The Life and Politics of Passing: Gender, Professionalism and the Queer Teacher

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Abstract

There is a dearth of research that considers how discourses of professionalism intersect with gender and sexual diversity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) teachers in a Canadian context. The Alberta Teachers’ Association released its first resource aimed to support LGBTI teachers in early 2018, suggesting that gender and sexually diverse teachers are just starting to gain visibility within their professional organization. Through autoethnography, Institutional Ethnography, and Critical Discourse Analysis, this thesis examines how LGBTI teachers experience and perform their gender in response to conceptualizations of teacher professionalism that dictate queerness—particularly “visible” queerness—as contrarian to the neutral subjectivity that teachers are expected to uphold. With the growing relevance of queer-affirming spaces in school, such as Gay-Straight or Queer-Straight Alliances, it is necessary to examine possibilities of a queer professionalism and changing expectations for professional practice in queer spaces. LGBTI teachers in Alberta need more than recognition from their professional organization and this research begins to conceptualize a queer professionalism for teachers that breaks the bounds of heteronormativity in order to support and celebrate gender and sexual diversity broadly within Canadian schools.

Keywords: teacher professionalism, LGBTI, queer, gender, heteronormativity
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, J. Anderson.
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Chapter One - Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) teachers are forced to carefully navigate their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression within the school environment (Connell, 2015; Ferfolja, 2008a, 2008b). Teachers will often use multiple strategies in an effort to “pass” or be read as heterosexual (Ferfolja, 2009). Such strategies include conforming to binary gender expectations, maintaining secrecy about queer identities (Khayatt, 1990), and intentionally exaggerating gendered appearances and performances (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Richard, 2016). In most educational contexts, it is damaging for LGBTI teachers to be “out” and open about their identity because they experience hostility from students, parents and colleagues, are viewed as less competent than their heterosexual peers, and are exposed to negative professional outcomes as a result (Harris & Jones, 2014; Richard, 2016; Smith, 2010). In particular, “visibly” queer and transgender educators—whose gender expression or performances do not conform to binary gender norms—experience significant marginalization in schools (Ferfolja, 2009; Harris & Holman Jones, 2016; Keenan, 2017). Even when visibly queer teachers do not disclose their identities to students or staff, the mere appearance of gender or sexual non-conformance situates them within a “glass closet” where they are exposed and presumed to be queer (Connell, 2015; Harris & Jones, 2014).

Constructs of professionalism that define what it means to be a “good” teacher primarily benefit white, middle class heterosexual and gender-conforming teachers while oppressing those who are racialized and/or gender and sexually diverse (Mizzi, 2013, 2016). “Heteroprofessionalism” specifically describes the ways in which heterosexuality is deemed compulsory within professional contexts, indicating that normative gender is somehow a requisite component of professional conduct (Mizzi, 2013, 2016; Rich, 1980). Unfortunately,
many LGBTI teachers feel that they need to adhere to heteroprofessional expectations in order to gain acceptance in their workplace and avoid consequences for themselves or their loved ones (Ferfolja, 2009; Mizzi, 2013, 2016; Rosiek, 2016). Such expectations can include concealing information about their personal or private lives—such as romantic partners—to students and colleagues (Khayatt, 1990); adhering to gendered dress codes, whether explicit or implicit; and ignoring or internalizing homophobia and transphobia in the workplace so as not to disturb the status quo (Mizzi, 2013, 2016). These heteroprofessional expectations, amongst others, both constrain and harm LGBTI teachers and can have additional untold impacts on students and the safety of school environments.

Numerous studies have considered the ways in which heteronormativity is engrained within the school environment for students and teachers alike (Connell, 2015; Ferfolja 2008a, 2008b, 2008; Henderson, 2017; Hill, 2009; Johnson & Lugg, 2010; Lundin, 2016; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Martino 2008; Mizzi, 2013, 2016). Historically, teachers’ bodies and lives have been subject to regulation, surveillance, and control under the guises of accountability, morality, professionalism, and public opinion (Henderson, 2017; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Martino, 2008).

This is particularly true with the rise of neoliberal influence in education that has resulted in increased teacher regulation, cultures of accountability, and government discontentment with teacher unions and advocacy (Dillabough, 1999; Naylor, 2018). Due to the very public nature of education, teachers find themselves exposed to policing on multiple fronts: from students, parents, educational authorities, government, and in the court of public opinion (Martino, 2008). Furthermore, because the nature of public education is social and education systems have numerous stakeholders, teachers also have to navigate constant streams of discourse concerning educational policies and practices, even when changes to policies and practices are most often
determined at government or school district levels. As the “face” of public education, however, teachers are uniquely positioned as front-line workers to bear the full brunt of discontentment or disagreement with institutional decisions. Such discourses have significant impacts on how teachers engage in their professional practice and can often steer their day-to-day decision-making, particularly when they arise in response to controversial or contentious issues.

Heterosexist discourses are particularly challenging for teachers because of the ways in which gender and sexual norms are already reinforced in the school environment and within the teaching profession (i.e. gendered washrooms, dress codes, gendered name prefixes, etc.) (Ferfolja, 2007; Hill, 2009; Lundin, 2016).

Moral panics that construct childhood innocence and queerness as mutually exclusive have influenced norms of professional behaviour for teachers, anchoring them to the hetero-norm (Cavanagh, 2008; Connell, 2015; Edelman, 2004; Ferfolja, 2007; Lundin, 2016; Russell, 2010). Edelman (2004) argues that such “sacralization of the Child...necessitates the sacrifice of the queer,” not only marking the two as irreconcilable, but acknowledging how queerness is often “sacrificed” (p. 28). Teachers who identify as LGBTI experience a particular tension between their identities as queer subjects and as teacher subjects, with the two being viewed as incompatible and in contention with one another according to compulsory heterosexuality (Connell, 2015; Rich, 1980). Not only is it considered unprofessional for teachers to explicitly acknowledge sexuality in the school context, it is unacceptably transgressive for that identity to fall outside the bounds of heterosexual marriage (Henderson, 2017). In response to the powerful and pervasive nature of heteronormativity in schools, LGBTI teachers are confronted with constant, moment-to-moment decisions about whether abide and conduct their bodies and bodily practices according to normative masculinity or femininity, or dissent, exposing themselves to
the violence of heterosexism as enacted through homophobia and transphobia (Henderson, 2017; Luschen & Bogad, 2003). Many of these teachers are faced with dilemmas around the extent to which they should abide or dissent, and their decisions are influenced by intersections of their identity (such as racialization and class) as well as other matters including legislative protection, public favour, and geographical context (Connell, 2015; Lundin, 2016). The burden of identity management that is placed on queer teachers comes at great personal, psychological, and emotional costs (Connell, 2015; Ferfolja, 2008a, 2009; Rudoe, 2010). As a result, the professional experiences of LGBTI teachers differ drastically from those of their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts.

**Context**

Despite an increase in LGBTI-inclusive legislation and educational policy since 2015, particularly concerning gender and sexual diversity in schools, little has been done to disentangle heteronormativity from teacher professionalism in the province of Alberta. Furthermore, where these increments of progress have led to material changes in law and educational policy, there continues to be strong resistance to gender and sexual diversity in schools from segments of the public. When the *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions* was released in 2016 by the progressive New Democratic majority government, such a monumental advancement for LGBTI inclusion was met with intense and vocal opposition. Calgary’s Roman Catholic bishop called the school resource “totalitarian” and parents lashed out, suggesting it would “pose a significant risk of harm to children” (CBC News, 2016; French, 2016). In a province with a long history of conservativism and Christian fundamentalism, such discourses are not new, nor have they changed remarkably over time (Filax, 2006, p. xiii).
Throughout the 1990s in Alberta, when the federal government was considering human rights protections for gay and lesbian Canadians, the provincial government—lead by Premier Ralph Klein—was openly and vehemently opposed (Filax, 2006; Rayside, 2014). Along with fellow politicians and media outlets, the Premier insisted that Albertans were “severely normal,” implying queerness to be incongruent with the Albertan identity, and an extreme kind of abnormality threatening the province (Filax, 2006, p. xiii). Even when a cabinet minister suggested that the province “would never ban such discrimination if it meant homosexuals could teach in schools,” (Hunt, 2014, para. 23), there were still important advancements being made for LGBTI students and staff, including Calgary Board of Education’s release of “An Action Plan for Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Youth and Staff Safety” (Filax, 2006, p. xii). This suggests that even when public and political discourse are rife with homophobic and transphobic sentiments, progress for the inclusion of sexual and gender diversity within Alberta’s schools is still possible. It also identifies a long entrenched us versus them mentality, where the “proper, ‘normal’ Alberta identity” is under constant threat from progressive activists with a gay agenda and a “powerful homosexual lobby” (Filax, 2006, p. xiii). This long-standing adversarial political climate is the context for this study.

**Research Questions and Framework**

While there is a growing body of international research concerning the impacts of heterosexism on kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) teachers in school environments, there is a dearth of research that considers how discourses of professionalism intersect with gender and sexual diversity for LGBTI K-12 teachers in a Canadian context (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Mizzi, 2013, 2016). Although Connell (2015) explains in detail the ways in which professional narratives impact LGBTI teachers, this research is confined to the United States where the
legislation, organization, and structure of public education are vastly different. Additionally, Mizzi (2013, 2016) acknowledges that heteroprofessionalism requires further consideration, particularly in conjunction with cisgender professionalism or cisprofessionalism—which presumes the stability of gender identity across the lifespan, imposes rigid constraints on gender expression, and conflates gender identity with assigned sex. Mizzi also suggests that with the growing relevance of “queer” spaces in school (i.e. Gay-Straight and Queer-Straight Alliances), further consideration should also be given to conceptualizing a queer professionalism or the queering of teacher professionalism within those particular spaces (Mizzi, 2013, 2016).

This thesis examines how LGBTI teachers experience their identities in response to discourses of professionalism that are constructed and enforced through legislative measures, school board policies, professional documents, and media. Through the lens of queer/ing methodologies and a combination of qualitative methods, including autoethnography, Institutional Ethnography, and Critical Discourse Analysis, I examine the following questions:

1. How do LGBTI teachers navigate their identities in response to explicit and implicit expectations of professionalism?

2. How do policies and politics influence how LGBTI teachers express core aspects of their identities as professionals?

3. What futurities exist for a queer teacher professionalism?

The purpose of this study is two-fold: to 1) understand how heteroprofessionalism impacts LGBTI teachers in southern Alberta schools, and to 2) seek change in the systems that uphold heteroprofessionalism by way of conceptualizing a radical queer counter-professionalism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Historically, the theories that come to inform a transformative philosophical paradigm—as taken up in this study—including critical theories, feminist theory, and
queer theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These theories are concerned primarily with emancipation, empowerment, anti-oppression, and an agenda for political action and resistance to normative discourse (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, they center the voices and experiences of those who face oppression and marginalization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This worldview, situated within the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, informs both the research design and data analysis for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Methods and Data Collection**

Autoethnography is a methodology grounded in feminist theory, queer theory, and critical theory—all seeking to disrupt and challenge that which is taken-for-granted as “normal” (Adams & Holman Jones, 2014; Rich, 1980; Schwandt, 2015). Hall (2003) augments the characterization of queer theory as a singular theory, suggesting that queer theories is more accurate. Because the construction of gender and sexuality are bound up in the construction of race and other discursive power structures, queerness is divergently experienced, perceived, and pathologized (Sullivan, 2003). In the context of this study, queer theories provide a framework for understanding the ways in which LGBTI teachers are forced to regulate their identities through “closetedness,” “passing,” “performance,” and “impression management” (Butler, 2007; Butler, 2011; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ferfolja, 2009; Gray & Harris, 2014; Rayside, 2014). Butler’s conceptualization of gender performativity alongside Goffman’s theories of impression management elucidate how deliberative LGBTI teachers must be about their identities in response to varying professional expectations (Butler, 2011; Goffman, 1959).

Data for this study was collected through autoethnographic storying of my own personal experiences along with the analysis of policies, documents, and media discourses. I drew upon my lived experience navigating professionalism as an LGBTI teacher through fluid gender and
sexual identities, including as a “closeted” lesbian, “out “lesbian, through transition, and as a transmasculine-identified person who is often presumed to be a cisgender and straight man. Autoethnography situates theoretical knowledge and political concerns amongst personal experiences and allows me to engage this research from my own standpoint (Adams & Holman Jones, 2014). This methodology aligns closely with the theoretical framework as it seeks to locate the particular experiences of individuals in the context of dominant power discourses (Adams & Holman Jones, 2014; Denzin, 2014). Furthermore, in conjunction with Institutional Ethnography (Smith, 2005), this autoethnographic data serves as a particular standpoint from which to analyze institutional texts and understand how they influence how teachers engage in their professional practice. In addition to legislation and policy expectations from different levels within Alberta’s education system, teachers are also confronted with public discourses concerning teacher professionalism and are influenced by rhetoric concerning gender and sexual diversity in the school context. Not only do these discourses impact how teachers engage in their practice, but they also affect how teachers interpret and enact local policies, legislated responsibilities, and expectations concerning professionalism. Because of the influence they have on teachers and within schools, public discourses are also considered alongside autoethnographic and policy data in this study, through the frame of Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

**Scholarly Significance**

The Alberta Teachers’ Association (The ATA) released its first resource aimed to support LGBTI teachers in early 2018, suggesting that LGBTI teachers in Alberta are just recently beginning to gain visibility within their professional organization (2018). Previous scholarship has indicated that the management and regulation of teachers’ sexualities in schools is tied to the
management of youth sexuality, entangling the experiences of both teachers and students
together within school cultures (Luschen & Bogad, 2003). As public conversation across Canada
continues around support systems for LGBTI youth in schools, it is important to consider that the
141) argues that self-representation is core to humanization and those “who have no chance to
represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human.” The first step
towards transgressing the oppressive nature of heteronormativity in schools is to make visible
both experiences and causes of suffering (Rosiek, 2016). This research contributes to the field of
anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002) to better understand the experiences of LGBTI
teachers in K-12 schools with the aim of improving working and learning environments for all
LGBTI-identified individuals in Canadian schools. If multiple voices and identities can be
celebrated as valid and valuable within the context of teacher professionalism, then there is a
significant opportunity for educators to deconstruct, disrupt, and redefine professionalism in
ways that embrace and nurture gender and sexual diversity (Mizzi, 2013, 2016).

**Overview of Study**

This thesis is organized into seven chapters, starting with this introduction that has
outlined the context, background, and significance of the study. Following the introduction,
Chapter Two situates my thesis within the current body of scholarship on teacher
professionalism and the experiences of LGBTI teachers by way of a literature review. This
chapter also includes a detailed theoretical framework of this study, drawing from queer theorists
such as Butler (2004, 2007, 2011), Foucault (1990), and Sedgewick (1990), in addition to
sociologist, Goffman (1959), to understand how queer identities are constructed, shaped,
performed, perceived, and punished. Chapter Three outlines my methodological approach for
this study, including how data was collected and analyzed through a combination of autoethnography (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Crawley, 2014; Holman Jones & Harris, 2019), Institutional Ethnography (Smith, 2005), and Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The three chapters that follow provide an overview and analysis of data that was collected, with Chapter Four situating the study in my own experiences as an LGBTI teacher, Chapter Five providing an overview and analysis of institutional documents that pertain to both teacher professionalism and gender and sexual diversity, and Chapter Six highlighting key discourses that influence LGBTI teachers in their professional practice. Chapter Seven then concludes the study with an overview of key themes within the data as well as possibilities for radically queer teacher counter-professionalisms and futurities for queer teachers. This final chapter includes the next steps for this research, underscoring the need for continued examination of the impacts of heteroprofessionalism and cisprofessionalism on teachers and within the school environment.
Chapter 2—Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In order to understand how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex teachers experience and perform their identities within the constraints of teacher professionalism, we must first examine how the complex notions of gender and sexual identity and teacher professionalism are constructed (Ferfolja, 2014; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013). This involves an analysis of language, scholarship, and theory, which are the focus of this chapter. First, I begin with a discussion of language and the key concepts that are under consideration in this study. This is a necessary step in delineating—without defining or oversimplifying—the terms that are used to describe and make meaning of complex constructs, like gender. Next, I review existing scholarship concerning the experiences of LGBTI teachers in professional contexts. I do this by highlighting key themes that emerge from the literature and that are pertinent to this thesis. Lastly, I situate this thesis within the work of queer theorists and outline a theoretical framework for this study, drawing largely on Butler’s conceptualization of gender performativity alongside Goffman’s “impression management.”

Contextualizing Key Terminology

Queer theories work to disrupt and problematize how gender and sexuality are constructed in relationship to one another and imbued with power by way of established norms (Bendl et al., 2009; Holman Jones & Harris, 2019). Although they are often viewed as separate and distinct categories, gender and sexuality are complex identity constructs whose norms operate in collusion with one another, making them difficult to disentangle and separate (Butler, 2004; Carnes, 2019). Given these complexities, along with queer theory’s resistance to certainty and definition, key language and terminology in this chapter will instead be introduced by way of contextualization. This choice ensures that socially constructed concepts like gender, gender
expression, and heteronormativity are not removed from the social in which they are constructed, enacted, enforced, and evaluated. This is to say that concepts like gender, while abstract, cannot be abstracted from the very concrete and material impacts that they have on individuals (Butler, 2007).

**Gender**

Gender is a social construct that has been historically confined to the “man/woman” binary by way of association to physiological characteristics (i.e. organs, hormones, and chromosomes) that have long been correlated to one of two sexes: male and female (Butler, 2004; Johnson, 2014; Richard, 2016; ). Though this term is often viewed as synonymous with “sex,” this is actually a misnomer. Whereas gender is often framed as what we are—implying a concrete or fixed way of being that can easily be known or shown—it is actually better understood as who we are, through the lens of identity and identification. In this sense, it can be understood as an inwardly, rather than outwardly, way of knowing. Despite this understanding, gender has long been viewed through the lens of biological determinism, as though our sense of who we are in the world and our relationship to feminine, masculine, or other expressions are determined by the body, separate from the mind (hooks, 1994). Furthermore, biological determinism suggests that our sexual desire, along with our gender and assigned sex, are linear, as though one layer of our identity determines all others (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Butler, 2004; Filax, 2006). In this tradition, we are told that our assigned sex (i.e. what the doctor labels our genitals), determines our gender identity (e.g. a penis means “it’s a boy!”), gender expression (i.e. masculinity), and future sexual desire (i.e. heterosexuality). Despite shifting understandings of these identity constructs, they continue to be normalized and naturalized as fact and therefore continue to constrain how we experience and come to know these aspects of our identities.
In the context of this study, gender is deconstructed so that it is not confined to a binary, spectrum, or list. Through the lens of queer theories, we can instead understand gender as the ever-changing ways in which we might come to understand, identify, and enact our “selves” through means like language, expression, performance, and the “daily social rituals of bodily life” (Butler, 2004, p. 48). Our ability to do this, however, remains continually constrained by normative expectations about gender, as they are embedded in most facets of our lives, including expectations around professionalism (Ferfolja, 2014; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Gray, 2014). Furthermore, this study recognizes that gender is not a static construct, but fluctuates across time and space, and that the absence of gender identity is also valid and included within this frame. The concepts of gender performativity as taken up by Butler will be examined later in this chapter to better contextualize the many ways we are taught and compelled to “do” gender.

**Gender Expression**

Gender expression is often conflated with the construct of gender identity, and as a result, we are socialized to assume gender identity based on visual appearances and cues, rather than asking people how they feel and what they know to be true about their gendered selves. Historically, gender expression refers to the ways masculinity and femininity are dispositioned through stylized acts, including ways of standing, sitting, speaking, and dressing (Butler, 2004; Connell, 2015). What we know now is that gender expression is not a determinant of gender identity, sex assigned at birth, sexual desire or sexual orientation. While some queer and trans individuals may take up coded forms of expression in order to make themselves visible to or noticed by peers within the queer and trans communities, these codes are temporally and culturally specific and can vary (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). For example, gay men in the 1970s took to displaying differently coloured handkerchiefs in their back pockets to signal their
identity and/or sexual preferences to others in ways that only “insiders” to such codes would recognize (Cornier, 2019; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). In this sense, we can recognize that gender expression can play a significant role in developing a sense of belonging for some people, whereas for others, it may be merely a matter of performance or obedience to social norms (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). This study considers gender expression as the many ways that people express themselves, whether consciously or subconsciously, and that are often tied to a binary way of thinking about gender as masculinity or femininity. The queering of gender is also considered, particularly in the ways that it might subvert and resist gender norms through non-adherence and non-conformance.

