers can garner more focused and specific information (Creswell, 2012; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). Marshall (1996) states that, “improved understanding of complex human issues is more important than generalizability of results” (p. 524) when discussing the strength of qualitative research over its quantitative counterpart. Carr (1994) highlights this strength when he describes qualitative research as a way of seeing the world from the eyes of the subject instead of those of the researcher. With this, the “focus turns
to understanding human beings’ richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences” (Jackson II, Drummond, & Camara, 2007, p. 22).

Why was a qualitative approach the most applicable to my study? In his paper, Creswell (2012) argues that, “we conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored… [and] need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue… only established by talking directly with people” (p. 47). Through interpersonal connections developed during my interviews, I was able to understand the ways participants addressed the problem I was studying (Creswell, 2012). Due to the context of my research, a quantitative approach, with statistics and its subsequent analysis, were not appropriate (Creswell, 2012). The ability to learn how my participants thought and felt about their experiences and circumstances was more important than whether I believed they were statistically valid (Thorne, 2000). Participants were able to “offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experience” (Jackson II, Drummond, & Camara, 2007, p. 23) “within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, and the reflexivity or ‘presence’ of the researchers in the accounts they present” (Creswell, 2012, p. 45). This internal view of LGBTQ culture was necessary to undertake in order to answer my research questions. In the end, Thorne (2000) summarizes why a qualitative approach was best suited for my research topic: “if the findings ‘rang true’ to the intended audience, then the qualitative study was considered successful” (p. 70).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

There are many different modes of data collection utilized in qualitative research: interviews (unstructured, semi-structured and structured), focus groups, case studies, ethnography, participant observation, narratives, and written and audiovisual materials (DiCicco-
Of these approaches, “semi-structured in-depth interviews are the most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315), and is the primary instrument for data collection used in this study. Creswell (2012) defines the semi-structured interview protocol as “open-ended questions… designed by the researcher… [that] do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers” (p. 45). This research style led to qualitative data “[consisting] of interview transcripts from open ended, focused, but exploratory interviews” (Thorne, 2000, p. 68). Due to the scope of the study, where documentation of detailed stories and personal experiences through open and direction questioning was necessary to answer the research questions, this approach was used (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

In their article, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) discuss the appropriate number of questions to be asked during semi-structured interviews (10 to 15), and how this number provides strong answers, while still allowing for the alteration and addition of questions as the research process continues and the researcher learns more about the subject of study. They also speak to the productivity of digression during an interview, stating that an interviewer should follow the interests and knowledge of their interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000) argue: “the knowledge gained through the interview affects our understanding of the human experience” (p. 94) and is used to inform our understanding of the topic being studied and answer the research questions. An emic perspective is achieved through autonomous participants willingly sharing information and experiences (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000). These perspectives are shared to “explore meaning and perceptions to gain a better understanding”, but interpretation and analysis is left to the researcher (DiCicco-Bloom &
Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). It is for this depth of understanding and difference of perception and knowledge that the research protocol called for the use of semi-structured interviews of a small, select group of participants.

3.3 Participants

Sampling in qualitative studies has to take into consideration not only the participant’s characteristics and experiences, but also the context of the study (Marshall, 1996). In this section, I review the sampling criteria I utilized for participant recruitment and outline possible approaches for this recruitment. I have also included a section for participant biographies, where I introduce each participant individually.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria. The quality of the research carried out is determined by the sample selected (Coyne, 1997). In order to select a sample, participants must meet certain requirements, “[sharing] critical similarities related to the research question” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). The following criteria were used when initially selecting teacher participants for interview:

1. Teachers will identify on the LGBTQ spectrum.
2. Teachers will not all have the same identification.
3. Teachers will have had strong connections with students and classes.
4. Teachers will have some experience with homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and/or other sexual minority discrimination.
5. Teachers will have worked primarily as secondary school teachers.
6. Teachers will have worked in the Greater Toronto Area.
Due to the sampling circumstances, the participants fulfilled all of these criteria except for number 2, which asked that the teachers not all have the same identification. In this study, both participants identified as queer/gay males.

To address the main research question, the teachers that I interviewed needed to self-identify on the LGBTQ spectrum. I interviewed a variety of identifications in order to obtain a variety of experiences and responses. I wanted to be able to see the effect of coming out in the classroom for many identifications, not just one. To see the effect of coming out on their students, the teachers I interviewed needed to have strong connections with their classes and students to be able to aptly discuss their perceptions of the attitudes and development of their students. Teachers needed to have experienced discrimination based on sexual minority themselves or have seen this type of discrimination occur in order to speak to the difference between positive and negative perceptions and actions toward the LGBTQ community. To control for student age as a variable, teachers worked primarily at the secondary level. To control for geography as a variable, teachers worked in the Greater Toronto Area and will speak to experiences in this locale.

3.3.2 Recruitment procedures. In qualitative research, all sampling is purposeful sampling (Coyne, 1997). Marshall (1996) states that purposeful sampling “actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question… [through] developing a framework of the variables that might influence an individual’s contribution” (p. 523). Creswell (2012) adds to this definition when he states that the investigator selects interviewees based on an ability to “inform an understanding of the research problem” (p. 154). However, there are other factors at play when selecting a sample for qualitative research: sample size, comfort of participants, and
richness of experience may all affect the sample. First, “an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). I believe a sample size of two was adequate to answer the research question, but made changes during the data collection phase as needed. Second, Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000) discussed comfort of interviewees in their article when they said, “the desire to participate in a research study depends upon a participant’s willingness to share his or her experiences” (p. 93). I wanted my participants to feel comfortable discussing their experiences and views as LGBTQ people. Third, some participants may be viewed as having ‘richer’ experiences than others, providing insight, understanding, and knowledge of the issue being studied to the research (Coyne, 1997; Marshall, 1996). These participants are described by Creswell (2012) as ‘information-rich’. Both teacher participants had come out in the classroom, which I viewed as a ‘richer’ experience because it more directly addressed my research questions and provided a different perspective from a participant who had not come out in the classroom.

In addition to purposeful sampling, other techniques were used during participant recruitment, as “there is no perfect way to sample” (Marshall, 1996, p. 524). I utilized convenience sampling, which “[involves] the selection of the most accessible subjects” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523) and “saves time, money, and effort” (Creswell, 2012, p. 156), but “may result in poor quality data and lacks intellectual credibility” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). I understood that convenience sampling may have affected the quality and validity of my data, but, due to the time frame of the study, was necessary. There were elements of critical case sampling, described as “subjects who have specific experiences” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523), and stratified sampling, which “illustrates subgroups and facilitates comparisons” (Creswell, 2012, p. 156), in my research. As outlined in my sampling criteria, by sampling different identifications of the
LGBTQ spectrum, I was hoping to make comparisons across these subgroups for participants who have had the specific experience of being an LGBTQ educator in a secondary classroom. Finally, I utilized snowball sampling, where “subjects may be able to recommend useful potential candidates for study” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523), which can identify cases that are information-rich (Creswell, 2012).

With these sampling procedures in mind, I recruited participants by attending LGBTQ conferences hosted by the Toronto District School Board, contacting online LGBTQ teacher associations and providing them with an overview of my study along with participant criteria, and relying on my community of teacher colleagues, mentor teachers, and existing contacts. Through these different approaches, I was able to obtain participants for my study.

3.3.3 Participant biographies. My first interview was with Cady Heron. At the time of our interview, he had been a guidance counsellor for two years at a Toronto public secondary school in the Conseil Scolaire Viamonde. Before becoming a guidance counsellor, Cady worked as an English teacher for four and a half years. He identifies as a gay man, sometimes preferring to identify as a queer man.

My second interview was with Elle Woods. At the time of our interview, he had worked for four years at a Toronto private school and then for another four years at a Toronto public secondary school in the Conseil Scolaire Viamonde. He taught photography, fine arts, communications technology, film studies, and French. He, like Cady, identifies as a gay man, but sometimes prefers to identify as a queer man.