**Gender Performance and Performativity**

Butler (2007) conceptualized gender and gender expression as an act of performativity, one that is not inherent in our being, but comes to be through citational and recitational performances. Gender is constructed around compulsory performances and these performances produce the illusions of gender by approximation (Butler, 2007). When people do not abide by binary gender performances, they experience punishment (Butler, 2007). Butler’s conceptualization of gender as performance is crucial in examining the ways that LGBTI teachers experience and understand their identities as a part of their professional roles. In alignment with our understanding of gender and gender expression, we can consider that gender is an identity that is felt, determined, and performed by the self and that those performances are often policed through the lenses of essentialist binaries (Gray, 2014). The way that we are socialized to interpret gender is based on visual cues and performance alone. We are not raised to reflect on our gendered selves or make sense of our own identities, rather we are taught and coached from the womb how to embody and enact the label that is assigned to us (Butler 2004,
2007). And while some people’s gendered performances feel authentic and in alignment with the core of their being, many people are not permitted to consider their identity in this way or do not feel that their performances accurately reflect their gendered selves.

_Heteronormativity_

Heteronormativity describes the ways in which heterosexuality is defined as normal and queer or non-heterosexual identities are pathologized (Bendl et al., 2009; Butler, 2007; Kumashiro, 2002). Not only do these norms around desire assume that all individuals are heterosexual, but they also assume much more about our desires. For instance, heteronormativity assumes that: everyone experiences sexual attraction; that such attraction is confined to the opposite binary sex and is stable across the lifespan; that romantic and sexual attraction are the same; that people express their gender in ways that align with and communicate their sexual orientation; that heterosexuality stems from biology and is therefore inherited; and that procreation is a biological imperative that can only be fulfilled through heterosexual relationships (Bendl et al., 2009; Butler, 2011; Edelman, 2004; Ferfolja, 2007). While heterosexuality refers to desire and sexual orientation rather than gender identity, Butler (2004, 2007) and Lundin (2016) indicate that the hetero-norm also demands normative gender behaviour as a part of normative sexuality. While conversations around LGBTI youth in school often cite concern over instances of homophobia and transphobia, it’s important to locate this oppression within a larger system of heteronormativity and the rigid hegemonic expectations of “normalcy” (Filax, 2006; Kumashiro, 2002). These discourses are socialized and presume that cisgender heterosexuality is the biological, cultural, and social norm (Butler, 2007; Carnes, 2009; Rosiek, 2016).
**Queer**

Queer is a reclaimed term that identifies sexuality and gender as socially constructed and seeks to confront the ways in which “queer” was historically used as an Othering slur (Carnes, 2019; Cleto, 1999). It acts as flexibly as noun and verb and frames gender and sexual identities in ways that oppose and work against binaries and fixedness (Cleto, 1999). In this study, “queer” is used to acknowledge the vast and culturally constituted ways that people identify outside of cisgender and heterosexual. Giffney (2009) suggests that queer is more of a space to be “navigated, revisited, revised, and elided” than it is a category to be “occupied” (as cited in Carnes, 2019, p. 126). Reducing these identities to an acronym (i.e. LGBTI) given their fluidity, can often erase identities for the sake of convenience or to abide by the constraints of the academy. I use both queer and LGBTI to describe gender and sexually diverse individuals and do so not to homogenize these identities, but rather to acknowledge the vast number of ways that people queer and resist normative gender and sexuality (Johnson & Lugg, 2010).

**Professionalism**

The research around professionalism is vast and conceptualizes professionalism in different ways, including professionalism as enacted by individuals (i.e. actions, dispositions and behaviours), professionalism as an ideology that influences the way people engage in their practice, and as a social construction that influences theory, policy, and practice. (Adams, 2012; Ginsburg & Megahed, 2011; Hilferty, 2008; Osmond-Johnson, 2016). As I navigate the complexities of these many definitions of professionalism, I consider Hilferty’s (2008) conceptualization of enacted professionalism as “an active process of social engagement through which teachers shape their own work lives” (p. 162). This characterization encompasses the social and interactional nature of professionalism as performed by teachers, but also goes on to
consider how the discourse of professionalism “emerges from everyday practice—through the routines in which individuals and groups seek to control the work of teachers” (Hilferty, 2008, p. 164). As a result of the very public nature of teaching, teachers are subject to discourses of professionalism that seek to control them as they engage in their work lives (Hargreaves, 2000; Zembylas, 2018).

While Hilferty’s construct of professionalism offers an explanation of what professionalism entails, Adams’ conceptualization of professionalism as an episteme, offers insights into how professionalism “reifies power/knowledge differentials” to discipline, obscure, and silence LGBTI teachers (2012, p. 328). One way that this occurs is through constructing “crafted occupational identities,” which for teachers is particularly powerful (Adams, 2012, p. 331). The demand for teacher professionals who are akin to “cyborg pedagogues” (Harris & Jones, 2014, p. 23)—that is, neutral, non-humans who are unemotional and leave their “selves” outside of the classroom (Gray & Harris, 2014, p. 5)—is established through both formal and informal norms of professional conduct (Adams, 2012, p. 331). Professionalism as an episteme offers opportunities to understand how particular identities are empowered, while others are marginalized (Adams, 2012). In particular, “neoliberal discourses of obedient...workers” shapes the construct of the “good” teacher as gender-obedient and compliant to managerial directives. (Adams, 2012, p. 336; Dillabough, 1999). Furthermore, the way that “professionalism” is constructed discursively reinforces these expectations of “obedience,” which work to eradicate and erase “diversity of thought and diversity of people” (Adams, 2012, p. 339). Understanding the ways in which power is steeped within constructs of teacher professionalism aids us in understanding why the “teacher as professional” narrative holds so much power for LGBTI teachers who are navigating their identities alongside their roles as teachers.
**Heteroprofessionalism**

Power and knowledge are deeply embedded within professionalism and institutions often seek to ensure the alignment and normativity of professional behaviour (Adams, 2012; Mizzi, 2013, 2016). Because teaching is a provincial endeavour in Canada, government legislation and policy also play a role in the discourses of teacher professionalism (Osmond-Johnson, 2016). These discourses often privilege white, middle class men, while marginalizing others (Kumashiro, 2002; Mizzi, 2013, 2016). The school as a workplace for professionals presents a twist to the construct of professionalism, because public opinion plays a role in dictating what constitutes professionalism for teachers (Connell, 2015). Often, expectations around normative behaviour in schools are rooted in gendered expectations and the absence of overt or explicit sexuality (Connell, 2015; Gray & Harris, 2014). Mizzi (2013, 2016) coined the term heteroprofessionalism to describe the pervasive and coded discourses that situate heterosexuality as “good” professionalism and other sexualities as bad. Furthermore, heteronormativity is enacted through gender policing (Carnes, 2019; Payne & Smith, 2016), discriminatory policies, the devaluation of queerness as “inappropriate”, and the silencing or closeting of workers in the workplace (Mizzi, 2013, 2016; Sedgewick 1990). The stubbornness of heteronormativity within the teaching profession lies in the moral panics that constitute the innocence of children and homosexuality as incompatible (Cavanagh, 2008; Connell, 2015; Edelman, 2004).

**Key Themes Emerging from the Literature**

**The Impacts of Heteroprofessionalism on Queer Teachers**

In the context of heteroprofessionalism, teachers have little choice but to conform to heteronormative expectations (Gray & Harris, 2014; Henderson, 2017). This conformity not only involves a denial of the gender and/or sexuality that are core to one’s identity but, also requires
an ongoing embodied performance of heteronormativity (Henderson, 2017; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Mizzi, 2013, 2016; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Rich, 1980). For people that identify as transgender, this also includes a re-imagining of our past as well (Johnson, 2014). There are several strategies that queer teachers use to navigate heteroprofessionalism: “splitting” or separating the personal from the professional and passing as heterosexual, “knitting” or attempting to navigate being out within the rigid confines of heteroprofessionalism, or “quitting” the profession altogether in response to this pressure (Connell, 2015; Ferfolja, 2009; Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Richard, 2016). How teachers determine their navigation strategy is influenced by intersections of race and class, affording some teachers with more options than others (Connell, 2015). Some teachers are able to perform a “mainstream” gayness, or homonormativity, that enables them to be perceived as straight because invisible sexual diversity is tolerated, whereas gender diversity is not (Harris & Holman Jones, 2016). This indicates that “visibly” queer, queer of colour, Two Spirit, trans, and non-binary teachers are significantly more marginalized by heteroprofessional expectations and pressures (Harris & Holman Jones, 2016).

**Gender Policing**

Gender policing describes the ways in which people consciously or subconsciously target gender behaviours or performances that don’t conform to binary gender norms (Carnes, 2019; Payne & Smith, 2016). Gender can be policed explicitly through professional dress codes, but it also commonly occurs through discourse (Dillabough; 1999). Comments about being “lady-like” or “being a man” might critique the ways in which people are not performing their gender according to the norms and serve as subtle reminders about gendered expectations. Furthermore, gender policing suggests a linear relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality and therefore,
the policing of gender is also the policing of sexuality (Connell, 2015). Teachers are prone to experiencing gender policing from students, parents, and their colleagues, as well as the implicit messages embedded within discourses concerning professionalism.

**Fear of Being Found Out**

Another key issue that emerged from the research was the ways in which LGBTI teachers experience fear of being found out as queer when they do not want to or are unable to be out in the school (Connell, 2015; Khayatt, 1997). While this fear is concerned about being “found out,” what LGBTI teachers are actually most fearful of are the consequences of homophobia and transphobia that will stem from people having this knowledge about them. This fear influences behaviour, often forcing teachers to engage in heteroprofessionalism and/or completely conceal their true identities to maintain a straight, cisgender façade (Connell, 2015; Khayatt, 1990; Rich 1980). Connell (2015) characterizes how LGBTI teachers will sometimes try to appear and behave as “very straight” as a safety precaution, but this also has the harmful effect of further contributing to an environment that perpetuates heterosexism. Unfortunately, gender presentation and expression, particularly that which is non-normative, sometimes puts teachers in a position wherein their sexuality will be questioned whether they have come out or not (Connell, 2015).

**No Past**

Transgender teachers face a particularly complicated challenge when they navigate the heteronormativity of school environments. Many transgender teachers will attempt to “pass” by engaging in heteroprofessionalism, sometimes even to extremes, so that they can be recognized without being misgendered or experiencing suspicion about their queer identity (Harris & Jones, 2014). Passing becomes particularly challenging for queer teachers when they, for any number of reasons, want to discuss themselves in the past tense (Johnson, 2014). Not only do they have to
conceal their queerness on a day-to-day basis, but transgender teachers also have to recreate their past as well (Johnson, 2014). Many LGBTI teachers have to navigate the emotional turmoil of making decisions around what to reveal about our personal lives based on fear for our safety or worry about our professional image being compromised, while at the same time feeling guilt for not representing our honest and authentic selves to the students that we work with each day. Transgender teachers in particular experience dilemmas around what to honestly share about our past lives, creating a barrier for us as we work to build relationships with students and colleagues.

**Queerness is Unprofessional, Homophobia is Not**

The narratives repeatedly emerging from the research suggest that many teachers believe that it is too personal and unprofessional for LGBTI teachers to take up their sexuality in the context of the classroom (Connell, 2015; Rudoe, 2010). There is an expectation that teachers present themselves as “asexual” in schools; though this so-described asexuality is actually a subdued heterosexuality (Connell, 2015; King, 2004). Many heterosexual and cisgender educators believe that they do not take up their own sexual orientation in the classroom, so queer teachers should not either (Connell, 2015; King, 2004). In making these comments, however, they reveal how straight privilege operates to permit conversations about heterosexual spouses and families in the classroom as normal, while suggesting that anything that falls outside of heterosexuality is inappropriate because it is non-normative. What is further damaging about the misconception that heterosexual teachers are not taking up their sexualities in class is that it further forces LGBTI teachers to deny their true selves and remain closeted because there is a widely held professional belief that that is where they should be in order to maintain professionalism (Henderson, 2017; Khayatt, 1997; Rayside, 2014). On the other hand,
homophobia is normalized as part of professionalism because homophobia drives the moral panic around the mutual exclusiveness of “childhood innocence” and homosexuality (Connell, 2015; Edelman, 2004; Khayatt, 1997). In objecting to queer educators revealing and sharing their identities, many teachers are simply buying in to the narrative that suggests they are taking up the work of protecting the innocence of children. While this may be the aim of some teachers, this narrative seeks to uphold the hetero-norm and permit homophobia and transphobia in the context of policing the identities and actions of LGBTI teachers.

**No Place for Pride**

Researchers have described the phenomenon of homonormativity in the context of professionalism, where queer teachers who are out at their schools still abide by normative behaviours, making their queerness largely invisible (Connell, 2015; Ferfolja, 2008a, 2014). While many LGBTI educators feel pressured to conform to the hetero-norm and that motivates them to engage in homonormativity, this participation and condoning of visibility that only looks a certain way has significantly negative impacts for trans teachers, teachers that queer gender, and teachers of colour (Connell, 2015; Harris & Jones, 2014; Lundin, 2016). The white-washed, upper-middle-class aesthetic of homonormativity exemplifies how systems of power and privilege serve to reinforce one another and doubly marginalize people (Carnes, 2019; Connell, 2015). The additional presence of religious education provides another layer that complicates how LGBTI teachers navigate their identity in schools (Callaghan, 2018). In the context of professionalism and the professional obligations laid out in the *Code of Professional Conduct*, teachers often prioritize the respect for religious beliefs above respect for sexual orientation and gender identity. This places pressure on LGBTI teachers to remain closeted or avoid conversations about gender and sexual diversity out of fear that they may be infringing on the
religious beliefs of students. Despite similar legislative protections for gender and sexual diversity, freedom of religious beliefs is believed to take precedence over queerness in schools as well as in public discourses around schooling (Callaghan, 2018). As a result, the hidden curriculum of professionalism continues to influence the silencing of LGBTI teachers and issues in schools.

**Queer Theories**

Autoethnography is grounded in feminist theory, queer theory, and critical theory—all of which seek to question what is taken-for-granted as normal or normative (Adams & Holman Jones, 2014; Rich, 1980; Schwandt, 2015). Queer theory, in particular, was developed in response to the normalization of heterosexuality and normative binary genders and is primarily concerned with identity and its construction (Adam & Holman Jones, 2014; Carnes, 2019; Ferfolja, 2007; Johnson & Lugg, 2010). In conjunction with feminist theory, queer theory opposes binaristic thinking and pushes back against dichotomies of man/woman, homo/hetero, mind/body (hooks, 1994), and public/private (Crawley, 2014; Rudoe, 2010). Both theoretical lenses of feminist and queer theories are employed in this study to examine how such binaries function through professionalism to oppress LGBTI teachers.

Queer theory has both a rich history and dynamic present, while at its essence engaging future potentials, seeking different possibilities than the structures that maintain marginalization (Sullivan, 2003). It engages a transformative worldview which ensures that research is bound in the political and endeavours social change, targeting systems of oppression that empower some by disempowering others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As such, queer theory should not remain bound within literature where it primarily originated but should be enacted upon for social change (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Muñoz, 1999; Namaste, 2000). In the context of this thesis,
I draw upon queer theory to understand the ways in which gender identity and sexual orientation continue to be monitored and marginalized in education contexts. For teachers in particular, queer identities are surveilled and policed through modes of professionalism, forcing individuals that might identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTI) to present and maintain themselves as straight and cisgender, as though their assigned sex is the same as their gender identity (Bendl et al., 2009; Gray & Harris, 2014). Queer theory provides frameworks to understand and confront the ways in which LGBTI teachers are forced to manage (Ferfolja, 2009) their identities through “closetedness”, “passing”, “performance”, and “impression management” (Butler, 2007; Butler, 2011; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Goffman, 1959; Gray & Harris, 2014).

This chapter addresses a brief history of the term queer in addition to the roots of queer theory in poststructuralism, constructivism, and activism (Creswell & Creswell 2018; Hall, 2003; Sullivan, 2003). While queer theory provides tools with which to critique the oppression of gender and sexual “others,” it is also crucial to assess the ways in which it fails to address the experiences of queers of colour and the roots of queer resistance within Indigenous opposition to colonization. By evaluating the ways in which queer theory lends itself to whitewashing and homonationalism, this chapter also aims to uncover its epistemological incompleteness and limitations in order to continually queer and decolonize queer theory (Alexander, 2018; Morgensen, 2011).

In addition to providing an overview of queer theory and its key aims, this chapter also includes analysis of the work of key queer theorists in order to conceptualize how power is exerted on the body through discourse, binaries, constructions of sex/gender, and surveillance. Through the work of Foucault, Butler, and Sedgewick—in conjunction with sociological theorist,
Goffman—that this project has a framework with which to understand how gender is experienced and performed by queer teachers in different professional contexts. Butler’s conceptualization of gender performativity alongside Goffman’s theories of impression management reveal how deliberative LGBTI teachers must be about their identities (i.e. denial, concealment, censorship, disclosure, celebration) in response to varying professional expectations within school contexts.

**Tracing the Roots of Queer Theory**

*Queer* was once weaponized not only to derogate same-sex desire, but also to target those identified as different or outside the norm (Cleto, 1999; Hall, 2003). After decades of violent use, it was reclaimed by LGBTI activist groups, including Queer Nation, and became a term used to celebrate the very “otherness” that had motivated the oppression of LGBTI people for so long (Hall, 2003). As a professor of English, Hall (2003) emphasizes that the reclamation and empowerment of this term has roots within social justice, particularly HIV/AIDS activism, and was later appropriated by academics to qualify emerging theories about sexuality and gender (p. 80).

Although the word “queer” evades easy description in a theoretical sense, it is nevertheless found in regular usage as a noun, adjective, and verb (Hall, 2003). As an adjective, it describes the complexities of identities and desires that make up personhood, noting that identity is not singular or static (Hall, 2003). In this sense, the reclaimed term both alludes to and reverts from its discriminatory origins where it was once deployed to mark or brand LGBTI people as deviants, thereby limiting us in material and often violent ways to this singular aspect of identity. When used as a noun, queer identifies the broadly oppressed genders and orientations outside of cisgender and “straight” (Hall, 2003). Lastly—and more commonly within
academia—*queer* is employed as a verb to unsettle and destabilize that which is classified as “normal”, particularly as it pertains to sexuality (Hall, 2003). In verb form, “queer” attends to its roots in constructivism.

**Poststructuralism and Constructivism**

Queer theory draws from poststructuralism to describe the self—specifically, the gendered, sexed, and desiring self—as socially constructed (Sullivan, 2003). The “self” arises through relationality and “immersion in culture” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 41) which is steeped within structures of power. Although the concepts of “straight” and “gay” are identified as constructs, Butler (2007) warns that they are experienced as real—despite being “fictive phenomena” (p. 62)—because of their discursive power. The notion of discursive power originates from Foucault (1980) and describes how power is imbued to language by way of norms and the construction of absolute “truths.” As a result of the discursive power of gender norms, they act to constrain the ways in which people live both tangibly and materially, in spite of their constructed nature (Sullivan, 2003). To *queer* is to then challenge the supposed reality of identities such as sex, gender, and race in order to uncover the ways in which they are constructed and by whom they are constructed by (Ferfolja, 2007; Sullivan, 2003); to engage in activism that Case suggests “attacks the dominant notion of the natural” (as cited in Hall, 2003, p. 55).

**Activism**

Although queer theorists have taken up the term *queer* as an ontological tool, it remains an important signifier for those who originally reclaimed it; that is, LGBTI activists and communities (Carnes, 2019; Hall, 2003). Queer scholarship works to destabilize identity categories and disrupt biological determinism, but some critics suggest that activists remain the most radical in their efforts to push the boundaries of normativity, particularly in presenting and
embracing “differing performances and embodiments” (Hall, 2003, p. 96). The origins of queer reclamation in HIV/AIDS activism remind us of the material violence and criminalization that LGBTI people have historically experienced, particularly queer people of colour and queer sex workers. To take on queer theory as a theoretical approach requires an intentionality to effect change beyond scholarly endeavours alone. Furthermore, it is an acknowledgement that the labour of early queer movements was carried out largely by queer folks of colour, butch lesbians, and transgender women—populations who continue to experience the most extreme violence in spite of their long-standing and consequential action against it (Alexander, 2018).