3.4 Data Analysis
After I conducted my interviews, I analyzed the data. I began by transcribing my interviews. After transcription, I coded each case individually. A code is “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). From here, I looked for patterns, assigning categories to these codes (Creswell, 2012; Saldana, 2009). “Coding is thus a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or ‘families’ because they share some characteristic” (Saldana, 2009, p. 8). Once I finished categorization, these categories were made into more comprehensive themes (Creswell, 2012; Saldana, 2009). “A theme is a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means… [and] brings meaning and identity to a recurrent [patterned] experience and its variant manifestations… [capturing and unifying] the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (Saldana, 2009, p. 139). I then compared my transcripts, looking for categories across interviews and synthesizing themes where appropriate through reflection with the use of analytic memos (Creswell, 2012; Saldana, 2009). Additionally, I looked at null data, that which my participants did not speak to. This approach to data analysis is known as the template approach: using codes to tag sections of text, sorting them into categories, and combining those categories into themes, based on prior research and theories (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). It is important to keep in mind that “coding and analysis are not synonymous, though coding is a crucial aspect of analysis” (Basit, 2003, p. 145). The analytic goal was to develop either an overarching theme from the data or an integrative theme that weaves different themes into a narrative (Saldana, 2009). It is from analysis and reflection that meaning emerged from the themes, which spoke to the research questions directly.
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

When conducting qualitative research, the design of the methodology requires an ethical review procedure. “Ethical issues are present in any kind of research… [but] harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles” (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000, p. 93). Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000) outline some of the necessary ethical considerations: the appropriateness of the research and methodological design, the behaviours in reporting data, the researcher/participant relationship, the researcher’s subjective interpretations of data, informed consent, confidentiality, and the reporting of final outcomes. There were minimal risks associated with participation in this study. However, due to the content of the material found in the interviews, while there are “potential therapeutic benefits of participants’ reviving unpleasant memories” (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000, p. 93), I obtained ongoing consent and was able to “provide psychological support” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 319) if the questions triggered an emotional response from the participants. I “ha[d] the obligation to anticipate the possible outcomes of an interview and to weight both benefits and potential harm” (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000, p. 94).

To minimize this risk, I notified my participants of their right to refrain from answering any question that made them uncomfortable. I understood that ethical dilemmas would arise that were not anticipated in the research protocol (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000). While the research protocol was designed with ethical considerations in mind, “the research protocol also should provide enough information ensuring protection of human subjects… [and] such protocols must give details of the manner in which the study will be conducted, followed by details of access to participants, informed consent, and access and storage of data” (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000, p. 95).
Three main ethical principles were kept in consideration during the research and methodological design: autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). Autonomy refers to the interviewee’s privacy (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). Informed consent was provided to participants through “the recognition of participants’ rights, including the right to be informed about the study, the right to freely decide whether to participate in a study, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty” (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000, p. 95). This right to privacy, safety and protection of rights was maintained through informed consent and effective conveyance of the nature and details of the study, while keeping ethical and legal issues in consideration (Carr, 1994; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). This took the form of a letter of consent (Appendix A) that was signed by participants prior to participation. This letter of consent provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specified the expectations of participation (1, 45-60 minute semi-structured interview). By masking their names in the data through the use of pseudonyms and removing identifying markers and traits, the information of participants was protected (Creswell, 2012; Di-Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Beneficence was defined by Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000, p. 95) as “doing good for others and preventing harm”. The use of pseudonyms took into consideration “the potential consequences of revealing participants’ identities” (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000, p. 95). Participants were told how the results of the study would be published, and the study was designed to reduce the risk of unanticipated harm, while keeping ethical and legal obligations in mind (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000). Consent for tape-recording was included in the letter of consent and participants were made aware of the fact that the recorded data was stored on a password-protected computer, to be destroyed up to five years
after transcription (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). “Justice in qualitative research studies is demonstrated by recognizing vulnerability of the participants and their contributions to the study” (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000, p. 95). One of the main standards of trustworthiness is member-checking (Jackson II, Drummond, Camara, 2007).

Member-checking “involves collaborating with the participants interactively” by providing them the transcripts and subsequent data analysis “so that they have a chance to shape the themes or abstractions that emerge from the process” (Creswell, 2012, p. 45). “Member-checking assists in validating qualitative research findings, as themes and descriptions are taken back to participants to determine whether or not participants feel they are accurate” (Jackson II, Drummond, Camara, 2007, p. 26) and may combat the subjectivity of the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000). The aim of justice in the ethical review procedure was to “[reduce] the risk of exploitation” of the participants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 319). In allowing for autonomy, beneficence, and justice to take control of the design phase of the study, the needs of the participants were the priority in order to strengthen the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, properly outlining the risks associated with participation.

### 3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

There are strengths and limitations associated with any research design. One of the major limitations in this research design was its scope. Due to ethical limitations, the semi-structured interviews could only be conducted with teachers, not students or parents. Additionally, relatively few interviews were conducted with teachers. When conducting qualitative research, there is often a “misapprehension that generalizability is the ultimate goal of all good research”
(Marshall, 1996, p. 523) and “[produces] ‘soft’ data which were, and are still described by some, as being inadequate in providing answers and generating any changes” (Carr, 1994, p. 717). This limitation, that a lack of generalizability is due to the small number of participants (Jackson II, Drummond, Camara, 2007), could also be seen as one of the research design’s strengths. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed for the collection of meaningful, honest, and valuable data through first-hand experiences of the teachers interviewed (Carr, 1994). Carr (1994) states that this approach “[allowed] for flexibility and the attachment of a deeper, more valid understanding of the subject than could be achieved through a more rigid approach” (p. 178) such as structured interviews or surveys, as seen in quantitative research.

Participants were also able to provide insight and raise issues the researcher may not have considered, adding to the quality of the research (Carr, 1994). Semi-structured interviews allowed for “more flexibility and responsiveness to emerging themes” (Jackson II, Drummond, Camara, 2007, p. 25) while “[allowing] the interviewer to delve deeply into social and personal matters” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315) both for themselves and the participant. While a small sample is not ideal, in ignoring the attempt at generalizability, a more meaningful experience could be drawn from the interviews and new ideas could be discovered. I was reassured that the data and themes were representative of my studied participants through member-checking, and recognized my personal subjectivity as a threat to the validity of the study had I not acknowledged my bias during data analysis, leading to a more purposeful protection of the trustworthiness of the data and subsequent analysis (Carr, 1994; Jackson II, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). The external validity of the experiment was kept to a higher degree, as the participants were interviewed “in their natural setting and [encountered] fewer controlling factor” (Carr, 1994, p. 719). Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden, (2000) describe other “benefits of
qualitative interviews as catharsis, self-acknowledgement, sense of purpose, self-awareness, empowerment, healing, and providing a voice for the disenfranchised” (p. 94). The participants had their experiences, thoughts, feelings, ideas, and reflections heard and validated through the interviews. It is clear that the strengths associated with qualitative research and semi-structured interviews outweigh their limitations.

3.7 Conclusion

I began this chapter with an overview of the methodological decisions made during my study. I defined qualitative research and explained it’s benefits and purpose with respect to the context of my research. I then outlined the different ways of collecting qualitative data and spoke to the reasons why semi-structured interviews were the most relevant to my work. Next, I discussed my participants - the criteria I applied to my participants during recruitment, the different sampling techniques I utilized, and the background of each participant. I described the template approach I used to analyze my data. I then spoke to the necessity of an ethical review procedure, highlighting the importance of autonomy, beneficence, and justice needed when working with interviewed participants. I finished the chapter by detailing the limitations and strengths of the methodology, semi-structured interviews, found in my qualitative research. In the following chapter, I report the research findings from my interviews.
Chapter 4: Thematic Analysis

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I illustrate the analysis of the findings from my qualitative study. As outlined in the previous chapter, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two queer-identifying male teachers, who have been given the pseudonyms Cady and Elle to protect their identities. These participants were recruited through purposeful, convenience, and critical case sampling while attending a conference on LGBTQ issues in education in Toronto. The interviews were transcribed, which then underwent the coding process. Once the data had been coded, categorization could occur. After this categorization, the transcriptions were reviewed once more in a second round of coding. Analytic memos were written during this entire process, which helped to refine the themes outlined in this chapter. These themes directly address the research questions posed in Chapter 1. The study’s purpose, which the research questions aim to fulfill, is to understand the multi-layered effects of the process and act of a teacher’s coming out in the classroom on LGBTQ students.

The first theme addresses the over-arching research question: How does having out LGBTQ teachers (or a lack thereof) affect LGBTQ students’ personal development and self-perception? This theme outlines the deeper level of comfort LGBTQ students possess with out queer teachers, shown by the personal information they are willing to disclose, and the choice they make in talking to an out teacher instead of a more traditional resource, a guidance counsellor. The data also shows that one of the main reasons as to why the participants wanted to be out in the classroom is that they felt their experience as queer students could have benefited from having an out queer teacher role model. These ideas reflect the impact having an out LGBTQ teacher has on the personal development LGBTQ students may undergo in schools.
The second theme addresses two subsidiary research questions: 1) Are there barriers in place that prevent LGBTQ teachers from feeling comfortable being out in the classroom? If so, what are they? and 2) Do LGBTQ teachers have an impact on non-LGBTQ identifying students’ personal awareness, views, and possible implicit bias towards LGBTQ communities? If so, what is this impact? This theme emphasizes the effect of a student’s personal and family values on a teacher’s comfort in being out in the classroom. These personal and family values are seen in systemic attitudes and beliefs of society, and the cultural and religious values families pass on to their children. The data from this theme also details how queer teachers attempt to rupture this system of values and attitudes from within.

The third theme speaks to the final secondary research question: How might we identify ‘appropriate’ coming out procedures for teachers, or are there multiple ways of achieving the same goal? If so, what is it / are they? Through the data, it is clear that coming out is a personal and situational decision. This decision is one that is difficult to make, and, once made, allows queer teachers to be out to different degrees: a verbal outing, a non-outing, or an assumption as to the teacher’s identity, from the point of views of students. This decision, of whether to come out or not, is influenced by many factors.

These three themes and their sub-themes will be analyzed using previous literature, queer theory, and transformative learning theory to illustrate how the data speaks to the impact that a LGBTQ teacher’s coming out can have in the classroom, if they feel comfortable and supported in making that decision. This new understanding of the impact of coming out in the classroom points to future directions for research and educational practice.
4.1 Student Comfort with Out Queer Teachers

When looking to the purpose (and primary research question) of the study, I wanted to see the impact that having an out queer teacher in the classroom could have. LGBTQ students are more comfortable with their out teachers than with other teachers and guidance counsellors, disclosing personal information and choosing to come out to these teachers, who did not have the same out LGBTQ teacher role models growing up. These ideas are reflected in the literature, which speaks to the importance of queer teachers as role models for LGBTQ students, to improve their comfort and sympathize with their current situations (Bellini, 2012; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Additionally, this theme directly contradicts the idea that coming out or being out has no impact on LGBTQ students or their comfort in schools (Khayatt, 1997).

4.1.1 Disclosing personal information. Queer students feel comfortable opening up to their out teachers, telling these teachers about their personal struggles, their home lives, and their understanding of their sexualities. Both Cady and Elle had experiences with multiple students coming out to them, sometimes being the first person that student had come out to. Both participants also spoke to an unexpected or unknown impact they could be having on students, both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ, in coming out and being out. Elle spoke of a student who asked him to “save her” from the program that her mother was trying to get her into to change or ‘correct’ her sexuality. Elle outlined that this relationship with his students is built through his open identity. This relationship was emphasized when he spoke to one of his gay students who warned him about a homophobic student who would be entering his classes that year. We see that the relationship is not unidirectional, but is from student to teacher and teacher to student.
What I see through the data is the development of a queer student-teacher relationship. This relationship is one that “recognizes the role of feelings” and serves as a more holistic approach to transformative learning (Taylor, 2008, p. 11). This increased comfort and well-being of LGBTQ students can be shown in knowing who to speak to, in having this queer relationship between teacher and student. This idea is often spoken to in the literature, with both agreement (Rasmussen, 2004; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010) and disagreement (Khayatt, 1997). Having someone to turn to in difficult situations, such as having a parent who disagrees with your identity, validates your self-worth and self-esteem, supporting the emotional needs of the student (Bellini, 2012; Lumpkin, 2008; Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002). This support fits directly with the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012c) expectations of supporting emotional needs of students. Mezirow (1991) speaks to this emotional support in the fourth step when undergoing transformative learning, when the learner sees that their feelings and transformation have been shared, that someone else has undergone a similar change. This is the core of the queer student-teacher relationship: in being able to see that someone else, a teacher, has fought with their feelings, been bullied and harassed, struggled with their family’s acceptance, and came out allows the student to undergo a personal transformation. This ‘queering’ of the student-teacher relationship is reflective of the ideals of queer theorists such as Kumashiro (2003). I would not expect all guidance counsellors to have been able to develop this sort of relationship with students, since some do not have classes in which they act as the teacher, and thus is not the resource literature often speaks to.

4.1.2 Out teacher preference over guidance counsellor. One of my interviewees, Cady, started working at his school as a teacher. He was out in his classroom and had positive
interactions and relationships with LGBTQ students. For this reason, the principal asked him to move into a guidance role as it was a “more natural fit” for Cady, where this administrator hoped he could have the same, and maybe even deeper, impact with LGBTQ students at the school. However, Cady noted that he had more students come out to him as a teacher than as a guidance counsellor. As a guidance counsellor, he “do[es not] think anyone has like come… to talk to me about their sexuality”, focusing more on mental health than the issue of identity. Elle, on the other hand, responded the way the literature often responds: that guidance counsellors are often the first support to students struggling with their gender or sexual identity. Bellini (2012) speaks to the necessity of consistent counselling to support queer students and the issues they face, and that LGBTQ teachers often feel that it is not part of their job description to talk to queer students about their queer lives. Walls, Kane, and Wisneski (2010) outline that LGBTQ students do not know who to turn to when working through their identity issues, be it teachers or guidance counsellors.

Transformative learning theory, according to Taylor (2007), necessitates an understanding of the readiness and awareness of the students, in this case with respect to their sexual and gender identities, before transformative learning can occur. This is done through an established, trusting relationship that can allow for discourse (Taylor, 2007). Guidance counsellors in schools traditionally do not teach classes, working in a separate office that students must enter in order to engage with a guidance counsellor. This office often has a multitude of resources, some related to identity and the LGBTQ community. However, because some guidance counsellors are not classroom teachers, acting as guidance counsellors full-time, this queer relationship I have outlined as necessary for a queer transformative learning cannot be fostered between counsellor and student. A queer teacher, on the other hand, sees the students
every day or every other day, interacting with the students in order to slowly build to this queer relationship. Without this relationship, guidance counsellors cannot assess a student’s awareness or readiness to engage in transformative learning to improve their self-awareness, self-esteem, and confidence (Bellini, 2012; Lumpkin, 2008; Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002). For this reason, it is clear why LGBTQ students choose to turn to their teachers instead of their guidance counsellors when looking for an out LGBTQ role model.

4.1.3 Lack of out LGBTQ role models. Both Cady and Elle noted that their decision to be in out in the classroom was in part due to the fact that they did not have out queer teacher role models growing up and wished that they had. Cady said that it was, “consciously one of the reasons why… I wanted to get into teaching”. He emphasized this point when he stated that, “if [he] had a teacher in [his] high school who was openly gay… [he] think[s] [he] would have felt… that there wasn’t necessarily something wrong about … [his] sexual orientation.” Both Cady and Elle wished that, whether their students were in the closet or not and whether it was because they were out or because of another our queer teacher, their students could find someone with whom they could relate and sympathize. Elle described his awareness of being a role model when he decided to become a teacher, and that this awareness impacts the views and attitudes he carries in class, specifically with respect to addressing harassment towards LGBTQ students and being open about his sexuality. Cady and Elle wanted their students to be taught differently than they were, to be in an environment that was more open and welcoming than the one in which they were raised.

In her paper, Khayatt (1997) argues that a person cannot choose to be a role model, and dissects the pressure queer people face to become role models. My interviewees both actively
chose to be role models, were aware of the impact their jobs would have on students, and wanted this experience to be different than their own. They directly dispute Khayatt's (1997) claims, and defend Bellini’s (2012) idea that queer students need queer role models for sympathy and understanding. They entered the teaching field because they lacked this sympathy and understanding growing up, hoping to have the effect Schneider and Dimito (2008) say that out teachers can have as positive LGBTQ role models.