From Theory to Theories

For a theoretical approach that seeks to complicate identities and rejects both identity politics and the fixedness of identity, it seems contrary to suggest that a single theory of queerness is possible, let alone actionable (Hall, 2003; Sullivan, 2003). Taking this into consideration, Hall (2003) suggests that queer theories is instead a more appropriate conceptualization to describe the converging and diverging multiplicity of voices that engage in the work of queering. Because the construction of gender and sexuality is also bound up in the construction of race and other discursive structures of naming power, to acknowledge the plurality of queer theories is to attend to the ways in which queerness is experienced, perceived, and pathologized differently based on other identities (Sullivan, 2003).

Troubling Queer Theory

Trans-textual

Although the roots of queer remain in activism, the work of queer theories often takes place in and amongst texts, being largely deployed in the analysis of literature and construction of identities (Namaste, 2000). As Namaste (2000) points out, queer theories comprise a “body of
knowledge” (p. 9) that often focusses more on the production of queerness in texts than the erasure of it in the lived world. Although queer theories work to disrupt heteronormativity and cisgender-normativity, they often fail to take into account the lives and experiences of people who do the same: who do not abide by gendered norms or prescriptive sexuality and are exposed to violence, even death as a result (Namaste, 2000). With these limitations in mind, this project seeks to engage queer theories through autoethnography to get at the very lived experience (particularly of trans-ness) that Namaste (2000) suggests queer theories on their own fail to realize as a result of their textuality.

**Queer/Quare of Colour Critiques**

The use of the term queer theories aims to acknowledge how various facets of identity that exist within and alongside gender, sex, and sexuality are taken up in queer scholarship. That said, the origins of queer theory are steeped in whitewashing, particularly in the early construction of “the homosexual” as white gay men and white lesbian women (Muñoz, 1999; Sullivan, 2003). Unfortunately, the repetition and citation of these early conceptualizations of queer theory perpetuate the absence of people of colour in analyses of queer experiences, so much so that queerness is often constructed as “a white thing” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 9): enabling the erasure of queer people of colour from both queer communities and communities of colour. The citation of queer scholars of colour and incorporation of queer/quare of colour critiques is necessary when engaging queer theories, not just as a footnote or tangent, but to implicate that “white normativity is as much a site of antagonism as is heteronormativity” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 22; Alexander, 2018). Johnson (2001) uses the word “quare”—the way his grandmother pronounced it, with a southern dialect—to describe how queerness intersects with racialization and class, particularly for black folks, while also resisting the idea that queer can serve as an *umbrella* for
all identities, without whitewashing them. To move queer theories beyond self-imposed limitations, Butler suggests that an emphasis should not be placed only on the convergence of the production of race and the production of sexuality, but on “the sites at which the one cannot be constituted save the other” (Butler, 2011). For this project to understand how LGBTI teachers perform and navigate their gender in the context of professionalism, it must address the ways in which whiteness works to intervene upon, limit, and prevent experiences and escalations of homophobic and transphobic violence. Because the construction of gender and sexuality is “inextricably bound up” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 58) in the construction of race and scientific racism, there is arguably no site at which they can be constituted separately, thus necessitating queer theories that center upon the experiences and voices of queer people of colour (Somerville, 1994).

**Queer as Colonizing**

Despite the reclamation of “queer” being a notable act of LGBTI resistance, the origins of resistance to normative gender and sexuality can be traced back much further than HIV/AIDS activism. A limitation of queer theories is their tendency to focus on non-Indigenous queer histories “without examining their formation within settler colonialism” (Morgensen, 2011, p. 43). The same normative heterosexuality that operates discursively today was a fundamental imperative of the colonization of North America (Warner, 1991). When queer theorists envision a future where gender is not confined to a binary, they fail to acknowledge the presence (and attempted erasure) of a multiplicity of genders that were in existence long ago, prior to colonization (Butler, 2004). Resistance to normative genders and sexualities is not contemporarily unique but is located within “genealogies of anticolonialism” (Morgensen, 2011, p. 49) that can be traced back through generations to Indigenous queer and Two Spirit people.
Two Spirit is a term used by some Indigenous and First Nations communities in North America to describe sexual and gender diversity rooted in cultural identity. Note that “Two Spirit” is an English term that serves as a placeholder for the vast and numerous culturally and locally specific identities that have long existed but, were erased through the structures of colonization (Lowman & Barker, 2015). As such, it is intended to invite First Nations and Indigenous people to return to their elders and knowledge keepers to understand how gender and sexual diversity took form in their ancestral lines before and in response to colonization. In some communities, though, this knowledge has been erased.

Unfortunately, queer scholarship and activism—in working against normative discourse—can simultaneously “prop up powerful settler colonial narratives of peacefulness, equality, and opportunity” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 72) and fail to acknowledge the ways in which recognition, particularly under the law, engages citizenship that was created through and founded in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands, worldviews, and ways of life (Morgensen, 2011; Spade, 2015). For this project to engage in an analysis of structures of education and professionalism and their role in enforcing normative gender and sexuality, it must do so through a decolonizing lens, “rooting colonialism out of worldviews, academic knowledge and political structures” (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 111). Systems of education have historically been engaged as a tool of colonization (now coded as “citizenship” [Lenon & Dryden, 2015; Puar, 2017]), producing strongly gendered norms and moralized sexuality intended to control and erase the bodies of Indigenous peoples (Lowman & Barker, 2015; Morgensen, 2011; Spade, 2015). Here, Morgensen is using the Foucaultian concept of “biopower” to describe how norms that were produced through colonization helped to shape modern sexuality, establishing the discourses of gender and sexual compliance that continue to
operate through schools and other institutions today (Morgensen, 2011, p. 32). Biopower is literally having power over other bodies, “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault, 1990, p. 140).

**Queer Theories in Education**

Schools are highly conservative and hypersexualized environments in that there is an embedded awareness of and preoccupation with sexuality—primarily in policing, silencing, and relegating it to the realm of privacy (Gray & Harris, 2014; Munt, 1997; Pinar, 2009). The ways in which bodies are surveilled in the school environment indicate an expectation of normative gender and sexuality, particularly for teachers (Gray & Harris, 2014). As the primary locus of socialization, schools construct sexuality as discreet at best—*only if heterosexual and only if performed in highly constrained ways*—and secretive or non-existent otherwise (Gray & Harris, 2014). For LGBTI teachers, these expectations are not only isolating, but can generate a cognitive dissonance or internal disconnection wherein teachers are expected to abide by heteronormativity in the context of their work by leaving key aspects of their identities at home (Connell, 2015; Gray & Harris, 2014). This becomes even more complex when LGBTI teachers become implicated in the harm of their queer students as a result of the “neutral (that is a sex, gender and desire-less) subjectivity” (Gray & Harris, 2014, p. 5) that they are required to (re)produce in their capacities as professionals (Giuffre et al., 2008). By engaging queer theories to analyze school contexts and the educative process, this project can better understand how professional expectations are employed to limit how LGBTI teachers experience and perform their gender and sexualities in their workplace and how this impacts the well-being of such teachers. This short overview of the origins, facets, and critiques of queer theories is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather works to situate this project within the broad landscape of theories
that interrogate the singularity of identity and the societal imperatives of gender obedience and heterosexuality.

Queer Theories on Sex, Gender, and Desire

Foucault on Power and Sexuality

In order to understand the ways in which heteronormativity and normative gender function in schools and coerce certain behaviours and performances from LGBTI teachers, it is necessary to understand the ways in which sexuality has been historically imbued with power, discursively and otherwise. Foucault (1990) notably traces the history of the discursive power of sex in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. In this text—one that contributed to the emergence of queer theory—Foucault identifies sexuality as a highly effective tool of power that is employed in the “greatest number of maneuvers” and through the “most varied strategies” (Foucault, 1990, p. 103). Located in both knowledge and discipline of the body, the power of sexuality is exercised as a manner of population control through the policing of language, creation of binaries, and the employment of surveillance (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1990). Foucault called this bio-power, describing the ways in which control is exercised on and over bodies, penetrating from the outside to become internalized as knowledge; it is through this repetitious production and reproduction of sexuality that its power becomes omnipresent (Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1990).

Discourses and Silence

Although Foucault notes that power functions in such a way that it exists beyond the individuals that exercise it, becoming “a machinery that no one owns” (Foucault, 1980, p. 156), it is still necessary to understand the material ways in which it operates on and through people and the institutions they have created. Within these institutions, early discourses of sexuality
emerged. States became interested in knowing about the sexuality of their citizens and created means of monitoring sex through legislation, moralization, licensure, documentation, and other regulatory regimes (Foucault, 1990). These regimes made “sex” a matter of public concern, not only to maintain “the strict economy of reproduction” (Foucault, 1990, p. 36) that was necessary to reproduce the labour force, but to discipline and control bodies through imperatives of family structure, appropriate social relations, and other conservative values. This discipline was embedded within state institutions, particularly through military and education structures, where it still functions today to avoid and correct “problematic” sexuality (Foucault, 1990).

Despite making “sex” a public issue, states did not necessarily want sex to become a matter of public conversation. As such, control was enacted through the policing of language, deeming conversations of sexuality as largely inappropriate and particularly so within specific relationships established through fiduciary obligation (i.e. teachers and students, parents and children) (Foucault, 1990; Smith, 2015). This power continues to function through silencing and secrecy, especially in the withholding of information about sexuality from children and youth (Rubin, 1984). Despite children being a product of the state-sanctioned deployment of “reprosexuality” (Warner, 1991, p. 9), discourses continue to position sexuality as corruptive and harmful to children, thereby mandating its censorship (Foucault, 1990; Rubin, 1984).

Aspects of sexuality that contradict its “proper” reproductive aims need not only to be silenced and made forbidden, but denied and deemed as non-existent (Foucault, 1990; Henderson, 2017). This repudiation of queer sexualities in particular continues to impact LGBTI teachers as they are forced to engage in professional contexts as though their identity is not real. By engaging a Foucaultian analysis of the discursive power of sex, this thesis aims to examine how censorship and silence are deployed through professionalism in ways that constrain how
LGBTI teachers embody and enact their identities within school contexts (Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Henderson, 2017; Hill, 2009).

**Binaries**

Where censorship executes power through denial, binaries execute power through delineation: binaries beget more binaries with heterosexuality/homosexuality relying upon a distinctive binary of man/woman and the classification of sexualities as permitted/forbidden, private/public, legal/illegal, appropriate/inappropriate, visible/invisible, and professional/unprofessional (Foucault, 1990; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Sedgewick, 1990). These binaries not only make clear distinctions between the normal and abnormal—or productive and unproductive—modes of sexuality, but they also serve as instructive and coercive, particularly for those outside of the heteronorm. Those categorized as homosexual need keep their “forbidden” sexuality private in order to maintain their professional reputation and perceived competence (Gray & Harris, 2014; Rudoe, 2010).

Although Foucault’s analysis distinguishes the power differential in the heterosexual and homosexual binary, feminist critics argue that he fails to properly acknowledge the power differentials between men and women (McCallum, 1996). In so doing, Foucault’s analysis lacks a nuanced understanding of how “appropriate sexuality” is differentially defined and applied across the gender binary. This is particularly relevant when considering the role of surveillance in regulating and controlling sexuality. Not only does discursive power operate through binaristic thinking to control sexuality, but it does so alongside censorship to enact the erasure of genders and sexualities that exist outside of man/woman and hetero/homo.
**Surveillance**

Once sex became a matter of state concern towards the end of the 18th century, the regulation of sex required the employment of measures that could discipline sexuality that was not in alignment with the conservative values of the state (Foucault, 1990). Rather than punishing deviants from the norm, states would “[immerse] people in a field of total visibility where the opinion, observation, and discourse of others” (Foucault, 1980, p. 153) would coerce normative behaviour, aiming to prevent any deviance from occurring. This power through surveillance was not just enacted by the state, but broadly within the social body through the Foucaultian notions of both “gaze” and “interiorization” (Foucault, 1980; 1990). The watchful eyes of others helped to enforce and police behaviour and when that gaze became internalized, people would not only surveil others, but they would surveil themselves (Foucault, 1980). As a result of this omnipresence of power, individuals are still constantly under surveillance and undergoing assessment from others, at the risk of being punished for failing to live up to normative gender and sexuality (Foucault, 1980; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Understanding how LGBTI teachers experience and perform their identities requires consideration of the regulative power of surveillance, both external and internal. Not only are teachers positioned in the public eye as a result of their profession and the social nature of schools, thereby exposing them to additional layers of surveillance, but their professionalism largely depends on being “read” as appropriately sexed (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Surveillance is employed by students, colleagues, parents, and regulatory bodies in ways that bind teacher professionalism up with the regulation of gender and sexuality.
Butler on Bodies Performing Gender

The development of queer theory is attributed, in part, to Butler’s work examining the social construction of gender and working to separate gender, sex, and desire from one another, thereby rebutting their supposed deterministic nature. Whereas Foucaultian analysis takes up how power is enacted upon bodies “and their pleasures,” Butler theorizes gender as performative in nature and examines the ways in which bodies are produced, constrained, and regulated by normative gender (Butler, 2011; Foucault, 1990). This thesis takes up Butler’s conceptualization of gender performativity to understand how teachers experience and perform their gender in professional contexts.

Bodies and Materiality

Drawing on poststructuralism, Butler’s formative work, *Gender Trouble*, identifies gender as a construction wherein “anatomically differentiated bodies” (Butler, 2007, p. 11) are demarcated and inscribed by and with gendered meanings. For Butler, the body is understood as the surface on which gender is signified and regulated but is also a construction in and of itself (Butler, 2007). The very divisions that gender are established upon arise from constructions of sexual difference on the body; constructions that produce the very bodies that they intend upon governing (Butler, 2007; Butler, 2011). Despite the significance of gender and sex as it is produced, inscribed, and experienced on the body, Butler suggests that the source of gender is external, not internal (Butler, 2007). While this conceptualization of gendered bodies as constructs carries through much of Butler’s work, a re-conceptualization is offered in the 2004 book, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Instead of constructs alone, Butler suggests “a return to the notion of matter” (Butler, 2011, p. xviii) and an examination of the extent that bodies materialize or fail to materialize norms, thereby becoming bodies that do or do
not matter. This does not suggest that the body is indeed the source of identity—sex, gender, or otherwise—but that the body is the source of the experience of being gendered and gendering (Butler, 2011). I draw on these notions of construction and materiality, despite their perceived contradictions, in order to understand gender as both socially and culturally constructed, but also felt and experienced as real and as a locus of identification.

**Gender and Sex**

According to Butler, where gender is a social construction, sex is “fantasy” (Butler, 2011, p. xv)—an attempt at finding a source that gender originates from, despite there being no such thing because the sex that gender is founded on is also socio-culturally constructed. Although the two are tied together in materially impactful ways, Butler denotes that the two are in relationship only by way of their shared constructed-ness and the ways in which they are externally inscribed upon bodies (Butler, 2004). By problematizing the deterministic relationship between sex and gender, Butler opens up possibilities for masculinity and femininity (and more non-binary expressions of gender, arguably) to exist outside of “differently sexed bodies” (Butler, 2004, p. 197). Untethering gender from sex serves also to release these constructs from the surface of the body where they are attributed as sites of control. In doing so, Butler asserts “that no one should be forcibly compelled to occupy a gender norm” (Butler, 2004, p. 213). Despite the strength of this conviction, it is certainly not a reality for many LGBTI teachers who are regularly compelled to occupy normative gender behaviours as a result of their professional status as teachers.

**Binaries**

Just as Foucault highlights binaries as a mode of discursive power, so too does Butler problematize binaries and their encompassing effects, critiquing the ways in which subjects are constrained to act accordingly within their rigid confines (Butler, 2007). In order for people to
“be” their gender, they must make evident the extent to which they are not the other gender in the binary (Butler, 2007). Sedgewick, another originator of queer theory, elaborates on the impacts of this, noting that gender is attributed to much of our existence—even the “least sexual aspects” (Sedgewick, 1990, p. 2) of our lives—forcing us to be largely pre-occupied with identifying with and against binary genders to secure the appearance of a stable gendered self.

**Performativity**

Butler’s theory of performativity describes gender as a ritualized and stylized repetition of “bodily gestures, movements, and styles” that produce an “abiding gendered self” (Butler, 2007, p. 191). Not only does Butler note the constructed nature of gender, but also identifies its deferred nature as well (Butler, 2007). Gendered performances work to approximate the supposed stable gender identities associated with essentialized notions of gender, suggesting that it is not possible to “be” the gender that one is assigned, but that it is necessary to work towards becoming that gender (Butler, 2007).

In establishing the notion that gender performances precede the identities that they aim to constitute, Butler suggests that subjects do not exist prior, but are only constituted through the doing of gender (Butler, 2007). Since the doing of gender is essentially mandated at birth (though it’s done to the subject, not by the subject), gendered acts and behaviours become repeated over time such that they “congeal” to create the appearance of a whole self (Butler, 2007). The ways in which this gender is experienced as reality results from the social productions and effects of gender performances over time, not from corporeal origins (Butler, 2004; Sedgewick, 1990). In essence, we are compelled to perform gender—often without knowing its exterior origins—in ways that convince ourselves and others that we embody that which we perform (Butler, 2011). Butler cautions against reading performance as choice,
however; gender performance is not willful, but imperative as per the discursive power of heteronormativity (Butler, 2011). So, while performativity suggests the presence of personal agency in “deploying” gender, Butler argues that discursive power compels such gender performances (Butler, 2011). In recognizing the coercive nature of gender, we can acknowledge that LGBTI teachers are pressured to perform gender in specific ways in order to be seen as *gender obedient* (Hill, 2009).

The reiterative nature of gender performativity is shaped not only by the idealized normative genders that people are working to achieve, but also by the threats of violence that coincide with gender *failure* (Butler, 2011). Just as normative power works to establish categories of being, it also works through exclusion and the labelling of some performances as authentic and others as fraudulent (Butler, 2004; Butler, 2011). Herein lies the power of gender and the tenuousness of its performance: it must be continually cited and performed in a manner that closely approximates the binary norm so as to maintain its status as *authentic* (Butler, 2004). Not only does the normative power of gender operate to qualify genders as legible/illegible, but it also defines personhood and ordains the intelligibility of bodies (Butler, 2007).

**Intelligibility**

According to Butler, the stakes of performing gender are high, so much so that our very intelligibility as humans is delimited to the quality of our gender performances (Butler, 2007). Intelligibility is constructed through the coalescence of sex, gender, and sexuality and in order to be seen as human, we must demonstrate coherence across these identities by conforming to normative expectations (Butler, 2007; Butler, 2011). This dehumanization of gender non-conforming bodies can be traced back to the colonization of Indigenous peoples, wherein persons marked as *berdache* (a colonizer term, or slur, for particular modes of gender non-conformance)
became the initial and persistent targets of colonial imposition and erasure; this invasion marked a “structure, not an event” (Lowman & Barker, 2015) that lay foundation to the continued dehumanization of bodies through gendered, sexed, and racialized oppression (Morgensen, 2011). The ways in which gender-variant and gender non-conforming people have historically experienced recognition has been through experiences of violence (Butler, 2004). Not only does one’s intelligibility as human depend upon gender coherence, but the discursive power of sex is revealed in the ways in which gender incoherence or failure is regarded as punishable through violence and even death (Butler, 2007). This reality is particularly felt amongst transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people and the fear of violence serves as a powerful mode of discipline. For LGBTI teachers, fear of employment termination is a particularly powerful disciplinary force.

**Heterosexuality and the Gender Binary**

While the gender binary establishes expectations for gender performances, it also operates concurrently with the “heterosexualization of desire” (Butler, 2007, p. 24) to maintain two discrete genders with apparent ties to specific physiological and biological qualities. Not only is gender identity constructed as with one gender and against the “opposite” gender, but it is also enacted in concert with the opposite gender, through the “idealization of the heterosexual bond” (Butler, 2011, p. 176; Sedgewick, 1990). It is through this established relationship between binary gender and heterosexuality that the policing of desire is achieved through the apparatus of gender surveillance and policing (Butler, 2011). This relationship raises the stakes of gender performances even further, indicating their culpability in the maintenance of both proper gender and proper desire (Butler, 2011). For LGBTI teachers, gender performances become the locus of deliberation, strategy, and management of identity.
The Closet

Given the repercussions of incoherent gender and “improper” desire, it is no wonder that LGBTI people often choose to engage in self-imposed silencing about their identities by staying “in the closet” (Hill, 2009; Sedgewick, 1990). While “closetedness” may often be framed as a stage or as stages through the queer lifespan, it can also serve as a strategy of self-preservation and for personal safety. While LGBTI people are exteriorly silenced through the discursive power of sex, this silence can be co-opted and employed as a personal safety strategy in different contexts (Henderson, 2017). For LGBTI teachers, closetedness can be performed to maintain one’s professional standing as appropriately sexed and desiring, thereby minimizing possible experiences of homophobia and threats of job loss or workplace conflict (Gray & Harris, 2014). The performance of closetedness must also be executed with the appropriate performance of gender not only to conceal one’s own identity, but to project the gender and desire that is deemed appropriate and normative (Hill, 2009; King, 2004; Sedgewick, 1990).

Passing

Passing describes the ways in which people are perceived to be “authentic” in their gender and/or sexuality (Butler, 2004; Pfeffer, 2014). While it is often experienced unintentionally because it is dependent upon how one’s gender performances are perceived, it can also be employed deliberately. Some people engage in passing as a strategy through the employment of appropriate gender norms so that they can maintain their status as a coherently gendered and intelligible person (Butler, 2004). The dangers of engaging this as a strategy lie in the risks of being “caught” and determined to be fraudulent, particularly where there are risks of homophobic and/or transphobic violence (Butler, 2004). Some LGBTI teachers go to great pains to pass in the school context, whereas others are privileged to do so without having to try. For
instance, there are some people whose gender identity and expression feel authentic to who they are in their core and so there are queer teachers who move through the world in ways that are not scrutinized or policed because their bodies perform their gender well for them. For others whose expressions are perceived as contradictory to their identities (i.e. men who have higher voices or smaller physical frames and are perceived as “effeminate”), there is a compulsory necessity to manage their gendered performances and consider how they might be perceived by others. In any case, passing—whether intentional or not—impacts the ways in which LGBTI teachers experience and perform their identities in school (Pfeffer, 2014). This is particularly evident in varying contexts, wherein it might be easier to pass in front of students, but not with an audience of parents. Given that gender is socialized throughout the lifespan, parents and adults are often more “equipped” to recognize and reinforce particular gender scripts than children and youth, who have not been socialized for as long. Therefore, even how teachers pass or manage their identities and expressions will change throughout different locations and work contexts.

**Goffman and Impression Management**

Whereas Butler cautions us not to confuse performativity with choice, Goffman’s conceptualization of impression management can help us to understand the ways in which LGBTI teachers might enact specific gender presentations, expressions, and behaviours in order to ensure that their gender, sex, and/or desire is perceived in the intended manner. This does not suggest that gender identity is a choice, but rather suggests that LGBTI people often strategically employ heteronormativity and cisgender normativity to maintain closetedness, pass within specific contexts or environments, or navigate potentially risky situations. According to Goffman, the primary goals of impression management are to engage performances in such a manner that the impression you intend is the impression that is received (Goffman, 1959). In this
sense, performances encompass patterns of behaviour, activities, and relationships, but they also involve a level of improvisation as well (Goffman, 1959). Improvisation is employed to “fill in” (Goffman, 1959, p. 73) and manage aspects of impressions, particularly where an understanding of the impression is incomplete.

This conceptualization of impression management underscores how strategies such as closetedness and passing are planned performances within improvisatory contexts that are deployed to maintain impressions that one is straight and cisgender (Goffman, 1959). It is of particular importance for many LGBTI teachers to be able to maintain an impression of normative gender and sexuality so as to appear competent, knowledgeable, and skilled within their profession. For example, many teachers who have children of their own are perceived by parents to be more qualified for their roles than other teachers. Ironically, this very specific realm of personal knowledge is awarded value for those teachers who are parents, when other areas of intimate personal identity (like queerness) actually serve to disqualify some teachers from being considered competent. The concept of impression management and performance, when used in conjunction with Butler’s theory of performativity, provides a comprehensive overview of the ways in which gender is (re)produced from moment to moment, particularly in an effort of create and communicate its supposed tangibility and prior existence.

Chapter Summary

By establishing this thesis within queer theories, there are a number of tools and critiques available to engage a thorough analysis of how LGBTI teachers experience and perform their identities in the context of professionalism. Furthermore, queer theories provide a vocabulary for understanding LGBTI identities and modes of existence (passing, closetedness, being “out,” etc.) as well as the situational nature of gendered performances. Although imperfect and
epistemologically incomplete, queer theories that are deployed alongside critiques of their shortcomings and other sociological theories enable this research project to come into fruition and do so with the necessary means to aid in understanding how key aspects of identity are experienced and performed by LGBTI teachers in differing professional contexts.

Key themes from the literature suggest that there are some common experiences for LGBTI teachers in the context of their professional roles. Many of these themes indicate that worry, stress, and concern are universal as LGBTI teachers make decisions about what “parts” of themselves to bring into their work and which aspects to conceal (Ferfolja, 2014). This psychological and emotional burden is amplified for those trans and queer teachers whose gender expressions and performances may be perceived as non-compliant to gender scripts and the heteronorm. In addition to meeting professional responsibilities as educators, LGBTI teachers must navigate additional barriers and intricacies to their roles because of how the rigid structures of normative gender and sexuality operate within the education system. Given that these processes occur largely internally—by way of continuous mental and emotional processing—it can sometimes be challenging to capture the broad ranges of experiences that LGBTI teachers have as they navigate constructs and demands of teacher professionalism. In the next chapter, I outline how a queer “scavenger hunt” methodological approach is employed in this study, using multiple methods for data collection and analysis in order to bring to the surface and make visible the experiences of LGBTI teachers.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to uncover and address how oppression—or, what Spade (2015) refers to as subjection\(^1\)—operates on LGBTI teachers through heteroprofessionalism, I employ a transformative paradigmatic approach for this thesis. Historically, the theories that inform this worldview include critical theory, feminist theory, and queer theories as highlighted in the previous chapter (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Hall, 2003). Ultimately, these theories are most concerned with emancipation, resistance, anti-oppression, and an agenda of political action (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As discussed in Chapter One, this study seeks to understand the impacts of heteroprofessionalism on LGBTI teachers, but it does not stop there. Instead, there is an agenda to use this understanding to begin to conceptualize and enact a queer—and queering of—teacher professionalism. With this, a transformative paradigm best aligns with the aims of this study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) assert that “questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm” (as cited in Christians, 208, p. 79) in that critical research is not possible without axiological, epistemological, and ontological foundations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). From this perspective, it is the emancipatory lens that serves as the bedrock of this study. The methodology, data sources, and analysis in this thesis are rooted within critical theories and are used to understand the material experiences of queer teachers throughout their varying professional contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

\(^1\) Spade (2015) states, “I use ‘subjection’ because it indicates that power relations impact how we know ourselves as subjects through these systems of meaning and control—the ways we understand our own bodies, the things we believe about ourselves and our relationships with other people and with institutions, and the ways we imagine change and transformation” (p. 6). Subjection, according to Spade (2015), better reflects the reality of the lived experience of oppression, whereas the term oppression alludes to one group of people overpowering another group of people.
In this chapter, I restate the purpose of this inquiry along with my research questions in order to outline my “scavenger methodology” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13) and its roots in critical social science (Cannella & Lincoln, 2018). Afterwards, I situate my thesis within the qualitative research tradition, but also outside of research “traditions.” I do so by way of queering methodology and methods in order to interrupt the “regimes of the normal” (Alexander, 2018, p. 278) that exist in academia (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In line with Spade’s (2015) “critical trans politics,” I do not want to pursue mere inclusion for queer and trans identities into existing problematic systems, rather I am pursuing this inquiry to unsettle the order of things—like professionalism and academia—that are “underwritten by settler colonialism, racist, sexist, classist, ableist, and xenophobic imprisonment, and ever growing wealth disparity” (p. 19). In service of this aim, I have to situate myself as both researcher and source of data in this chapter and deconstruct my “multiple selves” (Spry, 2018, p. 640) while being careful not to reinscribe my own privilege at the same time (Cannella & Lincoln, 2018, p. 89). The remainder of the chapter includes discussion about which data analysis methods were applied to the data sources. Finally, preceding the chapter summary, I include a discussion concerning the constructs of validity and reliability as they pertain to qualitative research more broadly and how I approach them within this project. Despite appearing to fall into the patterns of positivist research traditions, this section serves instead to reaffirm the political aims of this thesis by challenging notions of “authenticity” and further queering what is understood as knowledge construction (Crawley, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to understand how heteroprofessionalism impacts LGBTI teachers in Alberta schools and to deconstruct the systems that uphold heteroprofessionalism and unduly constrain teachers within rigid and monolithic constructs of gender and sexuality (Adams
& Holman Jones, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Holman Jones & Harris, 2019; Mizzi, 2013, 2016). Such an endeavour necessitates a radical qualitative approach that is “always/already concerned about power and oppression” and issues of social justice (Cannella & Lincoln, 2018, p. 84). Postmodern approaches to qualitative research challenge systems of power by incorporating multiple “research styles” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 105) rooted in many voices, radical ethics, and “attempts at solidarity” (Cannella & Lincoln, 2018, p. 84; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While traditional research methods often marginalize, silence, or erase groups of people (including LGBTI and racialized folks), qualitative research looks to center subjectivity and personal experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Douglas & Carless, 2013). With this in mind, this study engages qualitative research methods.

As outlined in Chapter One, my thesis is concerned with understanding how LGBTI teachers experience and perform their identity within Alberta schools in the context of professionalism and through the following questions:

1. How do LGBTI teachers navigate their identities in response to explicit and implicit expectations of professionalism?

2. How do policies and politics influence how LGBTI teachers express core aspects of their identities as professionals?

3. What futurities exist for a queer teacher professionalism?

Building upon the theoretical framework and literature review set out in Chapter Two, data from the micro levels of material experience to the macro levels of discourse are examined to get a sense of how constructs of professionalism map out specific experiences for LGBTI teachers and how queering such constructs can remap the “terrains of gender [and] identity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 106), opening up futurities of a queer teacher professionalism in
Alberta (Allen-Collinson, 2013). This concept of futurities originates from Muñoz (1999) who shifted away from using the language of *possibility*, and instead wrote about *potentiality*, because “potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present, but more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity” (p. 99). Where the word possibility connotes that something *could* happen, the language of potentiality reveals a *capacity* for change—something that *should* or *will* happen—which aligns with this study’s emancipatory aims. As such, while this project is situated within the present, the outcomes aim towards the horizon into the future, which Muñoz (2009) describes is “queerness’s domain” (p. 1). This foundation aligns with the queer theories set out in Chapter Two, where queerness is positioned as the “emergent not-yet” (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 67)

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research draws on varying forms of open-ended data, particularly personal experiences, that are not constrained within “predetermined scales or instruments” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181) that are typical of quantitative domains and positivist approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). Many qualitative methods, such as those employed in this study, consider the research process as equally important to the research outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is because the interpretive traditions of qualitative methods problematize the notions of certainty and singularity of truth in regard to research conclusiveness in an effort to resist structures of dominance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). Thus, the process of engaging particular methodologies offers insights that are just as valuable to an inquiry. Building on postmodern and poststructuralist approaches, Gubrium and Holstein (1997) call for a “new language of qualitative methods” (as cited in Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 58) that integrates researcher visibility, subjectivity, relationality, and
vulnerability (Colyar, 2013). Heeding this call has not always been easy, particularly when research traditions steeped in positivism have argued for greater objectivity and separation of the self from the research process. Douglas and Carless (2013) argue, however, the subjective and personal are not new to research in the social sciences, but have rather “been systematically removed...over the past century in response to calls for methods that more closely parallel research in the natural sciences” (p. 89). In this inquiry, I use a qualitative social justice approach to push back against problematic trends in educational research that seek to quantify the unquantifiable nature of human life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Instead, I look to reclaim the subjective, personal, and interpersonal as data (Rooke, 2010).

Qualitative methods work to make visible the vast and different elements of human life, especially those that are “conflictual, moving, and problematic”, which are ever present in the lives of LGBTI teachers (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 138). With such lofty aspirations, though, comes the understanding that there can be no single, universal paradigm or definition that encompasses all of the possibilities of a qualitative approach (Lincoln et al., 2018). That said, some of the distinctive features that are generally shared across qualitative inquiries include the use of nonnumeric data, an invitation into the subjective, and a focus on understanding social life (Schwandt, 2005). The queer theories used to frame this particular thesis place a similar emphasis on problematizing the norm through narratives of embodied experiences (Lincoln et al., 2018). Thus, a strategic use of multiple qualitative methods serves the narrative aims of this inquiry and aligns with the theoretical framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Although qualitative methodologies include critical, feminist, and interpretive approaches to research in social science, their origins—like all forms of research—are “inextricably linked” to colonial systems and ways of knowing that include xenophobia and racism (Denzin &
Lincoln, 2018). As such, any exercise in qualitative inquiry must be actively and explicitly untethered from structures of domination, even though such aims are already ontologically implicit. I try to do this by engaging an “ethic of vulnerability” (Rooke, 2010, p. 6) that takes responsibility for epistemological incompleteness, along with an “attitude of perpetual possibility” (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 571) for radical social change (Nash, 2010). To that end, I turn to methodologies that are queer/ing.

**Queer/ing Methodologies**

Queer methodologies offer strategies of reading, being, and doing that are counterhegemonic and resist normativity across all spheres of identification (Alexander, 2018). Alexander (2018) argues that a queering of queer theory reveals that it is “both theory and methodology” (p. 281); in this sense, queerness as a methodology should be taken up both as a “topic and a resource” for inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 105). This would suggest that no two queer methodologies can be alike. If a commitment to queering is inherent, then researchers must simultaneously take up and destabilize queer methodologies through a subversion of and scavenging from different qualitative methods (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Nash, 2010). In the same way that queer identities resist homogeneity, so too do queer methodologies. According to Nash (2010), “a queer methodology arguably seeks out and affirms the impossibility of a constant between the research, the researched and the field” (p. 11), thereby embracing a questioning/interrogating/unsettling of how they relate to one another (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Queer research is then an endeavor of destabilizing and remapping those relationships in service of undermining oppression (Browne & Nash, 2010). I drew from this scholarship about queer/ing methodologies when determining the methods for data collection in this study.
There are a multitude of challenges for researchers hoping to examine queer issues in schools, whether those issues concern the experiences of people within them or curriculum and instruction (Murphy & Lugg, 2016). Not only does such research need to come from a queer/ing positionality (always questioning in/difference), it also needs to take up “institutional and historical analyses” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 105) that address how selves—particularly, queer selves—are entrenched in institutions and systems, like education (Alexander, 2018). This suggests that examining queerness in educational contexts also requires attention to how individuals are constituted within the school environment by way of their positioning as teacher, student, other in other roles. Furthermore, because queer theory argues the fluidity and instability of subjectivity, researchers are confronted with the challenge of collecting data from tenuous subjects that are often excluded from research and invisible or “hiding” in the school environment (Browne & Nash, 2010; Halberstam, 1998).

Quantitative research methods have historically played a significant role in making queer identities invisible by way of relying upon normative gender markers and heteronormative assumptions in data collection. Queer research methods have responded to these challenges and the erasure of queer people from research by combining multiple data collection techniques in inventive ways to reveal new avenues of accounting for queer realities and materialities (Murphy & Lugg, 2016). Such practices are relationally and politically “counter-normative” with the intent to “break into and breakdown hetero-directive culture” (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 4) in order to challenge privilege (gendered, sexed, orientated, racialized, etc.) as it exists in schools (Taylor, 2010). In order to break into and deconstruct the heteroprofessionalism that affects LGBTI teachers in Alberta’s schools, I have built a “scavenged” queer methodology drawn from multiple qualitative approaches, including autoethnography, Institutional
Ethnography (IE), and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Combined, these approaches help uncover the extent to which cisgender heteronormativity underpins teacher professionalism in schools and works in refusal of such privileging (Halberstam, 1998). A combination of approaches is necessary for this study to trace the construct of a heteronormative teacher professionalism through the education system to identify not only where and how it is imbued with power, but also what material impacts heteroprofessionalism has on LGBTI teachers.

**Queer Methodologies as Scavenger Hunts**

Halberstam’s research on female masculinity (1998) created a foundation for queer methodologies. By combining multiple methods of information gathering, Halberstam indicated that such a queer methodology could offer rich data that is nimble enough to respond to the diverse experiences, positionalities, and subjectivities of female masculinity, but could also still maintain a commitment—as per queer theory—to opposing “academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (p. 13). It is this resistance to coherence that is empowering for me as a queer person and a queer researcher. Rather than seeking to fit within a norm (hetero-norm or otherwise), my queerness enables me to access vast possibilities for identity, relationality, community, and meaning making. In this same way, resistance to normative research practices allows for new possibilities to make sense of complex experiences that are embedded and layered within large systems, like the education system, while being simultaneously intertwined with other institutions (like government) at micro and macro levels. While using multiple methods often “at odds within one another” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13) might draw critique and sully the disciplinary silos of qualitative research, I think that such a project is necessary in order to be able to “construct rigorous and factual records of the lives of queer persons,” particularly teachers, ”within institutions like schools” (Murphy & Lugg, 2016, p. 371).
Murphy and Lugg (2016) indicate that there is no singular set of “scavenged methods” (p. 375) and suggest that queer scavenger methodologies need to be customized to each particular inquiry to best represent the “locally situated knowledges about everyday lives and practices” to be examined (Nash, 2010, p. 3). In so doing, a researcher not only brings light to the narratives of individual experience but, can also build towards understanding how those experiences inform shared understandings of “social reality” (Nash, 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, the idea of “scavenging” as queer methodology highlights the necessity of researcher creativity to go beyond traditional ideas of what counts as data and enact a commitment to promote radical change in both the outcomes and doings of research (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019; Nash, 2010). This creativity is only necessary because of a long history of queer erasure from research disciplines. Such pursuits require a careful consideration, however, to not sacrifice the complexity of such broad experiences by creating a “homonormativity” that constructs queerness in privileged and homogenized ways (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 3; Carnes, 2019). This denotes a particularly important responsibility within queer research, to ensure that it does not reify harmful stereotypes or normative conceptualizations of queerness as a white, gender-conforming homo-norm. While there is no one method that is “queerer than others” (Nash, 2010, p. 2), the methodology that plays the most prominent role in this study is autoethnography, which is described by Crawley and Husakouskaya (2013) as using “the notion of queer at its best—as a verb—in that it participates in queering methods” (p. 324).

Autoethnography as a methodological approach allows me to ground this research in my own experiences as a queer and transgender teacher, throughout a career wherein my gender and sexuality were (and still are) unstable and tenuous. It also commits to critical notions that “[disrupt] and [challenge] a colonial mindset that feels no need to articulate its own roots,
assumptions and origins” (Allen-Collinson, 2013, p. 289) through researcher reflexivity, narrativity, and the adherence to the fragmentation of selves (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Furthermore, it draws attention to the ways that identity and self are co-constructed, which is suited to this study which seeks to intervene in how LGBTI teachers navigate co-constructed and compelled identities within their professional lives (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019). Although autoethnography is called upon for this inquiry, it is done so with a commitment to Greenway’s notions of “methodological anarchism” that challenges “boundaries and hierarchies” (as cited in Heckert, 2010, p. 2) and holds space for other methods that allow for data to be drawn from the different and varied locations and forces involved in teachers’ lives.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a methodology that uses a researcher’s lived experiences as a source of data and seeks to transgress oppressive structures, such as homophobia and transphobia, by making both theory and lived experience visible (Crawley, 2014; Denzin, 2014). Queer theorists have long been criticized for the ways in which they take up queer theory to analyze the construction of queer identities in texts, rather than the real, lived experiences of queer and trans people (Namaste, 2000). Autoethnography centers lived experience within the research, and when queered, allows for queerness to serve both as topic and resource (or lens) for analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 105). While it constitutes a significant part of the scavenged methodology for this study, I would like to note Toyosaki and Pensoneau-Conway’s (2013) argument that autoethnography is not only a methodology. In the doing of autoethnography—just as in the being and becoming queer—we “come to know (epistemology), evaluate (axiology), become (ontology), and do (praxiology) our selfhood—our sense of being—in the world” (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 560). As a methodology—or in Gingrich-Philbrook’s
words, a “broad orientation to scholarship” (as cited in Adams & Holman Jones, 2008, p. 378)—autoethnography then opens up possibilities for researchers to “[theorize] social phenomena” (Crawley, 2014, p. 148), make meaning from personal experiences, and enact change in local social spheres and beyond (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008).