My participants, in effect, underwent their own transformative learning. The first step in Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning process is a disorienting dilemma, which for Elle and Cady was the lack of queer teacher role models in their adolescent years. This ‘conscientization’, as Freire would call it, pushed them to social action after a raised awareness was developed (Dirkx, 1998). Cady and Elle became aware of the impact that not having an out LGBTQ teacher had on them, and changed their personal life trajectories to address this need. In doing this, Cady and Elle are participating in the radical subversion of queer theory, fighting the traditional heteronormative narrative through social action (Green, 2007). They became teachers in order to be the queer role models that they lacked growing up. Through their own transformative learning, my participants aimed to disrupt the norms of society in order to affect transformative learning in their students. This queer transformative learning is routed in the lack of out LGBTQ teachers present during their education, where this lack can be attributed to the systemic attitudes and beliefs in society, as well as the specific values students bring in to the classroom.

4.2 The Effect of Personal and Family Values of Students

Through my interviews, it became clear that a major barrier to feeling comfortable coming out in the classroom was the students and their families. More specifically, the values
and attitudes that these students and their families possess can be the deciding factor when a teacher is considering disclosing their sexual or gender identity to a classroom. These values can take two forms: the systemic attitudes and beliefs that society carries, which change through time, and the familial values, be they cultural or religious, that parents pass on to their children, interrupting this change over time. Some queer teachers, however, are able to break these attitudinal patterns in coming out in the classroom, fighting the damaging silence of heteronormativity in the school system (Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010).

### 4.2.1 Systemic attitudes and beliefs.

Homophobia has been a persistent issue in society, impacting the institutions of law, schooling, and family. The systemic attitudes and beliefs of these institutions seem to only change over time, with the acquisition of new knowledge and passing of legislation, like the Civil Marriage Act of 2005. The value of time, in this sense, was made clear by my participants. Elle and Cady, being the same age, outlined almost identical Catholic upbringings and how different of a world it was twenty years ago. Cady stated that “people didn’t even really talk about the possibility of same sex marriage” and that “being gay was like the absolute worst thing you could be”. Elle admits that “[he] thought [he] was gunna have to spend [his] whole life hiding”, pretending to be something he was not, distancing himself from his family, never to see them again. He discusses the gendered name calling and homophobic bullying he experienced, and how this type of gender and sexual discrimination is almost non-existent in his school today, though still a recurring issue. Cady emphasized that, with the Civil Marriage Act (2005), a new wave of accepting attitudes toward the queer community rushed in with the realization of the minimal impact this legislation had on non-
LGBTQ lives. He furthered this change of attitude when he said that he read in the news that 70% of Canadians are in favour of same sex marriage, a much larger percentage than 15 years earlier, before the legislation had passed. This idea of time and its value was made apparent during my interviews. Cady calls this noticeable change in attitudes over time a ‘social phenomenon’. In his interview, Elle related homophobia to misogyny, where “people treat gay men with the same disdain they treat women”. This comparison to institutionalized sexism made me consider how deeply ingrained these societal attitudes and beliefs are, and how we are still working toward change in our country. “I think with time… those systemic attitudes and cultural beliefs and practices will just change,” said Cady.

Some authors have stated that schools function to perpetuate and re-enforce heteronormativity (Smith, 1998; Walton, 2004). What I noted from these articles is that they were written before the Civil Marriage Act of 2005 was passed. The social climate of Canada changed drastically after that in regards to diversity (Schneider & Dimito, 2008), with educational policy being written to reflect this change. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2012c) wrote that respect, fair treatment, and right to be free from discrimination and harassment was expected in schools, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, with the implementation of Bill 13 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a) and Bill 33 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012b). This legislation reinforces the impact of time on systemic beliefs and attitudes that was noted by my participants. Mezirow (1994) furthers this idea of time in relation to beliefs: “Reflection involves a critique of assumptions to determine whether the belief, often acquired through cultural assimilation in childhood, remains functional for us as adults” (p. 223). Through reflection, we are able to critique the values and attitudes we have acquired through our lives in order to undergo transformative learning. Both queer theory
and transformative learning theory work to resist the oppressive systemic attitudes and beliefs of sexual orientation and gender imposed on the LGBTQ community, diversifying traditional boundaries through social action (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Green, 2007; Kumashiro, 2003; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). In his interview, Cady complicated these systemic attitudes and beliefs a step further when he related them to the cultural and religious practices of families.

4.2.2 Familial cultural and religious values. The teaching of habits, values, and beliefs may pass from parent to child through the lens of culture or religion. This may allow the systemic attitudes and beliefs carried by parents to skip over the time required for possible change and growth. My interviewees spoke to the persistence of these religious and cultural values in the classroom and how they impacted their comfort in being out. Both Cady and Elle provided examples of students they taught whose beliefs opposed their identities. When Cady discussed his friend who is a United church minister and identifies as gay, a student in class compared this minister to the devil, saying that “you c[an’t] be gay and Christian at the same time”. Cady outlined how this subversion of Christianity and religion was seen as a perversion of the faith by many students. He furthers this idea when he described how his students would talk openly about the cultural and religious beliefs of their families and “how those conflict with… LGBTQ people”. In this moment, students are using their religion as an excuse for their overt homophobia. Because the ideas of sexuality have not fully formed in some students’ minds, Elle does not think that they can understand the complexities of these ideas. Perhaps this is one of the reason that students adopt the beliefs of their families, choosing to trust the opinion of a parent instead of developing their own attitude toward and understanding of the concept of sexuality and gender identity. Elle outlined this idea with a story from his teaching. He taught a student
who would continually challenge him in class, making other students uncomfortable with his sexist and homophobic remarks and opinions, to the point that this student needed to be removed from the class. When the parent of this student was brought in, Elle received nothing but disdain, saying that he felt the “father didn’t want [he and the student] to speak to each other ‘cause [the father was] afraid that [Elle]’s gayness w[ould] rub off on [the student]”. To make matters even more distinct, Elle described the fundamentalist approach this student has taken to his religion since his in-class interactions with Elle, taking younger students under his wing, the way his father did with him. Both of these examples outline the religious and cultural attitudes and beliefs parents pass down to their children and how these impact the classroom culture.

Culture, ethnicity, religious affiliations, and familial threats impact the comfort one has when coming out (Rasmussen, 2004). I think Rasmussen’s (2004) ideas can be translated to the classroom, reflecting what my participants outlined: that familial cultural and religious beliefs are a major barrier to feeling comfortable being out. The students who carry these homophobic beliefs attached to culture and religion have been shown, both in the data and in the literature, to distance themselves from out queer teachers (Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002). This distancing is due to their frames of reference, often acquired from their parents. Supporting this impact of familial views, Vega, Crawford, and Van Pelt (2012) stated that queer teachers avoid discussing LGBTQ issues, such as coming out, in class due to fear of a reaction from parents. Mezirow (1997) wrote that “frames of reference are primarily the result of cultural assimilation and the idiosyncratic influences of primary caregivers” (p. 6) and that learners often turn to religion for support when dealing with the feelings resulting from a disorienting dilemma. These are the first two steps of Transformative Learning as outlined by Mezirow (1991). What he is saying is that learners obtain their frames of reference from their families and their culture, and rely on their
religion when dealing with circumstances that work to challenge these familial and cultural frames of reference. These categories of identity that are traditionally imposed on LGBTQ by non-LGBTQ people, sometimes carrying these familial cultural and religious beliefs, are dismantled through radical deconstructionism in queer theory by disrupting this heterosexist system from within (Green, 2007).