Practices distinctive to autoethnography include writing from the self and weaving the personal voice into wider social and political concerns, often through evocative language and with a commitment to recognizing the self as always incomplete (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Olesen, 2018; Spry, 2018). Although autoethnography is written from the self—a turning in—to understand the social, autoethnographic approaches also examine relationality with others and create space for witnessing the others’ lives (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). In doing so, such methods contribute to scholarship that makes visible the experiences that often go unseen or unnoticed (Giorgio, 2013; Spry, 2018). Holman Jones et al. (2013) identify additional characteristics that are core to autoethnography and distinguish it from autobiography, including “(1) purposefully commenting on/critiquing of culture and cultural practices, (2) making contributions to existing research, (3) embracing vulnerability with purpose, and (4) creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response” (p. 22). While still committing to destabilizing the rigidity of research, these tenets of autoethnography ensure that such endeavours include the voices and experiences of those typically excluded from social, political, and scholarly realms, while also contesting the critiques that suggest autoethnography is merely a “solipsistic” endeavour (Olesen, 2018, p. 161). This thesis originates from these practices by (1) intentionally critiquing how professionalism constrains LGBTI teachers’ identities in education by (2) building on Mizzi’s (2013, 2016) concept of heteroprofessionalism through (3) my own personal experiences as a queer educator in order to (4) engage in radical
change towards a queer teacher professionalism (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Additionally, I embrace a queering of autoethnography that questions the fixedness of identities in and across interactions and through time and space (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008).

Queering autoethnography involves attending to our embodied experiences as we move through the world under the constraints of “compulsory, citational, stereotypical” identity scripts and hegemonic systems that influence our actions and how we negotiate ways of being (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008, p. 388). Furthermore, queer autoethnographies aim to speak from “subjugated knowledges” (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008, p. 388) by way of examining shifting identities and challenging hegemonic discourses concerning gender, sexuality, racialization, colonization, class and other modes of subjection (Spade, 2015). Queer autoethnographies also embrace “methodological hybridity” (Crawley, 2014, p. 148)—as per Halberstam’s (1998) notion of scavenger methodologies—and should be twisted and adapted from previous uses in service of radical social aims (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). In this study, I queer autoethnography primarily by adapting key methodological tenets and combining them with Institutional Ethnography and Critical Discourse Analysis to create a new methodological approach that seeks to undermine the inflexibility of singular research approaches and does so in commitment to social justice (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Smith, 2005; Spry, 2018). In addition to the characteristics of autoethnography that I previously mentioned, I also adopt aspects of analytical autoethnography to suit the research questions of this qualitative study.

**Analytical and Critical Approaches to Autoethnography.**

Analytical and critical approaches to autoethnography often “incorporate theoretical and conceptual sources” alongside narrative aspects of autoethnography, in order to analyze sociocultural phenomena that stem from a researcher’s personal experiences (Chang, 2013, p.
The dialogues between theoretical and personal offer opportunities to problematize existing discourses through both critical and subjective interrogation (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019). Such approaches “[serve] as a thread of micro-social labor” that is not limited to evoking emotional responses from the reader, but also takes on responsibility for investigating “sites of social injustice” to bring about material change and prevent future injustices (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 562). These approaches align with queer and critical theories to suggest the need for spaces that not only permit queerness, but that readily heed the call to queering to ensure that all lives count or matter as “animate, livable, and grievable” (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 46). This critical approach to autoethnography seeks to intervene in hegemonic systems, not just evoke responses to them (Holman Jones et al., 2013; Holman Jones & Harris, 2019).

Building on the characteristics of autoethnography, Anderson (2006) notes that “a visible and active researcher” in addition to a “commitment to a theoretical agenda of understanding lived experience” are characteristic of analytical autoethnography (as cited in Crawley, 2014, p 160). This is because the subjective experience of the researcher must also be tied to “current events and…historical accounts” (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 5) so that the personal is contextualized within the social, cultural, and political (Holman Jones et al., 2013). Without doing so, one risks freezing the frame on the self in an approach that more closely aligns with autobiography (Allen-Collinson, 2013). Critical theories and their notions of the socially constructed self suggest the need for an autoethnographic approach that takes into account how systems constitute different aspects of the self and how many selves emerge in response (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019; Sullivan, 2003). This is especially true in how the self is constructed as gendered, sexed, and desiring. Analytical and critical approaches to autoethnography do this by
bridging “the margins of modernist interviewing” and “postmodernist theorizing” (Crawley, 2014, p. 146) while also shifting between “the macro, wide sociological angle on socio-cultural framework, to the micro, zoom focus on the embodied self” (Allen-Collinson, 2013, p. 296). This is not to say that this particular autoethnographic form hierarchically locates theory above personal; rather, it seeks dialogue between and amongst them, knowing that they are epistemologically incomplete on their own, but less so when they are taken up together (Crawley, 2014). In addition to calling on the personal and theoretical in my examination of how LGBTI teachers navigate and experience heteroprofessionalism, I also include methods of Institutional Ethnography to better understand the education system in Alberta and how it colludes with broader hegemonic discourses in ways that have material effects on LGBTI teachers. Such material impacts may include the pressure to remain closeted about one’s queer identity and experiences of homophobic or transphobic violence from students, parents, and colleagues, amongst many other effects.

**Institutional Ethnography**

Through analytical autoethnography, I am able to situate myself and my experiences within the data and analyze those experiences through the lens of critical and queer theory. While this lays the foundation for my methodological framework, Scott (1991) emphasizes that “merely focusing on experience does not account for how that experience emerged” (as cited in Olesen, 2018, p. 159). And while theory helps to account for hegemonic discourses within institutions like education, we also need to better understand how these discourses take shape through organizational structures, policies, guidelines, and other minutiae of day-to-day operations. By scavenging specific tactics from Institutional Ethnography, I can better map the relationships between the broad structures of heteronormativity impacting LGBTI teachers and how those
structures are enacted within the education system (in schools, school divisions, and provincial education ministries) as well as beyond the education system (in media discourses that arise from local communities) (Smith, 2005).

Institutional Ethnography is a qualitative methodology developed by Smith (1992) that begins with people who are directly interacting or working within particular social institutions (like a school or hospital) and “works to understand how institutions and texts—which she terms the relations of ruling—mediate what a person can be and how an experience can be lived” (as cited in Crawley, 2014, p. 157). Smith (2005) uses the term “institution” to differentiate agencies or bodies that “are organized around a distinctive function, such as education, health care, and so on” (p. 225). By identifying these particular organizations as institutions, Smith (2005) denotes that these particular fields are tied to government agencies which, by way of discourse, coordinate the specific courses of action taking place at the local level around the general goals determined at the macro institutional level. This clarification is important for this study because it identifies that while a school is a workplace and worksite for a teacher, the aims and actions of teachers working within a school are organized around education as state agencies define and delineate it. Despite contextual differences existing amongst the more than 1500 schools in the province of Alberta, the goings on in each school will be remarkably similar: there are bell-times, a similar number of school days throughout the year, the same subjects being taught using many of the same materials, the standardized tests being written by particular students, and similar protocols for student success and graduation. Beneath these largely uniform practices, lies institutional discourses that guide the actions of individuals within them, coordinating their work in particular ways and also constraining what they say and how they act. So, while this study centers on my experience as an LGBTI teacher in specific school contexts, my experiences
cannot be separated from the overriding rule of the institution of education in Alberta and the discourses embedded within the system as a whole.

Like autoethnography, IE is rooted in critical and feminist epistemologies and centers embodiment and subjective experiences (Crawley, 2014). Additionally, the site of the organization or institution is the subject of research, rather than the individual, even though the individual’s experiences guide the research project (Cannella & Lincoln, 2018). This serves to emphasize the role of institutions in perpetuating oppression, rather than just focusing on those experiencing subjection, which often serves to reinforce narratives of Othering (Cannella & Lincoln, 2018; Smith, 2005; Spade, 2015). In line with queer scavenger methods, IE also seeks to draw from multiple sites of data in order to get to the essence of “the relations of ruling” in an organization (Crawley, 2014). Smith (2005) uses the term “ruling relations” to describe the dominant ideas and discourses concerning social organization and relations that are perpetuated largely through media. With work focusing primarily on the standpoint of women in institutions, Smith wrote extensively on ruling relations related to the subordination of women in the workplace, particularly in women-dominated institutions like health care and education. Given that heteronormativity operates alongside and in conjunction with sexist discourses, Institutional Ethnography offers a means with which to examine how such ruling relations are embedded within the education system and coordinate actions in local contexts around normative gender and sexuality (Dillabough, 1999).

Rather than situating this research in the perspective of someone outside of myself, as is typical of Institutional Ethnography, I am combining autoethnography with IE so that my own experiences teaching within rural Alberta school divisions are the standpoint from which I inquire into the institutional discourses (Smith, 2005). I am able to bring both methodologies
together to highlight the problems and issues of heteroprofessionalism for LGBTI teachers, while having firsthand knowledge of how those problems are rooted in teacher relationships—specifically my own—to “the institutional order” (Smith, 2005, p. 32). As discussed earlier, the origins of IE grew from recognition of institutional powers at play within areas traditionally identified as “women’s work” (DeVault, 2018, p. 183). People employed in these fields are not only at the whim of public sector changes but, are more likely to engage in substantial and ongoing unpaid labour in their work to resist the policies and legislation that seek to undermine their ability to do their work (DeVault, 2018, p. 184). With this in mind, I am drawing on methods from Institutional Ethnography for this inquiry because this method was designed for institutions like education, and is also inclined to capture the types and extent of unpaid psychological and emotional labour that LGBTI teachers engage in as they navigate heteronormative expectations of professionalism from within and outside the institution (DeVault, 2018).

As an ethnographic approach, IE typically involves observations and interviews with subjects at the center of the inquiry, though the researcher does not steer the direction of the study or delimit it prior to engaging with the subject(s) (Smith, 2005). Rather, IE is a responsive methodology that seeks direction from the people at the heart of the inquiry and follows the perspectives and experiences that arise through the study. Knowing that institutional discourses drive the work that people engage in, an Institutional Ethnography starts by examining the actualities of work in institutions, including problems or issues that people face. From there, it traces those issues throughout the institution to better understand how administrative procedures are laden with “ruling interests” that “shape professional practice” (DeVault, 2018, p. 183). Much like other qualitative approaches, IE values the role of subjective experience and the voice
of those within institutions (DeVault, 2018). The methodology is not just interested in illuminating these experiences, but in understanding and making visible the “highly politicized” (Smith, 2005, p. 119) and coordinated processes of neoliberalism that individuals are subject to at an increasing rate (DeVault, 2018; Naylor, 2018). Such processes include accountability and actions that go alongside it, such as increased workplace observation and surveillance. In order to identify how processes are coordinated, IE studies emphasize analyses of institutional documents, including policies and other managerial tools (DeVault, 2018). Documents are examined to understand how they coordinate both institutional actions as well as how they are accessed by individuals in varying contexts (Smith, 2005). Texts alone pose a challenge for researchers, though, because institutional accounts and procedures rarely reflect the actual and fulsome experiences of individuals within that institution. Thus, it is necessary for IE researchers to continually revisit their standpoint subject(s) to develop a picture of how processes are coordinated across institutions in ways that directly impact individuals (Smith, 2005).

The aspects of IE that I draw upon for this study include textual analysis, specifically institutional policies from provincial and local levels of the education system, as well as policies from other organizations affiliated with the education system, like The Alberta Teachers’ Association. Although document analysis could be used within a traditional autoethnographic approach, I believe that IE offers a more intentional framework because it explicitly examines the coordinated nature of ruling relations within institutions and this framework is necessary when examining a system as expansive as Alberta’s education system. Furthermore, I also rely on the subjective experiences of a queer teacher—myself—to better understand the actualities of professional experience within the institution. Whereas IE relies upon “insiders” to provide this information, I am equipped to share my own “work knowledges” (Smith, 2005, p. 155) and “in
situ” narratives (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, & Waitt, 2010, p. 4) as a queer teacher in Alberta.

By beginning with my own experiences, I work outwards to map out the different relationships that function to impact teacher professionalism in Alberta and adhere to the IE tenets by allowing the investigation to follow the lead of the personal. Lastly, I examine how the ruling interests of the heteronorm, through policies, legislation, and administrative decisions, impact LGBTI teachers directly in such a manner that creates a burden of additional unpaid labour and disproportionately imbalances the workload of teachers who experience implicit and explicit subjection (DeVault, 2018; Spade, 2005). When considering the possibilities of queer professionalism, this is of particular importance, especially as it concerns what is necessary within broader institutional and policy change in order to shift this imbalance.

Because IE relies on textual analysis to map out organizational power, I draw on Critical Discourse Analysis for the final methods in my queer methodological approach to this study. CDA provides tools for textual analysis that will assist in making visible the discourses at work within different areas of the educational system and from voices outside. The teaching profession is unique in that teachers are under the influence of ruling relations both from within the system and outside of it. CDA offers tools for both document analysis and media analysis, which is necessary when investigating the various social relations that coordinate and perpetuate heteroprofessionalism in Alberta’s school system.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Just as queer and critical theories are invested in social justice, so too is Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA (Machin & Mayr, 2012). CDA was developed to examine the ways in which texts and textual conventions are imbued with ideological and political discourses that construct narratives of “normal” (Machin & Mayr, 2012). When engaging in CDA, researchers
can take into account how “power is transmitted and practiced through discourse” and how “power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4). The aims of this method include social and political change, as made apparent in a commitment to making discourses visible. I have included this methodology alongside autoethnography and IE, to break down the discourses of professionalism and “appropriateness” that are anchored to heteronormativity.

Language plays a significant role in shaping culture (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Given the interactional and communicative nature of teaching and learning practices, education systems are permeated with language—verbal, non-verbal, and symbolic—that not only shape what occurs within the educational context but, are shaped by the political and social formations outside educational contexts as well (Rogers, 2011). In order to look forward towards potentialities of queer professionalism, we must first consider how language upholds heteroprofessionalism in the present. In the same way that there is no single queer methodology, CDA also employs a wide array of tools and approaches for textual analysis along with means to address the complexities within education systems under the growing influence of neoliberalism (e.g. increased teacher accountability measures, emphasis on standardized testing) (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Naylor, 2018; Rogers, 2011). In this way, Critical Discourse Analysis offers flexibility and can be taken up alongside Institutional Ethnography and autoethnography to better understand how cisgender heteronormativity influences the ways in which LGBTI teachers come to understand themselves and engage in their work as professionals. Built on the work of Critical Linguists, CDA employs a number of analytical strategies, including looking for assumptions within texts, analyzing language and grammar for taken-for-granted ideas, and working to recognize the different “models” of the world that underpin texts (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 20). Gee (2011) describes
these models using the concept of a “figured world”, which is “a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal” (p. 43). Through the lens of critical theories, we might recognize this concept as describing privileged identities—those that are constructed as preferred within hegemonic systems (i.e. whiteness, heterosexuality) and are given power over others (Spade, 2015). In the context of Institutional Ethnography, this term resonates with Smith’s definition of ruling relations as the persisting dominant ideas of patriarchy that organize social relations. I draw on this concept to investigate the constructs of professionalism and the discourses that shape the figured world of the teacher as professional with great consequence for those teachers who fall outside that construct of “normal.”

Alongside Institutional Ethnography, Critical Discourse Analysis uncovers how discourses function to create patterns of social relations that are played out in the arenas of institutions (Gee, 2011; Machin & Mayr, 2012). One particular strategy employed in CDA is lexical analysis, or analysis of word choice (Machin & Mayr, 2012). By examining language for repeating patterns, exaggeration, false dichotomies, structural oppositions, and absences, one can begin to piece together both the implicit and explicit discourses underpinning an author’s word choices (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Another discursive practice that is common within educational policy is “lexical cohesion,” or the creation and repetition of specific terms and phrases that are imbued with authority and a particular “of courseness” that leads us to accept them without question (Rogers, 2011, p. 163). Through this inquiry, I also pay attention to how authority is communicated through different professional documents, knowing that institutions often invoke language of officiality and expertise to emphasize certain aspects of discourse of greatest import to maintaining power (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Even the construct of teacher professionalism is laden with a specific type of authority, thus communicating that the stakes for teachers as
professionals are much higher than other roles within social and political realms. As we will see, this concept of the teacher as a professional complicates the experiences of LGBTI teachers. While CDA is often engaged in textual analysis, it is also a multimodal method and offers strategies for image analysis, recognizing that visual language is armed with the same discursive power as written language (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In the context of educational research, CDA is often employed for the analysis of curricula and student resources but offers unique opportunities to examine the discourses situated within the teaching profession and the institutions that manage and oversee them (Rogers, 2011). In accordance with the aims of this study, CDA contributes tools to a scavenger methodology that has been crafted to investigate the complex and interrelated discourses that fuel heteroprofessionalism in schools.

**Limitations**

Each of the methodologies I draw from for this queer/ing methodological framework are not without critique. First and foremost, the queer theories that underpin this entire study are often challenged for being too *textual* and too far removed from the “blood, bricks and mortar of everyday life” (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 5). By using critical queer theories, I aim to address the ways in which inequalities are rooted within and enacted through the social, without limiting analyses to texts alone (Chang, 2013; Gee, 2011). Using autoethnography as a part of my scavenged queer methodology also allows for the inclusion of my own lived experiences of queerness, thereby ensuring that the queer theories that I call upon are grounded in the material and not solely the abstract (Halberstam, 1998; Rooke, 2010). That said, autoethnography is also prone to criticism, particularly because autoethnographers *are* the data, data collector, and authors, leading many to question the legitimacy of knowledge that is produced (Tullis, 2013). There is a risk that the research project re-inscribes and reifies the very privilege it seeks to
challenge by normalizing my own singular situated ways of being queer in the absence of other representations (Chang, 2013). Or, worse yet, though I claim critically queer theories in my approach to this research, I run the continued risk of complicity with the hegemonic systems that I critique and reject (Pelias 2013). This tends to occur when researchers make the research about themselves, rather than the systems that they wish to disrupt and unsettle (Taylor, 2010). That said, this is always a risk in qualitative research, even that which is oriented to be transformative (Nash, 2010). In the next section, I hope to address these particular concerns by situating myself more explicitly within this research process, citing my privilege (while avoiding mere recitation), and speaking only from the “raw data” that is my story without speaking for or over others (Pelias, 2013).

**Researcher Reflexivity**

Reflexivity in qualitative research includes ongoing critical self-examining and a rigorous questioning of assumptions and biases embedded within the self and scholarly practices, because research is never separate from its author (Colyar, 2013; Crawley, 2014; Erickson, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018; Tomaselli, Dyll-Myklebust, & van Grootheest, 2013). It is particularly necessary for autoethnographic approaches wherein the researcher is the primary producer of data (Berry, 2013). Rather than listing off biases that impact how a researcher takes up their research, reflexivity is a process that should be embedded throughout an in inquiry in order to make visible the ways in which researchers are shaped by hegemonic structures that may also shape their studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Olesen, 2018). In alignment with queer theories, a starting point for reflexivity involves situating the self within the research and within culture more broadly (Berry, 2013). Such an act involves examining the many identities that influence how one comes to their research and recognizing how those identities are constituted contextually
through the social and political (e.g. binaries) and in ways that are contradictory (Lincoln et al., 2018; Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013). In this section, I situate my white, settler, colonizer, middle class, masculine, able-bodied, and queer selves that inform this inquiry.

Whiteness is a construct that affords power and privilege to those who have it and is intimately tied to colonial violence (Battiste, 2013). As such, it informs all aspects of my social experiences and how I move about the world. By reflecting on my whiteness in the context of this research project, I aim to acknowledge how white privilege has shaped the scope of my experiences with homophobia and transphobia and that educators whose queerness intersects with their identities as Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour (BIPOC) have additional burdens of professional expectations on top of heteroprostessionalism. While I cannot speak to those experiences from my location, I work to cite the scholarly work of such educators to ensure their material experiences are included alongside my own, so as not to reinscribe queerness as white (Alexander, 2018). In a teaching profession that is largely white, the naming of my whiteness serves to reject the ways in which it is normalized and resist the construction of teacher as white.