4.2.3 Rupturing the system from within. While these values, both familial and systemic, are persistent in the classroom, some teachers do not hesitate to disrupt homophobic and heteronormative views. My interviewees spoke to the impact of coming out in the classroom to rupture the anti-LGBTQ narrative and impact both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students. Both Cady and Elle spoke of students of religious families who came out to them, and how both of these students struggled with their identities due to their families’ beliefs. When confronted with homophobic attitudes and interactions in his school, Elle would respond by speaking about his childhood and how he was treated. He would speak to the impact of homophobic and gendered slurs, using personal stories while coming out to his students to help them understand his point of view. In doing this, his students grew to understand the struggles faced by the LGBTQ community, having their views, attitudes, and beliefs shifted through this interaction with Elle. Elle exemplified this point when he asked: “If more people come out, won’t all of those parents who are harbouring these like fucked up ideas about homosexuality have no choice but to change their mind?” With this, coming out in the classroom is a way of disrupting and dismantling homophobic societal and familial attitudes and beliefs, enabling transformative learning in students.
The social climate of schools in Canada today are distinctly more welcoming and diverse than the homophobic and heterosexist attitudes that used to exist (Smith, 1998). However, there is still a gap found between this positive school climate and the efforts being made by teachers (Bellini, 2012). Elle models how he wishes his students to act in addressing homophobic slurs and discriminatory actions, which is something Lumpkin (2008) writes is necessary when acting as a teacher role model. Queer teachers, like Elle, should add to the current efforts being made in schools to implement a positive school climate that is welcoming to the LGBTQ community (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). If queer educators stay silent in their identities, these homophobic attitudes and beliefs are made to be acceptable (Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012; Walton, 2004). In his actions, Elle, as the out queer educator, enables transformative learning for a more inclusive frame of reference to occur by enacting the first three steps of Mezirow’s (1991, 1997) transformative learning theory: 1) a disorienting dilemma (addressing homophobic beliefs by coming out in the classroom), 2) self-examination with feelings of guilt and shame (outlining for the students how it makes the victims of these homophobic attacks, including himself, feel when discriminatory language is used), and 3) a critical assessment of assumptions (asking the students how it makes them feel after he has explained his feelings). In doing this, Elle is “[facilitating] the unlearning of prejudice” (Elliott, 1996, p. 698). This approach can be described as radical subversion: the dismantling of heteronormative power and social order through use of personal histories (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Green, 2007; Mezirow, 1981, 1994, 1997). Elle’s use of his personal history and act of coming out allows for one of the most effective and powerful ways of enacting transformative learning and changing of homophobic attitudes through the use of direct one-to-one interactions between the queer educator and the student (Rasmussen, 2004; Taylor, 2007). If the learners’ assumptions are not challenged, transformative learning cannot occur
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(Taylor, 2008). Elle’s approach, however, requires personal strength and emotional maturity. He asks, “Do you have to be the person who sacrifices your well-being to be that person who makes a stand?” Coming out can take many forms, including Elle’s, but is a choice that should not be made lightly by the teacher.

4.3 Coming Out as a Personal and Situational Decision

Coming out is a decision that depends on many factors. There is no way of identifying appropriate coming out procedures as it is a difficult personal decision that relies of this variety of factors. Coming out can be portrayed in ways other than a verbal coming out, and should emphasize the process of coming out more than the product (Khayatt, 1997; Rasmussen, 2004). However, to what extent is a teacher’s identity clear if they do not come out explicitly? This grey area of clarity is explored, with some teachers choosing to come out only when the topic arises from students in class. This leads to the different factors that influence a teacher’s decision to come out, such as age, classroom environment, personal views and beliefs, staff support, size of school, and school-based resources.

4.3.1 Coming out is a difficult choice to make. During my interviews, it became clear that there is no way of identifying coming out procedures, but it is possible to identify the extent to which a teacher is out. This takes the form of: 1) a vocal outing, where the teacher has verbalized their sexual or gender identity, 2) an assumed outing, where the students make inferences as to the sexual or gender identity of the teacher, or 3) a non-outing, where the teacher is not out or is not comfortable being out in the classroom. Both Cady and Elle have said they are out in the classroom, with Elle being “100% out”, while Cady is “as out as [he] feel[s] [he]
need[s] to be”. For both participants, coming out is a personal and situational decision that can be done in many ways. Cady outlined a necessary comfort in coming out, that it is “a case by case basis” and that “you may be, sort of, more out in one classroom versus another” with valid reasons as to why you chose to come out only in one class. Elle furthers this point when he states that “you never know what someone’s reality is”, but that “you have to be true to you” when deciding whether to come out or not. Both participants highlight this comfort in relation to mental health, with Cady stressing that there is no responsibility to be out in the classroom and that a queer educator should always put themselves first. Elle believes that, with today’s social climate, everyone should be out, but understands the difficulties some people face when making this decision. He believes that coming out is important for his mental health and to ‘normalize’ the homosexual experience when he says: “My announcing [my sexuality] with confidence in an unwavering manner, that… is helpful for the students… straight or gay”. He also says that “90% of the kids knew” he was queer before he came out, which emphasizes the assumptions being made by students with respect to gender and sexual identity. Cady, on the other hand, has told certain students directly, but feels that coming out in the classroom needs to be relevant to the situation in order to be necessary and impactful. He thinks that teachers should come out if they feel comfortable. He continually refers more to this comfort and relevance in coming out when compared to Elle. Through this focus on mental health, Cady and Elle understand the difficulty in coming out. Elle jokes that once you come out “there’s no problems and you’ll never face people being mean to you”, using humour to contrast the reality of the queer educator’s situation: that coming out is a difficult decision to make, and that, once that decision has been made, is a choice that is continually made in the coming out process.
Khayatt (1997) speaks to the process of coming out, emphasizing that it is not an act that occurs once for the queer educator, and that this coming out is also not restricted to a vocal or verbal outing (Rasmussen, 2004). These two scholars speak to the variety of coming out procedures that Elle and Cady speak of in their interviews. Cady’s idea that a queer educator should not feel responsible to come out is mirrored by Rasmussen (2004) when he outlines the guilt that is pushed onto LGBTQ teachers who may choose to stay in the closet. Turner (2010), on the other hand, reflects the ideas that Elle spoke to: that our identities are as important as our pedagogy and curriculum in the classroom. However, both Elle and Cady agreed that the decision to come out must remain with the teacher, highlighting what authors such Khayatt (1997) have written.

Mental health was often spoken to in both interviews and literature, with positive mental health benefits being tied to coming out, including reduced anxiety and depression, which allows for personal growth and acceptance (Elliott, 1996; Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002). Elliott (1996) does problematize this coming out when he explains that the emotional and physical toll of coming out is not often seen. Through this, it is clear that mental health is a major determinant when queer teachers consider coming out. If a teacher, after considering their mental health, does decide to come out, contact with LGBTQ people can ‘normalize’ queer lives, reducing prejudices students may have with respect to the queer community (Rasmussen, 2004; Smith, 1998; Waldo & Kemp, 1997). This can be seen as transformative learning, where social change is seen in the change of the individual to respect diversity through discussion of life histories (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). Elle used his life histories when coming out as a form of transformative learning for his students, emphasizing his personal feelings and experiences as a queer person. Elle also believes that queer educators have a responsibility to come out, while
being respectful of personal differences in views and lives. This idea agrees with Elliott’s (1996) and Bellini’s (2012) views that heteronormativity, or the invisibility of queer people, is strengthened when teachers decided not to come out, and that this coming out shows that non-heterosexual identities are not ‘bad’ or ‘shameful’. Radical subversion, as seen in queer theory, explains this coming out as a political dismantling of gender and sexual binaries to strengthen the ‘other’, working against heteronormative ideals (Green, 2007; Stein & Plummer, 1994). When considering binaries, Khayatt (1997) wrote that “coming out is not the opposite of being in the closet”, drawing out the idea that there is a grey area, an ambiguity that Elle spoke to in the assumptions students make with respect to their teachers’ identities who do not undergo a verbal outing in the classroom.