Decolonization is a necessary project for all non-Indigenous folks, particularly white settlers, and cannot be done separate to scholarly endeavours (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Gender-based violence was a primary tool of systematic violence towards and genocide of Indigenous peoples throughout early colonization and continues to be used in the present. An obvious example of this is the current crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. While colonizers worked to upend the matriarchal organization of many Indigenous communities, they also targeted those who did not fit within the gender binary, working to erase their historied existence and value within Indigenous communities (Smith, 2010; Spade, 2015). Indigenous resistance to the normative genders and sexualities that were enforced by early
colonizers is accounted for in the oral histories of Indigenous peoples in North America, as well as scholarship (Morgensen, 2011). Therefore, as I take up notions of queer resistance as part of this research, I cannot do so without recognizing that the origins of resistance to normative gender and sexual identities cannot be separated from Indigenous anti-colonial resistance (Morgensen, 2011). Furthermore, when I speak about stories from my experiences as a queer teacher within an Indigenous community, it is necessary to ground those stories within my privilege as a white settler who has experienced homophobia, but within the hegemonic structures of colonialism and as an arbiter of such power (Spry, 2018). Such “contested selves” are made clear in my inquiry in order to take up an ethical and critically conscious approach that lays bare my own agency and actions within such structures (Berry, 2013; Cannella & Lincoln, 2018). Lastly, by employing autoethnography as part of my queer methodology, I resist the colonial history of ethnographic research that works through the power of detached gaze towards and against the Other (Holman Jones et al., 2013).

Heterosexism also operates as a tool that is enacted to supplement racist and sexist discourses (Kumashiro, 2002). Heteronormativity cannot be taken up as a topic of research without considering how it operates with and for other forms of oppression, particularly Whiteness, to entrench binaries such as masculine/feminine, for example, Whiteness as masculine and Asian as feminine (Kumashiro, 2002). The hetero-norm works to reinforce the gender binary in ways that punish non-binary genders and disobedient gender performances (Lundin, 2016). As such, homophobia and transphobia are experienced differently for folks who are constructed as “visibly” queer than for those who might “pass” or be considered gender obedient. Although I now experience privilege as a presumed gender-adherent masculine person, my past experiences as a visibly queer and gender non-conforming teacher have also shaped how
I come to engage in this research and allow me to speak from a unique position about sexism and heterosexism as they are disproportionately implemented under the guise of professionalism. That said, there are still significant gaps in educational research, including in this project, regarding the voices and experiences of non-binary educators (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019).

Taylor’s (2010) research examining intersections of class and sexuality reveals the ways in which queerness is constructed as universally middle-class, making invisible the vast populations of LGBTI people who are working class or experience poverty. To prevent the construction of a “homo-norm” that is white and middle class, I take up the ways in which my class privilege serves as a protective factor (Rudoe, 2010) in my encounters with teacher heteroprofessionalism and relations of ruling (Crawley, 2014). Although my experiences were not without subjection, my economic security and contract status offered protections that other educators might not have when encountering similar constraints. Class privilege also comes up when interrogating my own privilege within academia and in examining whose voices are included and whose are not in scholarship and social justice projects such as this thesis.

Lastly, I situate myself as an able-bodied researcher that has not experienced exclusion from or barriers to participation within either the teaching profession or academia because of institutional responses to disability. Butler’s (2007) discussion of the body as the surface where gender becomes signified may provide an understanding of how discourses generate dis/ability on the site of the body as well. Rather than addressing the ways in which disability is a production of hegemonic structures and systems, it is instead discursively placed and enacted on the bodies of individuals and then used as a means of bodily surveillance and control. Such discussions of the gendered body need to also take into consideration the ways in which other forms privilege and subjection are also inscribed onto the body. Queerness exists in many
different ways and interests with different layers, including disability, and thus my thesis research only speaks to a very narrow experience of what it means to be a queer teacher. In this same vein, it is necessary to note that while I have situated myself in this research according to these facets of identity, I do so without suggesting that these are the only ways in which I experience privilege.

Data Sources and Collection

This thesis draws on numerous sources of data and different methods of analysis through autoethnography, Institutional Ethnography, and Critical Discourse Analysis in order to generate a nuanced understanding of how LGBTI teachers experience and respond to heteroprofessionalism. Autoethnography and queer methodologies are often portrayed as a kind of *bricolage* that involves the crafting of research from what is available (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). As such, I blend different types of writing and sources to demonstrate a commitment to examining the experience of the personal in the context of the institution (Chang, 2013). In this section, I delineate which sources are included within this study and locate them according to how they emerged through this queered methodological approach. I begin by contextualizing this study within Alberta, providing an overview of the provincial structures organized around education, and mapping out the institutional arms that play a role in defining teacher professionalism in the province.

Context

In Canada, education is a provincial matter that is legislated and governed through provincial ministries. Publicly-funded schools in Alberta—except for band operated Indigenous Education Authorities—fall under the scope of both the Education Act (2012) and Teaching Profession Act (2000) and are overseen by Alberta Education. This ministry overseas teaching
quality standards as well as teacher certification across the province. In addition to role of legislation and government oversight in the profession, teachers in Alberta also belong to a professional organization: The Alberta Teachers’ Association (The ATA). The ATA takes on leadership for the profession as a whole through labour relations, professional designations, professional development, and disciplinary matters pertinent to teacher conduct. Teachers are not permitted to teach in publicly funded schools without a certificate from Alberta Education and paid membership within The Alberta Teachers’ Association. Additionally, teachers that are employed in a publicly funded schools must also adhere to local policies and contracts set out by their employer as well as collective agreements negotiated at the local level. This means that teachers may be required to abide by different policies and have distinctive contractual obligations according to their geographical location. When discussing the institution of education, it is prudent to consider how broad this institution is in the Alberta context as well as the various ruling relations existing within. As a result, I must re-emphasize that my own personal experiences may not speak to the experiences of other LGBTI teachers located across the province.

In addition to contextualizing place for this inquiry, I also bind this study according to time and history to provide specifications around data collection. In this vein, I have considered legislation, policies, and news stories from the years 2011 to 2019 during the time that I was a full-time teacher in south-central and southern Alberta. This inquiry does not examine the entire history of the professionalization of teaching in Alberta and the experiences of LGBTI teachers throughout time, but rather speaks from the actualities of my experience located during those years. In consideration of scholarly ethics, I do not name the specific locations where I taught but I do attempt to gather data (i.e. news stories) that most closely reflect the local social and
political climates that I encountered. In the next section, I describe the specific data sources from the aforementioned context.

**Stories and Self-interview**

The doing of autoethnography requires decision-making around which stories are included and excluded and researchers that engage autoethnographic approaches have an ethical responsibility to make those decisions with transparency (Douglas & Carless, 2013; Tullis, 2013). Invoking Crawley’s (2014) notion of autoethnography as “self-interview” (p. 145), I have selected stories from my professional experience that are centered around embodied experiences and denote my engagement and struggles with institutional forces and ruling relations that are unique to teachers. These personal stories or “scenes” serve as a primary resource and direct the document analyses and theoretical discussions that follow, in a similar manner to the process of Institutional Ethnography (Chang, 2013; Crawley, 2014). While autoethnographers often refer to fieldnotes or other artifacts in their approach, I have generated vignettes within this thesis through recall and memory-work, with the aim of breaking the silences around experiences that were emotionally memorable and significant to me (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Chang, 2013; Giorgio, 2013) Holman Jones et al., 2013). I am able to reflect on and analyze these stories having left the “field” of those particular school environments, but without being able to leave the field, or state of mind, that is queerness (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Crawley, 2014).

**Documents**

Language plays an important role in coordinating the ruling powers of institutions, making documentation—namely policy—a rich source for institutional analysis (Smith, 2005). Texts offer opportunities to examine the power relations that exist within institutions because they comprise the shared (or dictated) principles and values that are fundamental in establishing
and mediating group order (Kress, 2011; Smith, 2005). What is interesting in this particular study, is that different organizational bodies that play a role in governing the teaching profession have different sets of values and policies for doing so. While there are hierarchies that discern jurisdiction amongst the different bodies, those hierarchies differ according to context. As such, any examination of the institutional policies and practices that impact the teacher profession is an onerous endeavour. The documents and legislation that I refer to in my analyses include: the *Education Act* (2012), the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000), the *Teaching Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2018), the *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12 Handbook* (Alberta Education, 2019), the *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions* (Alberta Education, 2016), the *Code of Professional Conduct* (The ATA, 2018b), the *Members’ Handbook* (2019b), the *Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities of Teachers* (The ATA, 2018c), *Breaking the Silence: A Guide for Sexual and Gender Minority Teachers in Alberta* (The ATA, 2018a), the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000), and policies selected from three school divisions in southern Alberta. I have selected some of these texts for close reading using CDA and consult all of the documents to map out the various influences on and vested interests in teacher professionalism in Alberta.

*Media*

Because autoethnography is not just a study of the self, but a study of the self in the *social*, the use of news stories and media offers opportunities to illuminate how particular discourses and relationships arise within social and ruling relations (Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013). For the sake of this inquiry, media stories are called upon to highlight wider discourses concerning teacher professionalism that create figured worlds and define what it means to be a
good teacher (Edling, 2015). Given the unique position of teachers as both *in loco parentis* (in place of parents) and employees of school jurisdictions, complications arise concerning who has what kind of authority over teachers and to whom teachers are accountable. Although there are formal guidelines that dictate teacher responsibility, there are also informal means by which authority is granted, including through media. In this study, I use CDA both to identify which discourses concerning queerness in schools are at play within the selected articles and how they construct a broader understanding of how parents and parental voice can impact the ruling relations that construct teacher professionalism in Alberta.

**Ethical Considerations**

Writing from and about the self in scholarship is a public act of vulnerability, particularly in attempting to account for identities that are not fixed, through a medium whose final result is one that *is* fixed and frozen in time (Allen-Collinson, 2013). This is particularly true because our lives are highly relational, meaning that any stories about our lives are not entirely our own (Allen-Collinson, 2013). In pursuing autoethnographic storytelling in this inquiry, I have to acknowledge the ways in which the voices of others are likely braided within the stories that I share (Allen-Collinson, 2013). As such, careful and meticulous ethical considerations have been undertaken throughout the research process (Tullis, 2013). In the process of selecting the stories to share, I adhered to an ethics concerned with: structures of power and a critique of hegemonic systems; the protection of privacy and confidentiality of others, but not without gentle honesty; the impact such stories may have on my personal relationships; and how I might manage reliving memories of traumatic and harmful encounters with homophobia and transphobia in pursuit of this research (Christians, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Giorgio, 2013; Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013; Tullis, 2013). Through consultation with colleagues, I have also taken care to ensure my
adherence to the *Code of Professional Conduct* (2018b) in how I frame my stories and analyses. As a certificated teacher, I am required to conduct myself in adherence to my contractual obligations and in accordance with the *Code of Professional Conduct* (2018b). Just as those institutions shape teacher professionalism, they also shape aspects of my thesis research.

**Data Analysis**

Queer lives and experiences—specifically, my own—lay the foundation for material data to be reviewed in this study (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019). Where other qualitative and quantitative approaches might rely on specific instruments for analyzing and coding data, queer theories also serve as an instrument for analysis, employed to interrogate structures that perpetuate harm and injustice (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013). Queer theories not only organize the theoretical and methodological frames for this study but, also inform how I come to make meaning of the institutional web of ruling relations that partake in normalizing a specifically gendered and sexed construct of teacher professionalism. Moved by my own personal experiences navigating a production of self within such constraints, I attempt to denaturalize these notions of professionalism that are entrenched in the guiding documents of the teaching profession (Machin & Mayr, 2012). With such a personal investment in the findings of this research, I have to consider questions of “validity” and “authenticity” that are tethered to methodological considerations in any scholarly pursuit (Nash, 2010). Though I have already claimed a resistance to traditions of qualitative research and *objectivity*, I outline my commitment to accountability for the knowledge construction of this thesis in the next section (Douglas & Carless, 2013; Nash, 2010)

**Validity and Reliability**
Scavenged methodologies run the risk of being viewed as haphazard or non-systematic in their approaches to research because they are not bound to one particular methodology or process (Murphy & Lugg, 2016). Critics of such methodologies do not take into account the ways in which traditional scientific research routinely ignores and erases the experiences of folks whose identities are marginalized (Murphy & Lugg, 2016). A traditional scientific approach that adheres perfectly to methodological tenets cannot possibly capture the experience of marginalization, particularly if it aims to be objective. Returning to Spade’s (2015) notion of subjection, it is difficult to capture the ways in which individuals are subjected by hegemonic discourses and structures of power if there is no space for the subjective—voices, bodies, experiences, histories, emotions, stories, resiliencies—in the research process. For the research questions laid out in this project, I ensured that the research process itself was not disembodying because heteroprofessionalism already dictates the removal of one’s self in order to fit into the role of teacher (Douglas & Carless, 2013). I consider the notions of rigor, generalizability and triangulation to help explain the strengths of this research project, while also challenging the notions of validity and reliability as they relate to social science research.

**Rigour in Qualitative Pursuits.**

Rather than subscribing to traditional notions of academic rigour, I employ interpretive rigour in my writing (Lincoln et al., 2018). This notion of rigour is based on what can be done with the outcomes of the research and to what extent they point to any particular actions that can affect change (Lincoln et al., 2018). Because queer and critical theories are committed to transformative change and this study is aimed towards futurities of queer professionalism, it is fitting to consider the success and portability of this research by way of interpretive rigour. Rather than claiming my queer identity as proof of credibility, I think it is more important to
invest in reflexivity and make apparent all aspects of my identity that influence my experiences with heteroprofessionalism (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010). This commitment ensures the necessary vulnerabilities and dialogues of a queer/ing methodology.

**Particularity.**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), particularity is a strength of qualitative research. Rather than trying to apply the outcomes of research to broader populations, autoethnography and queer methodologies zoom the lens in on the specific experiences of those who are most often excluded in the research (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). In doing so, these methodologies also shift the gaze away from individuals and towards the institutions that shape how people exist. This opens up opportunities for uncovering new subjective and local knowledges while resisting attempts to homogenize experiences (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). If there is any generalization that could occur without contradicting queer and critical aims, it is one that applies the outcomes and analyses of an institutional ethnography to other institutions, to better understand and intervene in harmful patterns of ruling relations (Smith, 2005). This manner of generalization, though not true to its traditional conceptualization, offers the opportunity to apply new knowledges to create social and political change without erasing subjective experiences.

**From Triangulation to Crystallization.**

In qualitative research, it is common to frame the validity of research around the coordination and use of multiple methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Put simply, triangulation is a means of ensuring that multiple avenues or perspectives are taken into consideration (Flick, 2018). It may also include taking up multiple theoretical frames to examine data (Flick, 2018). Although my thesis research adheres to the tenets of triangulation, as noted by Creswell and
Creswell (2019) and Flick (2018), I turn instead to Lincoln et al.’s (2018) concept of crystallization to offer a more nuanced consideration of validity in qualitative approaches.

Lincoln et al. (2018) problematize the use of the triangle—“a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object”—as the central image of validity and suggest the use of a crystal instead (p. 141). The image of the crystal offers a material object that can be held, manipulated, and moved to alter what is seen reflecting from and refracting through (Lincoln et al., 2018). This better captures the ways in which we bring our situated selves and local knowledges to the research that we read and take away from it our own truths, rather than any single universal truth. If we could see validity in this manner, we can let go of the idea that there is only one way to read and value research and instead see how each person is able to make meaning in ways that matter to them, while still reflect outwards so that they have impact beyond the self (Lincoln et al., 2018). In taking up this metaphor of validity, I suggest that the strength, worth, and value of this project cannot be found in the ways and means with which I gather data, but in the recognition that this study tells a small part of a much larger story of queerness, marginalization, and the pressures of normativity in education systems and the teaching profession.

**Chapter Summary**

In this study, I engage queer and queering methodologies to examine how LGBTI teachers experience and perform their identities in response to demands of professionalism. Scavenging from multiple methodologies, I chose to situate this research in my own experiences as a queer and trans educator (*autoethnography*), examine how the ruling relations within the education as an institution (as per Smith, 2005) coordinate heteroprofessionalism (*Institutional Ethnography*), and consider the ways in which broader discourses about teacher professionalism (*Critical Discourse Analysis*) make visible the heteronormative expectations placed on LGBTI
teaching in different professional contexts. Through the lens of critical and queer theories, I also consider what futures might exist for a teacher professionalism that embraces queerness and commits to an agenda of transformative social change for teachers marginalized more broadly by other structures of power that construct teachers as white, able-bodied, etc.

By situating myself within the research and engaging in reflexivity, I begin this thesis with 1) subjective experience, then 2) move to understand the subjective through critical and queer theoretical lenses, before 3) mapping out how the institutional ruling relations coordinate subjective experiences of homophobia and transphobia, in response to and alignment with 4) broader social discourse. In place of arguments for validity and reliability of data, I instead invite interaction and co-construction of knowledge along with the reader through the dialogue of autoethnographic approaches and the image of the crystal refracting inwards and reflecting outwards (Lincoln et al., 2018). This metaphor for internal growth and external change acknowledges the broader aim of this inquiry, which is to enact change in the institutional powers and discursive structures within Alberta’s education system in order to embrace a queer, non-normative professionalism.
Chapter 4: Autoethnographic Data

Overview

According to Smith (2005), the lives of individuals working within institutions—such as health care and education—are coordinated by language, documents, and institutional texts. This is not to say that people are without agency within those institutions, but instead that those institutions exert influence on individuals’ actions by way of policies, procedures, and discourse. In the context of teacher professionalism, there are expectations that are explicitly laid out in documents and distributed materials, but there are also hidden assumptions and taken-for-granted norms as well. Professionalism operates at many different levels in education: through policy, governance, regulations, and interpersonal interactions (Hargreaves, 2000; Osmond-Johnson, 2016; Mizzi, 2013, 2016). Aoki’s (2005) and Martin’s (1976) conceptualizations of school curricula are useful in understanding how constructs of professionalism operate across multiple levels and result in the prevailing knowledge of teacher professionalism as heteroprofessionalism (Mizzi, 2013, 2016).

Aoki (2004) differentiates between the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived when it comes to the learning that takes place in schools. The curriculum-as-planned includes the explicit learning outcomes in Programs of Study and what learning is intended to occur (Aoki, 2004). The curriculum-as-lived refers to what learning actually takes place, particularly because the classroom is a living, dynamic space wherein students bring their own histories, experiences, curiosities, and more. While Aoki (2004) notes that these two curricular worlds are often in tension, teachers have to dwell in between both for student learning. I believe that Aoki’s curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived can help us understand the ways in which expectations of teacher professionalism operate both in policy and in the implicit ways
that teachers, administrators, and school divisions take up and enforce their ideas differently across local contexts, influenced by their own histories, experiences, and values.

The term “hidden curriculum” was first coined by Jackson in 1968 and describes norms that are established implicitly within the school environment, such as students raising their hands to respond to questions or walking in a straight line, silently through the halls. While there is no consensus on a specific definition for hidden curriculum, Martin (1976) provides a strong framework for understanding how such unplanned and unintended knowledge transmission takes multiple forms, influencing learning states, character traits (such as obedience and gender norms), emotional states, and attitudinal states. Learning that arises from the hidden curriculum is not exclusive to students in schools, but applies more broadly to any learning that occurs through unintentional reinforcement. This conceptualization helps to delineate how teachers might understand teacher professionalism differently, based on their own experiences and educational backgrounds. It is also useful for understanding how particular morals and values are embedded in discourses around teacher professionalism, particularly within public spheres and the realm of media.