4.3.2 Vocal outing versus assumed outing. In the previous sub-theme, I outlined that there are different degrees to which a teacher can be out: vocally out, not out, or this grey area I have called an assumed out. In my interviews with Cady and Elle, the idea of vocal out versus assumed out was one that was referred to, but seems to confuse the purpose of being out. How do students have, as Cady put it, an informal understanding of who to talk to with respect to LGBTQ issues when the teachers have not disclosed their sexual or gender identities? This identity ambiguity can be linked to this situational coming out that both Cady and Elle speak to, where a teacher may choose to come out to one class, but not another. This message could travel between students in the school, where the identity of the teacher dissipates from one class through the entire school. This idea could be reflected by what Elle meant when he said that “90% of the students knew” he was queer before he came out and when Cady says that he hopes students who have not come to talk to him personally about their identities know that he is
present in the school and take solace in this. My participants also spoke to the idea of a verbal coming out, specifically when asked by students in class. As Cady said: “One student asked me outright if I was gay at one point and I said yes.” He asserted that he does not keep his identity a secret, but how else could he have replied to this question? Elle paralleled this concept when he explained a scenario he experienced when he was entering a school for a practice teaching placement. He told the principal: “I’m not planning on making some big statement to the class that I’m gay, but if it comes up… I don’t lie about it, ever.” These two examples outline a situational coming out, where a teacher will only come out in response to a scenario or situation that is initiated by a student.

In his interview, Cady described a moment when he realized he was not as out as he had assumed, and had to continue to come out to staff and students. This moment outlines two points: 1) coming out is a continual process, one that is carried throughout a queer person’s life, and 2) there are complications in not being explicitly out, such as the erasure of queer visibility that can occur as a result of this lack of clarity (Elliott, 1996). Rasmussen (2004) writes of a constant re-negotiation of personal and public lives that queer educators, and not heterosexual educators, face daily. This re-negotiating takes the form of the decisions a teacher makes when deciding when to come out, if at all, and how to react to student questions with respect to their private sexual and gender identities. How would someone like Khayatt (1997) respond to a specific student questioning her identity in the classroom, when she feels that the decision to come out remains with the teacher. Would they respond truthfully, coming out but without it being the teacher’s conscious decision, or would they lie, protecting their personal agency but eliminating their queer visibility? In choosing not to answer, a queer educator can carry out queer theory’s ideal of resisting oppressive social categorization of sexual and gender identity (Abes & Kasch,
The fear in/of the closet

Khayatt (1997) reiterates this resistance when she writes of the ambiguity of a teacher’s identity being more pedagogically challenging (and beneficial) for students than an explicit verbal outing. She compares it to heterosexual teachers, who do not have to undergo a similar outing process, wondering why should queer teachers have to. In choosing not to answer, the consciousness and social awareness of students could be raised, known by Freire as ‘conscientization’, allowing for transformative learning to occur in a student’s understanding of identity (Dirkx, 1998). Whether a teacher decides to come out of their own volition, come out only in response to a student question or action in class, not answer when a student asks, or not come out at all, many factors are considered when making this decision.

4.3.3 Factors that influence a teacher’s decision to come out. Classroom environment, personal views of the teacher, age, staff support, size of school, and resources within schools, such as GSAs, are all factors that influence a teacher when deciding to come out. Both Cady and Elle detailed the difference in comfort between the school and the school’s Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Cady says that his school’s GSA is “where I’ll discuss more openly my own personal life as a queer man”, and Elle says that his school’s GSA is where “we’re gunna talk about how awesome being gay is together”. Participants in GSAs, both students and teachers, show increased comfort with their sexual identity, and GSAs function to decrease homophobic attitudes in schools (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2011).

Both Cady and Elle work for the same school board, in high schools of less than 500 students. They outlined that these small high schools allowed for more comfort due to the smaller staff and student community and the unified message of inclusion that the school staff would portray. This school board also provided LGBTQ teachers with more support, specifically
from the board’s education director, as Elle stated that it was one of her main priorities. He says that “[he] feel[s] like [his] identity is like not only respect, but like promoted with this school board, unlike the private school where [he] worked”.

While Cady has only worked in the public education system, Elle often compared his public education system experiences to those of the private system. He noted that the support he felt from administration, staff, and parents of the school in the public board, which Cady echoed as important to his comfort in being out and open with his identity, was lacking in the private system, where he did not feel safe and supported with respect to his sexual orientation. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2012c) aims to promote an inclusive, diverse, and welcoming school climate for students and staff, which was a conscious shift as noted by Walton (2004) with the Accepting Schools Act.

Cady also spoke to the lack of comfort he felt being out in the classroom if he knew the students in that class were homophobic, creating an unwelcoming classroom culture. Russ, Simonds, and Hunt (2002) found this to be true, where homophobic students would distance themselves from queer teachers, making for an unwelcoming classroom environment. This classroom culture can be isolated to that group of students, or permeate throughout the school. At Elle’s school, however, a positive and inclusive school climate is made evident through events like Pride Week and anti-discriminatory workshops regarding race, gender, and sexuality. In this way, teachers and staff contribute to the development of an inclusive and LGBTQ-friendly school climate (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). This staff effort contradicts what is said in Bellini’s 2012 study, where she explains that teachers felt uncomfortable addressing queer issues in schools as it had not been covered in their teacher education programs, and Schneider & Dimito’s 2008 study, where they describe the lack of LGBTQ resources present at schools. Elle
also noted that the younger staff members, such as himself, were more comfortable being out in the classroom than the older staff members, reflecting the idea of time seen in the first theme of this chapter and written of by Rasmussen (2004). We can see the influence of these many factors on Elle’s and Cady’s comfort being out in the school and in the classroom, and how these factors may be applicable to most queer educators.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the findings from my two semi-structured interviews as it relates to queer teachers coming out in the classroom and the queer transformative learning this has on students, both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ. These findings address the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, and speak to the impact having an out queer teacher has for LGBTQ students, the barriers found within the classroom that hinder a teacher from feeling comfortable coming out or being out, and the process of coming out itself.

The first theme identifies the comfort that queer students feel with out LGBTQ teachers. By disclosing personal information, such as their identities and issues at home, it was shown that queer students feel more comfortable with out queer teachers than traditional resources, such as guidance counsellors. The lack of LGBTQ role models in the lives of queer students has led to the disorienting dilemma of Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning theory which inspired those queer students to become out LGBTQ teacher role models themselves.

The second theme explores the systemic barriers in place that do not allow for LGBTQ teachers to feel comfortable being out in the classroom. While these systemic attitudes and beliefs carried in society have been shown to shift toward acceptance over time, religious and cultural beliefs of the family allow this shift over time to be negated by passing these attitudes on
to the children of the family. However, coming out in the classroom acts as the radical subversion of the heteronormative beliefs of religious and cultural families, disrupting these hegemonic structures in order to continue the trajectory toward acceptance of diversity (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Green, 2007; Mezirow, 1981, 1994, 1997).

The third theme outlines the process and act of coming out in the classroom. There is a spectrum of ‘outness’ in the classroom, from the explicit verbal outing to no outing at all. The decision to come out is difficult to make and requires thoughtful consideration of different factors, including but not limited to age, environment, and personal views. This decision is complicated by the students, where a student asking a teacher about their identity requires a choice. This choice can enable the teacher to come out, leading to positive mental health and impactful pedagogy, or to choose not to answer, which can act as a form of queer ‘conscientization’, raising the awareness of students, allowing them to question their understandings of identity to allow for transformative learning (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Dirkx, 1998).

In the following chapter, I will begin by outlining the key findings of my research along with their significance to the educational field. After this, I will speak to the implications of these findings for both the educational community and my personal practice. I will then make recommendations based on these findings, as well as suggestions for areas of further research. I will conclude my qualitative study with final thoughts and comments on the topic as a whole.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This qualitative research study sought to explore the impact of out queer teachers on students’ personal development and self-perceptions. Applying a queer transformative learning theory lens to the data, I was able to explore the following research questions:

1. How does having out LGBTQ teachers (or a lack thereof) affect LGBTQ students’ personal development and self-perception?

2. Are there barriers in place that prevent LGBTQ teachers from feeling comfortable being out in the classroom? If so, what are they?

3. Do LGBTQ teachers have an impact on non-LGBTQ identifying students’ personal awareness, views, and possible implicit bias towards the LGBTQ community? If so, what is this impact?

4. How might we identify ‘appropriate’ coming out procedures for teachers, or are there multiple ways of achieving the same goal? If so, what is it / are they?

These research questions each address a different aspect of the coming out process: impact, both anticipated and unexpected, barriers, and procedure. This chapter begins by providing an overview of the key findings that addressed these research questions, while also outlining their significance to schooling communities. Next, I outline the implications of this research as it pertains to the educational community and my professional identity and practice. I then provide recommendations to the Ontario Ministry of Education, faculties of education, school administration, and teachers based on the research and its implications, as well as areas for further research stemming from this study. I conclude this research study with some final thoughts.
5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

The first key finding from this research is that queer students are more comfortable with out queer teachers, choosing to disclose personal information to these teachers instead of their guidance counsellors. Cady discussed this feeling from his personal experience: “Curiously enough… it was actually when I was in the classroom that students like came and talked to me… would come out to me.” The significance of this finding is that schools lack the necessary out queer role models that queer students need to feel supported and welcome in their schools.

The second key finding from this study is that students’ personal and family values affect queer teachers’ comfort in coming out and being out in the classroom. Systemic attitudes and beliefs, as well as cultural and religious beliefs of the family, may permeate the social environment of the classroom unless disrupted by queer teachers. These heteronormative values and views can negatively impact a teacher’s ability to feel comfortable in their classrooms, which needs to be addressed by enacting a queer theory approach to action.

The third key finding from this research is that coming out in the classroom is a personal and situational decision that is difficult to make. This decision is influenced by many factors, including administrator and staff support, classroom environment, personal views of the teacher, and resources within the school. For this reason, a spectrum of ‘outness’ is seen in teachers, from teachers who are verbally out in all of their classes to those who are not out in any. Students may even force a teacher to make a coming out decision on the spot when questioned about their sexuality. Resources and professional development for LGBTQ students and staff need to be improved in order to provide adequate support to these teachers.

5.2 Implications
The significance of these key findings outlines implications that myself and the educational community can take into practice. In this section, I identify these implications as they relate to the Ontario Ministry of Education, faculties of education throughout Canada, school administrators, and teachers. The implications for my professional identity and practice embrace the transformative learning I have seen in my queerness and how this new knowledge will impact my practice as an educator.

5.2.1 The educational community. In their 2009 policy document “Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy”, the Ontario Ministry of Education discusses the rise in homophobia and queer suicides since the early 2000s. By attempting to provide equity to all students, the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) lacks particularity for LGBTQ students, which needs to be changed for more purposeful action to be taken in schools. Bill 13 of the Accepting Schools Act takes this equity policy a step further, defining what constitutes bullying and working to prevent bullying by promoting a “positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a). While these policies can be used to defend queer students and staff, they do not specifically outline the needs of LGBTQ people in schools and how to support them. If these equity standards are not being met due to the vague nature of the language, the language of these policies need to be made explicitly clear to ensure that queer student needs are being met.

This research study also shows student preference of teacher over guidance counsellor when it comes to meeting queer student needs. The Ministry should see this as re-imagining the role of teachers and guidance counsellors for queer students. The duties of guidance counsellor should be re-evaluated, and perhaps a new role for teachers should be created to fill this specific
student need. These new roles would be for teachers who wish to support LGBTQ students in purposeful ways. The education system is difficult to navigate as a queer person, and measures need to be put in place to ensure that this difficulty is eased for both students and staff and that these measures are made accessible.

While I was interviewing my participants, I kept asking myself: who taught these educators how to be queer in the education system? Through the interview process, it was apparent to me that they were not taught, and had to instead learn how to navigate the system themselves. If some queer teachers are struggling in the current school system, how might queer students face the same difficulties? Faculties of education are currently working to diversify the voices being heard in the education system by including these communities and their ways of knowing in pre-service teacher education, such as First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities, the LGBTQ community, English Language Learners, and students with learning exceptionalities. While this form of education is important, I believe that it is only shallow at best. I do not believe that pre-service teachers are able to engage with these different voices in authentic and purposeful ways. In my opinion, the current structure of education programs does not function for its current purpose of engaging pre-service teachers in authentic and transformative learning with students and this requires change. This change requires an increased in opportunities for pre-service teachers to authentically engage with students throughout their education.

In realizing that queer educators do not know how to navigate the education system, I began to wonder if it was due to a lack of support. When I outlined the different factors that affect a teacher’s comfort in coming out and being out, administration and staff support was one of the factors frequently discussed. Elle recounted a story of one of his practicum experiences, where the principal supported his decision to come out to his students. Administrators can
directly impact a teacher’s ability to be themselves in their school. Knowing this, administrators needs to be well-informed and up-to-date with policy as it relates to LGBTQ students and staff in order to maintain their safety and comfort in schools. Administrators also must ensure that, in understanding current policy, they must carry out their school climate surveys as required by the province of Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a).

Finally, I want to return to the people for whom I conducted this research: teachers. All teachers should know that they have the right to be who they want to be in their classrooms and serve as role models to students, but especially those who identify as LGBTQ. Coming out and being out is difficult and should be done in a case by case manner. Queer teachers should be supported in whichever choice they make, be that coming out or keeping their identity to themselves. This implication is one that carries the greatest impact on my professional identity and practice.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice. Through this research study, I have been able to discover how passionate I am about helping LGBTQ students and staff navigate their lives in schools. I have always believed that queer students’ needs are different from those of non-queer students and these needs ought to be met. I began this project out of interest and curiosity, unaware of the impact a teacher’s coming out in the classroom could have on students. I discovered that the impactful nature of coming out on both student and staff. I was not anticipating to see the job satisfaction, personal confidence, and situational complexities that can stem from a teacher coming out and being out in the classroom. I focused solely on the impact the act of coming out could have on students, and ignored the person carrying out the act. This
has helped me to better understand the complexities of coming out and being out, both in and out of schools, and the necessary balance a person must find for themselves in these spaces.

Before I started this project, I was someone who thought that people who chose to stay in the closet were being selfish and immature. I never fully understood the difficulties people may face when deciding whether to come out or stay in the closet. Through years of building confidence, while my memories and feelings faded, I remembered my initial coming out proceeding without issue. It was as if I had forgotten my own coming out, and how emotional that experience was for me. The interviews reminded me of the fears and struggle I had faced, and how it is a shared struggle in the LGBTQ community. We have made significant progress since I came out, but there’s work yet to be accomplished. Coming out is not a one-time act, it is a continual process, a never-ending cycle that queer people undergo. This newfound understanding of ‘outness’ will impact my teaching moving forward.

In my practice, this realization leads to a better understanding of how to support not only queer students and staff, but also myself as a queer person. I will not put as much pressure on myself to be out. I understand now that being out is situational and dependent on many factors, and that I can take these factors into consideration when deciding when is the best time to come out. I will embrace this process, and work through it in the way that works for me, while also understanding the importance of being out. This is the balance I will continually try to find in my classroom. In schools, I will support LGBTQ teachers in their personal struggles, providing guidance and advice on how to find their own balance in being out. By understanding the arguments for coming out and staying closeted, I will support my colleagues in their choice.

While conducting this research, I began teaching positive space training professional development sessions for pre-service teachers. I will continue to work on my abilities as a
teacher leader, providing professional development for staff to help them to better navigate their identities (both queer and not) in schools, while offering the necessary support to LGBTQ students. With this new knowledge and understanding that stems from my research, I am confident in making recommendations for the educational community.

5.3 Recommendations

When it comes to directly supporting the needs of queer students and staff in schools, policy written by the Ontario Ministry of Education is vague. To what extent are equity policies being carried out in schools? For example, every school in Ontario is required to conduct school climate surveys every two years in accordance with Bill 13 of the Accepting Schools Act (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012a). Policy makers need to develop more definitive policy to support LGBTQ students and staff that protects them from the discriminatory views of students, parents, and other staff members as discussed in Chapter 4.2. This would support queer teachers in coming out and being out in the classroom, if that was their choice.