Professionalism is prescribed through legislation and professional documents, defining not only what constitutes professional conduct, but also what protections teachers have in their roles. In Alberta, the Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation yet, the discrimination of LGBTI teachers still occurs in Alberta’s schools (Callaghan, 2018; Yourex-West, 2018). This gap between what is prescribed by institutional texts and what actually occurs is similar to the relationship between curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived: despite what is set out in writing, individual people are bringing those texts to life and can instill their own values or re-entrench majoritarian values unintentionally. As
a result, the hidden curriculum operates to simultaneously teach and reinforce dominant discourses. The hidden curriculum concerning heterosexuality often takes shape when teachers assume that their colleagues are heterosexual and cisgender, thereby reinforcing gender and sexual norms in the teaching profession. Ultimately, concepts of professionalism are complicated and layered, but can be understood as analogous to the relationship between curriculum-as-planned, curriculum-as-lived, and hidden curriculum. Despite how institutional texts and legislation define teacher professionalism, it is shaped by how individuals enact those texts as such actions often teach and reinforce implicit understandings about professionalism, particularly in regard to normative gender and sexuality.

In this chapter, I share data collected through autoethnographic reflection and self-interview (Crawley, 2014). Doing so situates the research questions within my own lived experiences as a queer teacher. Although I begin the chapter with a chronological recounting of being raised in a gendered manner, I do not adhere to a chronological form for long. Instead, I draw on themes from similar experiences and examine how those themes came up throughout my career. By describing my experiences as an LGBTI person and teacher, I am establishing the standpoint for this study and for the examination of documents and legislation, through Institutional Ethnography (Smith, 2005), that will come in the next chapter. With these experiences as a point of reference, I am able to index and map out how my experiences of homophobia and transphobia were coordinated more broadly by policies and practices rooted in heteroprofessionalism.

**Little Queer from the Prairies**

I was born in a rural community in southern Alberta and lived there for the first 17 years of my life. "It's a girl!" read the balloons and the birth announcement: a cause for celebration and
an exclamation, presented as fact. Though initially intended to inform family and friends, the line "it's a girl" ended up becoming more of a reminder for myself than others.

"I don’t want to wear a dress"—"But girls wear dresses"

"I don't want you to curl my hair"—"But I need to, so you don't look like a boy"

"Can I play football?"—"You're a girl, girls don't play football"

"What's your son's name?"—"She's a girl, her name is Jamie"

"You can't have a boy on your team"—"Oh we don't, she's actually a girl"

I learned from a very young age that although I didn't feel like a girl, I needed to be one. I couldn't always do what I felt was right for me, instead, I had to follow a set of rules—many explicit, but most were implicit. Although most of these rules were shared with me by the adults in my life, my friends and peers also reinforced them: rules about my hair, my clothes, how I dressed up, how I behaved, how I played, who I played with, what I liked in school, how I played sports, what I decided to do after graduation. I have a few vivid recollections from as early as four years old of how my gender was taught to me and how I learned the lengths with which I would have to go to perform and prove my "girl-ness" throughout life.

I remember one summer evening, closing out a 30-degree Celsius day, I was eating popsicles after dinner with my brother in the living room. At the time, my older brother was five and I was four, set to start Kindergarten in the fall. My dad had taken his shirt off in the evening heat and so my brother followed his example and did the same. Not knowing any better, I took mine off too, both to cool off and to mimic their every move, as young children do. Nothing about our chests was different, save for the fact that my brother was a little bit taller. Yet, I was met with admonishment by my whole family and told that I was not, in fact, allowed to take my shirt off because I was not, in fact, like my brother or father at all. I recall being both confused
and upset, feeling ganged up on by my whole family telling me that I could not do something because of who I was. I argued. It didn't make sense! *What was so wrong?* But I did not win that argument, nor would I win many of the arguments that would follow through the years. Not only was this a formative experience for me, but it is one of my earliest memories of unintentional gender disobedience and a resulting chorus of rebuke.

A year or so after this had happened, once I had finished kindergarten, I had a similar experience with a friend who lived across the street. Outside of my usual routine, I recall being told to have a bath and clean up before dinner, though I don’t quite remember why. I had started to get undressed in preparation to jump in the bathtub and had taken my shirt off when I heard the sounds of my friend riding his bike in the cul-de-sac through the open window. Careful to keep my chest below the ledge, I peered out the window and called to him, asking if he wanted to play after supper. Despite being confident that I had carefully concealed my naked chest, he immediately noticed my barely visible bare shoulders and asked why I wasn’t wearing a shirt. Shouting from the street to my upstairs bedroom window, he chided, "*only boys can do that, you're not allowed to, that's weird!*" At this point, it became evident that there were somehow these universally understood rules about shirtless-ness and who I could or couldn’t be because I was a girl.

While these are just two experiences and are by no means the only instances of gender policing and enforcing in my childhood, they speak to the ways in which gender is taught at a very young age both inside and outside of the home. For the longest time, I was called a "tomboy" which is often seen as a permissible form of queerness during childhood, or at least a form of queerness viewed as less harmful than others. It is permissible to the extent that is a temporary masculinity or lack of femininity that is seen as normal because *of course* girls would
want to mimic masculinity in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, it is viewed as playful, innocent, and a passing phase. The same patriarchal society that doesn’t take tomboys too seriously often violently rejects and rebukes boys that engage in feminine behaviour. While gender non-conformance in children is not often viewed positively, it is tolerated differently for masculine girls than it is for feminine boys. It does, however, become a more serious problem when it persists beyond childhood.

Although this “tomboy” label offered me the flexibility to play in the mud, wrestle, and wear my brother's hand-me-downs, my ambiguous gender was far too often a topic of conversation. In church, school, summer camps, extracurricular lessons, and more, the question of whether I was a boy or girl was frequently asked. These conversations, particularly when my friends or family were witness to them, created significant anxiety; it always felt like I was getting in trouble because no one else had to have those conversations but me. I learned that it was necessary for me to be more like a girl so as to avoid such mortifying questions, especially when I was around people who didn’t already know me. I found it helpful to play up my femininity, especially amongst adults: I would raise the octave of my voice, giggle, and sit with impeccable posture. Once I hit grade five, I even asked to get my ears pierced, to make this femininity more than temporarily visible. These memories of gender panic—worrying that I would be called out for failing to be a girl—remain vivid and visceral. The intentionally pre-emptive decision-making about my gender behaviour was a strategy that I adopted early on in my childhood, though it would continue to find its use throughout my life and into my teaching career.

Through the first decade of my life, I had already learned many lessons about my body, not knowing that there were still more to come: lessons about girl's hair, behaviour, friends,
chores, play activities, singing voices, and more. Because I was raised in the Catholic church, there were additional layers to these lessons. First, according to church doctrine (and shared in many a Sunday homily\(^2\)) God created man and woman, each with different roles and expectations that were all God-given. It was “God’s plan” for men and women to marry each other and procreate. Scripture was clear that wives were to abide by their husbands as per the divine nature of marriage and God’s creation of man first, then woman. In the Catholic church, sin was defined as many things, but some sins were viewed as more forgivable than others. Swearing, drinking to excess, and gossiping were sinful, but simultaneously the norm in the church community. Despite permissiveness around some “sinful behaviours,” there were others that would remain categorically unacceptable and these were often reserved for some of the heavier, more forceful sermons that I remember. Of course, knowing that I was different, I was already more attuned to the direct, repetitive messages about the sanctity of marriage, the sinfulness of homosexuality, and the calls to adhere to God’s path of heterosexual marriage, procreation, and understanding one’s gender roles. The seriousness of such sermons made it abundantly clear to me that I was in danger not only because of the sins themselves, but in how the church (particularly my family, friends, and school community) would respond to the knowledge that I was one of those people. And so, I learned to take on these same homophobic sanctity-of-marriage scripts as a way to maintain my own separation and innocence from such “sins.”

Although I had maintained a messy mushroom cut for the better part of my childhood, it was sometime towards the end of junior high—at the peak of my pubescence—when I remember making the significant decision to grow out my hair. I was no longer able to deter conversations

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\(^2\) A Roman Catholic priest’s speech or sermon that takes place after the reading of scripture during Mass.
about my gender through action alone and so I had to play the part on a more full-time basis. This involved parting ways with the boys’ sections in clothing stores and differentiating my hairstyle from my brother’s. With these decisions came a deep sense of grief. Although it felt like I had agency in those decisions, they were in fact a reluctant response to what felt inevitable. Time had come for me to “give in” to the world around me and hide away the parts of myself that I knew weren't acceptable. At the very least, I thought that this sacrifice would deter the constant barrage of questions concerning my gender and address the perpetual anxiety I was experiencing. But, even when I started to "look" more like a girl with long hair, plucked eyebrows, and breasts no longer hidden under baggy clothes, such constant questioning only intensified. It was no longer about whether I was a girl or a boy, but rather how I would prove my femininity—was I a normal girl? Who did I have a crush on? Did I wear a “real” bra? Were my closest friends, girls? Which celebrity did I think was cuter? At this stage in my life, I learned the ways in which gender and sexuality are bound up together and that it would prove more difficult than I anticipated to impersonate the “normal.”

The anxiety that I experienced in my early childhood never went away, rather it evolved and spurred different kinds of worry over time. In high school, with my newly visible femininity, I grew less concerned that people would misinterpret my gender and more concerned that they would recognize the signs that I was not straight. For one, I was never really good at being a girl. I almost exclusively wore my hair in a tight ponytail, gelled down to get rid of the strays and not at all the style that any of my friends were wearing. I did not wear name brand clothes because my parents could not afford to provide me with a whole new wardrobe once I ditched the masculine athletic attire. I often wore pants that were too tight for me, thinking that tight clothes were synonymous with femininity. My peers and family would notice and comment on how tight
my pants were, making my gender failures both apparent and a laughing matter. On top of this, when most of my peers were starting to wear makeup, I had no clue what to do with it and felt left behind, as though the girls around me had been given this gift of inherent knowledge about femininity whereas I was without an instruction manual.

Although my gender was no longer a question, as it had been in the past, it was still under close scrutiny. During junior and senior high school, I was a committed athlete and played on all of the school sports teams. When I had short hair, I was often mistaken for a boy and faced constant questions about why there was a boy on the girls’ team. I felt considerable relief when my ponytail eventually allowed me to blend in with all of the other players. Furthermore, in a team uniform, I didn’t stand out from my peers with my weirdly tight pants and lack of feminine style. Despite feeling like I could finally pass in the very specific environment of high school sports, I was once again reminded that my perceptions did not match the perceptions of others. In a one-on-one meeting with my basketball coach during my grade 11 year, he told me that I played basketball “like a guy.” The ways that I dribbled, moved up the court, threw the ball down the court on fast breaks, and did lay-ups revealed a masculine energy, according to my coach. At first, I took this as a compliment. After all, I had dedicated years to studying National Basketball Association (NBA) players on television, trying to emulate their moves whenever I practiced out on my driveway. Furthermore, he had framed this as a compliment, as though my gender deviance was actually a good thing and made me a better player. Once this comment started to sink in, though, I realized that maybe it wasn’t just him who recognized this out-of-place masculinity and maybe it was just as obvious to other people, despite my best efforts. This was particularly dangerous given the stereotypes of butch girls playing sports. Furthermore, this
incident reignited anxiety about my gender performances, because it was clear that I wasn’t really fooling anybody except myself.

I started dating my first boyfriend when I was in grade 11. Luckily, I did not need to pursue anything, but rather agreed to date the first person who indicated that he had the slightest interest. While this helped to ease some questions around my sexuality, it ended up generating several more, along with many obligations and expectations that surround teen romance. To my surprise, people were even more interested in my dating life with a boyfriend than they were when I was without. There was a barrage of new social scripts that I had to make sense of, not only because I didn’t inherently know how to be straight or a girl, but also because I was taught very little about romantic relationships from my parents or in school. Having a boyfriend meant additional scrutiny from others, invasive questions, and a running joke that everyone was both surprised and excited that Jamie—the former tomboy—had a boyfriend. When we eventually broke up after a few months, I had to find a way to feign sadness, in spite of the relief that I truly felt.

I continued to feel anxious and hypervigilant about my gender performances well into university. Despite engaging in secret relationships with other women—although we were “just” friends—I still outwardly identified as a straight woman, even doing my best to project that image by participating in Christian bible studies on campus. If my appearance, dress, and behaviour, didn't quell the constant questions around my dating life, then perhaps a visible affiliation with an aggressively heterosexist doctrine could do the trick. In the most desperate of times, I really did hope that I would actually be able to “pray the gay away.” With my upbringing in the church and a largely Catholic extended family, being “out” as lesbian, trans, or queer—anything outside the norm—was not within the realm of possibility for me. Despite my best
efforts for more than two years, I returned again and again to an ongoing relationship with a woman, eventually giving up on bible studies and any hope that a higher power could take the burden of “otherness” from me.

It wasn’t until my third year of university that I started to find community and supports that allowed me to humour the notion that maybe I could be queer person in the world. Although I did not change my mind about concealing my queerness, I would permit myself to daydream about what my future could be, consume queer music and media in hiding, and even talk to a small group of friends about it behind closed doors. Although I was still confident that I would live out the rest of my days pretending to be a straight woman, at least these moments spent in the queer warmth of others offered some solace. They helped me to feel seen, without actually being seen or surveilled as I had felt for the better part of my life.

At the end of that year, emboldened by a newfound love of Tegan and Sara³ and a secret stash of The L Word⁴ on DVD, I decided that I wanted to shed my long locks for short hair again. In an act of veiled philanthropy, I volunteered to shave my head for a cancer fundraiser, raising money and donating my hair as a part of the event. Although I felt guilty in the process, I knew that on people would view my actions as generous and that they would be inclined to embrace my radically queer makeover as a result of the “sacrifice” I was making. Ultimately, it was the perfect opportunity for me to begin to embrace small parts of my hidden queer self. Doing so through a drastic removal of one of few visible signs of my femininity, however, would bring me back to my childhood struggles with gender and being gendered from the outside-in.

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³ Tegan and Sara are a musical duo comprised of twin sisters from Calgary, Alberta. Both sisters identify as queer and were trailblazers in the music industry in the early 2000s because of their advocacy and work as openly queer artists.
⁴ The L Word was a television show centred on the experiences of lesbian women and other queer folks in Los Angeles. It came out in 2004 and was the first of its kind to showcase queer women and stories.
In the context of this research, I want to emphasize that I learned to navigate gender and professionalism as a queer educator as a result of how I learned gender as a child. Having developed an acute awareness of gender perceptions, projections, performances, particularities, and punishments from a young age, I knew that I would be charting somewhat familiar terrain as I re-entered the school system as a teacher. The purpose behind drawing on autoethnographic data from long before I was a teacher is to provide a more accurate picture of how I have navigated issues concerning gender and identity throughout my life. Moreover, the skills and strategies that I have used to maneuver gendered expectations as a teacher are the same that I used throughout my childhood. Finally, I do so to indicate to the reader that my experiences as a queer teacher also call upon traumatic experiences from my past. Such trauma is important to consider as you read and understand my experiences, actions, and inaction in the face of homophobia and transphobia.

**Miss, Mr., and Misgendered**

I came out to my parents as a lesbian in April of my final year of university, at the age of 23. Although I hated the word “lesbian” because it felt more alien and discordant than “gay,” I at least felt more at home as a lesbian than as a straight woman. I had known that I was queer for what felt like a lifetime at this point and was in a new relationship with a woman, but I could only bear to share with my family just one piece of information at a time. It wasn't until months later, the night before my convocation from university, that I would tell them about her. As my lesbian-ness moved from the abstract to the concrete and tangible, my parents started to express concern about the next steps in my career. What would “this” mean for me as a new teacher? My mom, having worked in a Catholic school for more than 15 years, had concerns that likely emerged from her own experience working with a closeted teacher in the Catholic system in a
rural community that on its best days was not friendly to diversity. My dad suggested that I was making things difficult for myself and hoped that I would find a way to be okay through it all. And while I clung to an optimism about how things had changed given my more progressive surroundings living in a large urban centre, I felt that if my parents were nervous about it, I should be too.

The anxiety that I experienced as a child about whether people “would know” re-emerged before I even started my teaching career, during the two mandated teaching practicums in my teacher education program. No longer armed with a ponytail that indicated my femininity, I felt that I needed to call on the performances that I learned when I was a child and teenager. I traded in my sports bras for underwire to ensure that my breasts were visible and not hidden, I kept my eyebrows well-manicured, spoke at higher octaves and in softer tones, and leaned into movements and gestures that were more femme. I had to invest in a wardrobe of teaching attire that was much different than my casual clothing and included things like blouses, khaki dress pants, and the formidable heeled shoe. This wardrobe served as a reminder that I still did not know how to be a girl, and instead was left to draw from cursory knowledge about what constituted feminine work wear that did not include dresses or skirts. Knowing good and well that my gender would be questioned both in my appearances and in regard to my relationships, I was highly protective of personal information, revealing very little and concealing the rest.

This continued into the first two years of my career, where I worked diligently to conceal my sexual orientation and project the hetero-norm as best I could. A few of my close friends who also worked at the school were queer, but we kept it under lock and key because we were all new in our careers and understood that our silence was protective and necessary. When I moved to southern Alberta with my then partner and began the job hunt for a new teaching position, I
surprised myself when I came out as gay during my second job interview. The administrators who conducted the interview asked about what my partner did after I indicated that we were making the move because of a work transfer. Without even thinking, I said “she” in response. Luckily, with this interview, I was able to secure a teaching position that would continue for the next five years.

In my first two years working in this southern Alberta school division, I was out as queer to several of my colleagues—albeit mutedly—and was pleased to find out that I was not the only queer staff member. I did not feel as protective about my sexual orientation amongst my colleagues, but was quite vigilant about concealing that information from my students and their parents. Given the openly conservative political leanings within the community, I was quite worried about what might happen if some “concerned” parents grabbed hold of this information. I did, however, have no choice but to be “out” to anyone and everyone when I came out as transgender and transitioned after my second year. It is fairly noteworthy when a “Ms.” goes away for the summer and comes back as a “Mr.”

During my final teaching practicum, when I was still trying to pass as a straight woman, I was placed in a Catholic high school within a self-directed learning program. The nature of the program was different than traditional schools, in that I spent most of my time supporting students who were working independently through modules and I was only assigned to teach one regular class in the girls’ leadership academy. Although I had met the students enrolled in my
class and continued to meet students by supporting them during tutorials, many of them remained unfamiliar to me just as I was to them. I cannot recall exactly how it came about, but I learned from one of my students in passing that word was spreading around the high school that I looked like Justin Bieber, the Canadian pop artist who, at the age of 16, had just released his latest album. Apparently, my hairstyle was the same as his and that warranted the nicknames “Ms. Bieber” and “Justin,” which students were quick to adopt. Though very few would mention it directly—"did you know that you look like Justin Bieber?"—that practicum experience was marked with paranoia each time students would giggle when they passed in the halls. While on the surface it seemed harmless enough, being compared to a prepubescent boy was not only a scathing review of my gender performances, but a challenge to my professional identity. Even more frustrating was that I could not talk about it with my supervising teacher or seek advice about how to address it because doing so would lead to conversations about why it bothered me, and I could not risk exposing my queerness in a Catholic school. I was able to tolerate the nicknames for another four weeks at which point I completed my practicum and could put the experience behind me.

Once I completed my undergraduate degree, I was hired for my first official teaching position at a high school in a rural Cree community outside of Edmonton. While it took some time for students to adjust to me as a new staff member, it did not take them long at all to make the Justin Bieber connection. I had hoped that being associated with a prepubescent pop star was well in the past, given that months had gone by since my introduction to the nickname. Once more, I was faced with navigating this kind of innocuous name-calling—Ms. Bieber, Mrs. Justin, Biebs—without feeling like I was able to do something about it. As a new teacher, I was well aware that my colleagues were watching my classroom management skills and might see this
behaviour as a failure to manage my classroom and student behaviour. That said, even when I felt like I needed support from my colleagues to address this behaviour, I was hesitant to make them privy to this incredibly embarrassing nickname that continued to plague me. When I finally decided to disclose this to my partner and some of my close friends, I hoped that they might be able to offer advice and help me navigate this unfortunate ongoing situation. Instead, they directed me to look at a Tumblr page called *Lesbians who look like Justin Bieber* (2019). The annoyance over the seemingly harmless nickname was quickly replaced by dread as they explained to me that there was a running joke about how a lot of lesbian women looked like a young Justin Bieber. The nickname not only drew attention to the fact that I looked like a boy, but also suggested that I looked like a lesbian.