The current structure of teacher education programs is not weak, but it could be stronger. I recommend that a new form of teacher education that emphasizes transformative learning between teacher and student be implemented to improve participation and learning. Sitting in classes today, professors speak to pre-service teachers about educational theory and strategies without having elementary or secondary students in the classroom. I believe that teacher education programs should be integrated into schools, with teachers and professors having classes in the schools in which they work and study. Some Faculties of Education carry out this style of pre-service education, but I believe it should be necessary for all. With this, a more authentic view of LGBTQ student needs could be developed from the beginning of the program.
This prepares pre-service teachers to feel better equipped to handle the daily workings of a classroom, as they would have many unique experiences that they would be able to unpack and discuss with their professors before entering the workforce. Students would be encouraged to voice questions, concerns, and comments to pre-service teachers to provide insight and perhaps change the current practices of teaching through this transformative learning process of more authentic in-school learning. In-service teachers would be better able to maintain an up-to-date understanding of policy, practice, and strategies that would help them to continue to grow as they teach. I believe that this integrative model of pre-service teacher training would benefit not just LGBTQ students and staff, but everyone in the school.

The Ministry of Education need to work with schools to better understand the role of teachers and guidance counsellors in the lives of LGBTQ students. I have three recommendations that could address this implication from the finding in my study. The first is that school boards develop programming that encourages guidance counsellors to build relationships with students similar to those that teachers are able to develop in class in order to more explicitly align with the Ontario College of Teachers Standards of Practice and Ethical Standards, specifically those of care, respect, and trust (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016). The second is to completely restructure the role of guidance counsellors, removing some of the responsibilities as they relate to students, and moving those responsibilities to a new teacher role, allowing leadership to be developed through this queer transformative learning. The third is to integrate students into teacher professional development and peer learning communities, giving voice to students. These three strategies aim to enable teachers and administrators to better understand the needs of all students, including LGBTQ students, in order to provide them with better resources.
Next, I recommend that the availability and variety of resources be improved for both queer pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as their queer students. These resources could take a variety of forms, such as access to counsellors, social workers, and LGBTQ youth groups, information sessions with guidance counsellors, stronger in-school presence and support for GSAs, or pride weeks that integrate queer issues and students into the school environment. With this in-school resource reboot, faculties of education and schools are asked to provide professional development and classes dedicated to queering the classroom: coming out in schools, addressing LGBTQ students’ needs, and providing support and resources to LGBTQ students. This education could help teachers to understand how to navigate coming out and being out in their classrooms, as well as addressing questions from students related to identity.

Although no recommendation is made specifically to teachers and their practice, the recommendations made at each level will impact teachers in their daily practice. What will also have an impact on teachers is the further research that can be done on the topic of coming out and being out in the classroom.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

In conducting this research study, there were two major limitations with regards to the scope of the research. The first area for further research is within the LGBTQ teaching community. My interviewees both identified as white queer male educators, and, for this reason, my findings can only point to the implications for this subsect of the community. This research study needs to be re-conducted with a broader number of participants with varying identities, including lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identifying teachers in order to understand the point of view of the community as a whole. This expansion will allow for a broader scope of voices to
be included, reducing the common narrative of ‘white gay male’ as representing the entire
LGBTQ community. This study did not investigate the intersectionality of race, sexuality, and
gender identity. Queer transformative learning theory, as I have outlined it, speaks to the ability
to enact change through learning (Green, 2007; Kumashiro, 2003; Mezirow, 1991; Stein &
Plummer, 1994; Taylor, 2008). This learning is not solely for the student, but for the teacher as
well. By continuing this research and empowering often unheard voices in the LGBTQ
community, such as queer voices of colour and voices of transgender people, I will continue to
learn from students and teachers alike, and they will be able to grow through my continued
learning.

The second area for further research relates to students of queer teachers. Due to the
limitations of this research project, I was unable to conduct this study to include student
perspective. I recommend that this research be conducted by looking at both teacher and student
points of view. In conducting a quantitative, multi-year, Ontario-wide survey of students about
their experiences with out queer teachers, in classes and in schools, and asking questions about
personal development and self-perception, a more distinct correlation between having out queer
teachers in classrooms and its impact on students can be drawn. In conducting further research
with both teachers and students, the findings of this research can only be reinforced.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This chapter started with a review of the key findings from this research study, while
emphasizing the significance of each finding. These significances pointed to implications for
myself, teachers, administrators, faculties of education across Ontario, and the Ontario Ministry
of Education. As an educator, I will continue to learn and grow while providing positive space
training to students and staff of schools. Teachers should understand that there is no pressure to
out themselves in the classroom, but to do as much as they are comfortable. Administrators need
to support their queer staff in being out, providing adequate resources to both students and staff,
and enacting policy surrounding LGBTQ issues. Faculties of education need to restructure their
current practice in order to provide more authentic learning to pre-service teachers. The Ontario
Ministry of Education needs to review current policy and the roles of teachers and guidance
counsellors as they relate to queer students.

A direct recommendation was made to each body based on the implication described.
Schools and faculties of education need to improve LGBTQ-friendly resources and professional
development for pre-service and in-service teachers. Ministries and faculties of education can
look at more authentic ways of building the relationship between teachers, guidance counsellors,
and their students. Faculties of education should consider integrating their learning into school
environments to provide pre-service teachers with transformative learning opportunities from
students. The policy review required of the Ontario Ministry of Education would be to provide
more discrete language surrounding support for queer students and staff. Concluding this chapter
were areas for further research, extending the current research to include different teacher
perspective (race, sexual identity, gender identity) and student perspective.

This research study has shown me the impact queer educators can have. If you could
make a difference in a queer student’s life, enabling them to see the possibilities for their lives,
empowering their personal growth, and confronting their fears and concerns, what could possibly
stop you?
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date: ________________________________

Dear ________________________________,

My Name is Patrick Callegaro and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the effect of LGBTQ teachers’ coming out in the classroom on the self-perception and personal development of LGBTQ students. I am interested in interviewing teachers who identify on the LGBTQ spectrum. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be the MT Research Coordinator Angela MacDonald. You are free to change your mind about
your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Patrick Callegaro

(phone number redacted)

(e-mail address redacted)

MT Research Coordinator: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vamic

Contact Info: (e-mail address redacted)
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the content of the interview contains personal questions relating to my sexuality, personal experiences with coming out, pedagogy and classroom practice, and personal views related to LGBTQ experiences.

I have read the letter provided to me by Patrick Callegaro and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn the effect of LGBTQ teachers’ coming out in the classroom on LGBTQ students for the purpose of their personal growth and self-perception. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your experience as an LGBTQ educator. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
   1a. Where do you currently teach?
   1b. What do you teach?

2. How do you identify on the LGBTQ spectrum?

3. To what extent are you out in the classroom?

4. Do you currently or have you ever led a Gay-Straight Alliance?
   4a. If so, for how long?

5. As a member of the LGBTQ community, do you feel obligated to educate others about the LGBTQ community?
Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs/Practices

1. Do you see yourself as a role model in the school?
   1a. Can you extrapolate?

2. Is your school inclusive and welcoming or not to the LGBTQ community?
   2a. Can you provide some examples?

3. From your perspective, are student peer to peer relations inclusive to LGBTQ issues?
   3a. What are some examples of this?

4. How do you think our identities lend themselves to our practice in the classroom?

5. Do you have any students who identify as LGBTQ?
   5a. If so, how do you know?

6. Does a teacher’s outward identity (gender or sexuality) impact the type of things students are likely to share?
   6a. Do you have any personal examples?

7. Do teachers have a responsibility to come out in the classroom?
   7a. Why/why not?

8. When deciding to come out or not, what factors influence your decision?
   8a. Does this differ with students, parents, colleagues, and staff?

9. In what ways do you think having an out teacher impacts students?
   9a. Is there a different effect for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students?

10. Do you believe there is one “appropriate” coming out procedure for teachers, or are there multiple ways of coming out?
10a. If so, what is it/are they?

11. What other duties do you carry as a teacher aside from instruction of material/curriculum?

12. Do you believe LGBTQ teachers have additional duties compared to non-LGBTQ teachers?
   12a. If so, what are they?

Supports and Challenges

1. Are there barriers or obstacles in place that do not allow for you to feel comfortable being out in the classroom?
   1a. If so, what are they?

2. What supports are available to LGBTQ students and teachers in your school?

3. Have you faced any hardships from students, peers (teachers), parents or administration for being out/LGBTQ?
   3a. How do you respond to these hardships?

Next Steps

1. What could be improved in order to make the lives of LGBTQ students and teachers more manageable in schools?

2. What advice would you give to teachers who are worried about coming out in the classroom?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.