It wasn’t too long after this that one of my students set aside the niceties of the “Bieber” nickname and shouted, “you fucking lesbian!” at me in front of an audience of students and staff in the hallway outside my classroom. To be fair, this was not unprompted, but was in response to my decision to bench her in the upcoming volleyball tournament due to her absence from school. Her frustration was valid, particularly because my whiteness created even more of a power imbalance between us as teacher and student. Though I was hurt that I had clearly caused harm in this relationship with this student, I was not mad at her for this comment. Instead, I was embarrassed and frustrated with myself. This student had lifted the veil and revealed that my queer identity was not as secret as I had hoped, and I was once again fooling no one but myself. At least she had been direct and said it plainly, rather than cloaking it within the Justin Bieber “code.”

A few years later, after I moved to a different school in southern Alberta, Justin Bieber changed his hair style and I was no longer the butt of the “Ms. Bieber” joke. Although I had
come out to my administrators and some colleagues as a queer woman, I was still trying my best to perform a femininity acceptable enough to be interpreted as straight. During one of my grade nine math classes, a colleague appeared at my classroom door and urgently pulled me outside of the room. He had been teaching one of the other three grade nine classes when he overheard a group of students talking about me while they were working on a group assignment. Upon pressing these students, he discovered that they had received a group text message from one of their friends—a student in my class—which included a picture of me teaching at the front of the room. In response to this picture, their friends (from a different school) who were included in the group text thread proceeded to make comments about my sexuality, inquiring if I was a lesbian because I looked like one. My colleague asked to take their phone, then brought it with him to my classroom around the corner. He informed me of the group text and showed me what he had read. On the student’s phone, I saw pictures of myself teaching at the front of the class followed by a conversation amongst these students commenting on my “dykey” looks. Here I was, teaching about polynomials while a significant back channel conversation took place in the class, questioning the frail straightness that I had projected. Once again, I was faced with how to address this inappropriate behaviour through the lens of classroom management, while also maintaining an objectivity so that it didn’t seem that I was taking things personally because I was actually “dykey.” My colleague recognized this predicament as a queer man, himself. He decided to address the behaviour on his own through the lens of inappropriate technology use and taking pictures without permission. In doing so, we hoped to draw little additional attention to the events that transpired. We later commiserated in his classroom, after school had ended, recognizing this particularly vulnerability as queer teachers in a rural community. Ultimately,
there was a certain level of abuse that we had to tolerate in order to keep ourselves under the radar in the community.

**What Not to Wear: Professionalism and the Clothes Closet**

There were many stressful days throughout the school year, but none were more stressful than parent-teacher interviews. Throughout my teaching career, I have struggled the most around relationship-building with parents. This is not because I lacked social skills or confidence in my capacity as a teacher, but because I was afraid of being found out or forced to reveal what felt like an aspect of my private—not professional—life. As a queer woman, these were some of the few times throughout the year that I would put on more makeup, wear jewelry, and retrieve my push-up bra to emphasize my chest instead of concealing it. Knowing the rhetoric around queerness in schools and how many queer teachers are treated, I was diligent in my attempts to conceal this part of myself and appear gender obedient. My greatest stress was not whether someone would challenge the grades that I had assigned students, but that they would challenge my performance of femininity, or question my straightness. This was particularly true when they would bring their young children—too young for school—along with them, and I worried that they would ask if I was a boy or a girl (as many young children would do). So, I would fret over my clothing and mannerisms, particularly during these times of year. I would cross my legs at the knee instead of the ankle, I would wear brighter colours than greys and blacks, wear a visible necklace and larger earrings. From the cupboard under the sink, I would dig out the expired makeup samples that my mom had given me years ago to make myself up. This also meant that I would have to get up early to fight with the eyelash curler, put on mascara, and add some blush to my cheeks. On these days I felt self-conscious because I knew that I was not doing my
makeup well, but while being called inadequate as a woman was of concern, it was less
concerning than being called out or found out as queer.

Having learned at a young age the importance of appearing the gender that you are—particularly to adults—I would experience significant stress during these times of the year. In between, I would often feel more comfortable relaxing into androgynous and butch aesthetics in the classroom. My wardrobe involved to primarily include black skinny pants, V-neck shirts, and cardigans. Although it varied day-to-day, my regular outfits differed drastically from those that I selected for parent-teacher interviews and other important occasions. Moments of stress would arise when I would forget about a visit from the superintendent or an assembly and be worried about how I was being perceived and what people were thinking of me in my more masculine attire. Did they know? Were they naïve enough to look past my androgynous attire and write it off as a style choice, rather than a reflection of my queer identity?

Throughout my teaching preparation and practicums, the idea of professionalism was almost always stressed as first and foremost, your appearance. Class after class, instructors would discuss what was appropriate for women to wear and what was appropriate for men, citing appearances as crucial in establishing rapport amongst students, parents, and supervisors. My mentor teachers and practicum supervisors were permitted to comment on and discuss our appearance as the object of learning, offering suggestions about professional attire and behaviour. These conversations would bring me back to my childhood, refusing to wear dresses and skirts and feeling uncomfortable in frills. Now, I had to navigate a professional wardrobe alongside my own discomfort with my body and my identity as a woman in a world that didn't accept my way of being woman.
While not explicitly stated, I learned that an important part of teacher professionalism was gender obedience. The hidden curriculum of teacher preparation programs, workshops, and readings was clear about differentiating between expectations for men and women, primarily in terms of dress, but also in terms of behaviour, specialties, and grade levels. Women were nurturing and elementary teachers: they would need to wear professional clothing, but also be comfortable so that they could bend down and work with the young children. For men, what was considered appropriate dress stayed fairly static: collared shirt, slacks, dress shoes, maybe a tie. Men weren't anticipated in elementary classrooms but were more so in physical education where they could wear athletic clothing, or in shop classes where they could wear a more traditional masculine uniform: blue collar, hard-working menswear. The stereotypes of the "queer" teacher also played a role in our consideration of professional attire, by way of common tropes in movies and TV shows: the butch lesbian gym teacher and the flamboyant gay drama teacher. Even outside of these tropes, discursive expectations around normative gender and sexuality mandated a particular kind of feminine teacher contrasted by a particular kind of masculine teacher.

After I transitioned over the summer, I felt confident that these anxieties about my gender performance would dissipate and that I wouldn’t have to fight my natural behavioural inclinations that were often read as masculine. I was also able to wear what was most comfortable, the dress code of a male teacher: dress pants, tucked in collar shirt, sometimes a tie. Patterned shirts were best to hide the tell-tale markings of my chest binder; the places where lines were visible where the fabric pushed into my skin and fat. My partner assured me that no one would notice because they weren't looking for that, but I noticed. I also noticed that my chest was too flat compared to the typical chests of my colleagues. So, I would still hunch my shoulders and cave in my chest so that it was not too noticeable.
Five years into my teaching career, I joined the grade five teaching team in the same kindergarten to grade nine school where I had been out to my colleagues as a gay woman. The move from the junior high classroom to upper elementary helped to ease my transition period as I could get to know new students and new families. I was also aware that at their age, my grade five students were still reading gender by clothing and hairstyle. As a fresh, baby-faced pubescent adult, they didn't necessarily notice my lack of facial hair or my cracking and changing voice. When they saw my short hair, masculine clothes, and recognized a voice that was deeper than theirs, they “bought into” my gender expression and performances without question. While my anxiety and gender panics subsided in front of my young students, they continued to be amplified when I was amongst my colleagues and students’ parents. Just as I had donned femininity during parent-teacher interviews in the past, I was now taking on masculinity in explicit and intentional ways that were outside of my own gendered ways of being. Only now, I was less worried that people might know that I was queer, but I was confident that they did know that I was trans. After all, I transitioned in the same school and community after working there for two years. And so, on top of my exaggerated performance of masculinity (Hedlin et al., 2019)—deepening my voice, sitting with legs spread or crossed at the ankle, firm handshake with spread fingers so that my hands appeared larger than they were—I was also very hyperaware of the expressions and performances of others, looking for any clues that they knew.

After teaching grade five for two years, I decided to make the switch back to the junior high classroom. Ironically, like many of my students, I was two years into puberty—albeit, my second one in this case—and continuing to experience the many unpleasantries of it. Though, no longer unbeknownst to my students who had previously been too young to be able to pick up on the cues, my students were now in the trenches of puberty with me and were able to recognize
many of the changes alongside me—the increased sweating, acne, dark thin hair growing above the lip. My smooth, boyish face also made it challenging for me to be taken seriously as a teacher with experience. Despite having six years of teaching experience under my belt, many parents and teachers thought that I was brand new to the profession and did not always take me seriously or listen to my advice. I once had a colleague directly question my ability to teach the subjects assigned to me because of my presumed lack of experience. Most parents, upon first meeting me, would make comments about appearing "too young to be a teacher" or "too young to have that much teaching experience." Despite my newfound gender obedience, my lack of specific masculine traits, like facial hair, opened up the questioning and challenging from students’ parents that I had been worried about all along.

Even more concerning, though, was the growing culture of toxic masculinity amongst many junior high boys that was seemingly permitted by adults inside and outside of school: physicality (most often violent, including punches to the groin); put-downs rooted in misogyny (“don’t be a pussy”) and homophobia (“no homo”); and embracing jokes and humour involving racism, sexism, sexual violence, and homophobia. While I found myself feeling like I had to be conscientious regarding my masculinity so that I would be read as a man, I also had to consider the ways in which I might project a different kind of masculinity than the toxic masculinity being embraced. This proved even more challenging given that some of that toxic masculinity was rooted in the beliefs and values of the Latter-Day Saints (LDS) church, which comprises a significant population in the community where I worked. In my attempts to correct some of the problematic behaviours learned by these students, I was viewed as challenging their norms, beliefs, and religious practices. This gave some students and their parents additional ammunition, on top of my trans identity, to attack my professionalism and teaching practice.
Stalls and Stalling: The Washroom Problem

It is fair to presume that public washrooms are generally uncomfortable for most people, particularly in the context of the work environment where you know people well enough to care how they perceive you, but do not know them well enough to feel comfortable in such private moments and environments. Growing up, washrooms were always a source of stress for me. I recall an incident in the fourth grade where, while using the girl’s washroom, a younger student screamed and ran out of the bathroom, telling her teacher that there was a boy in the girls’ washroom. Despite the fact that my mom still insisted on curling my mushroom cut under, my short hair prompted her to assume I was a boy and a threat to her in the girls’ washroom. This paved the way for many more encounters of this nature, especially when I had short hair, particularly in public washrooms and with older women or young children likely to question my presence. It became routine to choreograph my day around using the washroom in ways that would reduce negative experiences with others. In university, I would sit in the back of the classroom or at the end of the row so that I could have access to use the washroom in the middle of class when it was less likely to be occupied. While driving home for the holidays, I would map my routes based on gas stations with single-stall washrooms. I have a long-held anxiety around washroom use that has persisted throughout my entire life.

Throughout my teacher training and teaching career, I have been very calculated about my washroom use in order to avoid confrontations by colleagues and students alike. As a butch lesbian with short hair, androgynous appearance, and the height and shoulders of a man, I avoided using the washrooms during scheduled break times on professional development (PD) days or meeting breaks, instead opting to sneak out and use the washroom when there was a greater likelihood that it would be empty. If I did encounter any women in the washroom, I
called upon feminine performances: make eye contact and smile, emphasize movement of hips while walking, pull shoulders back to emphasize chest, speak with a higher voice, if possible. I had hoped that these performances would communicate that I was in fact in the right washroom, and although I was unable to escape the scrutinizing stares walking in and out of the washroom, I was at least able to avoid confrontation most of the time. Whenever single stall washrooms were available, I would opt to use them and would appreciate their privacy, despite knowing that it was with able-bodied privilege that I was using accessible spaces in ways that might create barriers for folks with disabilities needing to use them. And, if all else failed, I could count on being able to dehydrate myself enough that I could wait until getting home to use the washroom.

The social codes in women’s washrooms and men’s washrooms are significantly different (Rasmussen, 2009) and after becoming adept at navigating one set of rules, I had to quickly adapt to another set after I transitioned. The first challenge of men’s washrooms is that they tend to have several urinals and only one stall, therefore creating challenges for folks who don’t stand up to pee. Homophobia compels so many of the behaviours in men’s washrooms: prohibiting things like eye contact, standing too close to others and lingering too long, while forcing you to leave lots of space between you and the next guy. So, when the single stall is occupied and I need to use the washroom, I can’t linger around awaiting my turn for fear of being confronted for not inherently knowing the rules of the restroom. Unfortunately, this meant that instead of leaving a meeting or PD session once to use the washroom, I would often have to do so several times. Unfortunately, when the washroom was occupied and I was unable to go, I would still need to pretend that I had gone in order to prevent any questions concerning my inability to access the urinals. A fear of such washroom encounters and preoccupation with strategizing to use the washrooms no doubt jeopardized how people viewed my professionalism.
Choosing to miss out on professional learning or leave in the middle of a meeting may have been seen as unprofessional and inappropriate behaviour. After all, so many of my colleagues place such an expectation on students to use the washroom during their break times, so why wouldn’t they place this expectation on those around them?

Despite their roots in homophobia, the rules around averting eye contact in the men’s washrooms were actually a significant relief. During times when, upon close scrutiny, my gender could easily be questioned, I was pleased to find that this rarely happened. This did not stop me from performing masculinity to gain safe entrance and exit from the men’s washrooms: shoulders widened and slouched at the same time to hide my chest, shuffling feet with toes pointed outwards, wide stance, and arms as though I was carrying invisible suitcases. Unfortunately, when you sit down to pee, there are still risks that you might be targeted. Although passing as a man affords many privileges, the performance required to pass can sometimes be a dangerous one where a single misstep can end in violence (Pfeffer, 2014; Rasmussen, 2009). Trans folks, particularly trans women, are often the targets of violence motivated by hysteria around gender. Salamon (2010) identifies this danger stemming from “difference masquerading as sameness” (p. 112) and draws attention to the ways in which violence is a consequence for trans folks who perform gender in ways that are perceived to “trick” others, too closely approximating the gendered ideals. While I am lucky to have not experienced such violence in the workplace, there have been times where I have been questioned and harassed by men (often under the influence of alcohol or drugs) when sitting down to pee in public washrooms. Although I don’t have to choreograph my day around washrooms the same way as when I was a visibly queer woman, I continue to be concerned with how I perform my gender when inside them to avoid such harassment escalating to violence (Rasmussen, 2009).
have become well-versed in the culture of men’s washrooms so that I can perform appropriately: head down, no eye contact, feet a certain width apart.

For the last five years of my teaching career, I taught in classrooms on the second floor of the school building. While there were two sets of student washrooms on the second floor, the only staff washrooms were located on the first floor, connected to the staff room. As a junior high teacher, I was sometimes able to make it down to the staff washrooms during a student break so that I did not leave my students unattended in order to use the washroom. Because these students were older, it was acceptable if they were unsupervised for a minute or two if I was late returning to my classroom. When I moved from junior high to elementary, however, I learned that I would have to navigate my washroom use differently because of the additional responsibilities when working with younger children. Elementary students did not have unsupervised breaktimes between courses and their typical breaks outside of the classroom took place during recess. This meant, by and large, that I was with my students for almost the entire day, apart from recesses when I was not scheduled for supervision and periods when they were in physical education or music class. While there were many days of the week when I was able to use the washroom while my class was out for recess, there were still days where I struggled to find time to do so. Because a student washroom was located just down the hall from my classroom, I had the habit of using it as it was the closest and allowed me to be away from my classroom for a shorter amount of time if I needed to sneak away in the middle of class. Before using it, I would always double check that there were no students, which meant sometimes pacing up and down the hall, checking the washroom, then checking on my working students while I waited for the washroom to become unoccupied.
As a trans man, early in my transition, I also had to find ways to navigate “that time of the month.” Although rarely discussed, trans men menstruate too, and this added to my challenges accessing the washroom. For one, most men’s washrooms are not equipped to dispose of menstrual products, particularly the boys’ washroom that I had sometimes used on the second floor of the school. When using the staff washroom on the first floor, I also had to find a way to bring menstrual products down to the washroom with me, discreetly, because there were no cupboards or places to store such supplies within the washrooms. There were some days when I was unable to have time away from my students to venture downstairs to the washroom and I worried that I would bleed through my pants—a thought that mortifies me even to this day. As a result, I would often plan dental and doctor’s appointments or call in sick on days when I knew I was going to be menstruating and did not have any preps or breaks within the school day.

For some time, there were discussions about adding a staff washroom to the second floor. Largely spurred by a colleague who was forced to use a mechanical closet with a garbage can when she was experiencing morning sickness, our administrators had been advocating to head office for a single stall washroom to be built. The biggest barrier to this request was that our school was the newest building in the division, less than five years old. It was hard to justify additional expenses on our building when others were in need of more significant upkeep. Nonetheless, this topic emerged now and then during staff meetings, with my colleagues asking about how the request was progressing. During one particular meeting, our administrators brought up concerns around washroom use based on a meeting they had had with other administrators and superintendents from head office. Upon hearing that teachers were using student washrooms (not just in our school, but in others), the superintendent stated that under no circumstances should staff members be continuing to do so. This put all of us in a precarious
position: our administrators, being given this directive but also wanting to support us in taking care of our needs, and staff, knowing that this was an expectation, but facing the challenge of only having three single stall staff washrooms in a building with more than 40 adults on any given day. We were now faced with having to make the decision between disobeying a directive from the superintendent or having to leave our students unsupervised to use the staff washrooms when nature called. The additional layer of concern as a trans teacher was that there was now a local standard of professionalism that required the surveillance and policing of staff washroom use. This further fuelled my anxiety around washroom use in the workplace.

**Being Queer is More Unprofessional Than Being Homophobic**

I was very involved in the local chapter of the Alberta Teachers’ Association throughout my time as a teacher in southern Alberta, serving on several committees, including the Executive of our local association. One particular privilege of sitting on this committee was participating in biannual meetings with the executive staff the school division. Such meetings allowed for relationship-building as well as direct advocacy about issues of concern to members of the professional organization. During my first year in the school division, the superintendent decided to retire, and the process began to find their replacement. At the time, I was still identifying as a queer woman, but presenting as “straight” as I could manage amongst students and some colleagues. Once the new superintendent was hired, we were thrilled to have the opportunity to sit down with them during one of these joint executive meetings. We had heard that this person had received their first degree from a bible college, so we were prepared to ask some questions to gauge their support of LGBTI diversity within the school division during this first meeting. Well into the meeting, one of my colleagues at the table asked the new superintendent to share their values around supporting diversity in schools, specifically through GSAs, QSAs and other clubs.
What followed was a response that was simultaneously confusing and crystal clear at the same time: the superintendent suggested that people could not be beaten up for being gay, but they also could not be beaten up for being homophobic, either. While avoiding a direct response to my colleague’s question, the superintendent also made it very clear that being queer and being homophobic would be equally protected within the school division. Furthermore, this response implied a belief that either homophobia was as intrinsic as one’s queerness, or that one’s queerness was a choice in the same manner that homophobia is. Although legislation and policy at the division level suggested that one’s sexual orientation and gender identity were protected grounds from discrimination, our superintendent indicated that such policies might be enacted or lived differently. This was highly concerning as a queer teacher. We were left feeling as though we would remain unsupported by division office if we had any concerns about homophobic incidents, because the right to be homophobic was to be equally protected. Knowing that this person was setting the direction and coordination the actions of division office and administrative staff, many of us were very nervous of what was to come.

The next joint executive meeting was set to take place in the fall of the following school year and happened to occur on Halloween. As was the tradition in our school, many of the junior high teachers coordinated a group costume for Halloween and we decided that year to dress up as rock stars of the 80’s and 90’s. The costumes included Joan Jett, Cyndi Lauper, and my queer colleague and I as Elton John and George Michael. While both of our costumes were a bit on the risky side, I was taking a particular risk as a queer woman cross-dressing as a gay George Michael. But, risk aside, I was committed to the costume and was excited for the teacher lip sync that was planned during the lunch break. While the costumes were a huge hit at school, we were a bit hesitant to appear at our meeting with the school division executive in such fashion. Despite
our concerns about showing up in full costume at the golf course clubhouse, where the meeting room was booked, we did so, nonetheless. The responses from members of division office executive team were lukewarm at best. Although we were not the only ones in costume at the meeting, the costume choices made by our colleagues from other schools were much more muted than ours. What was particularly noticeable was how the superintendent seemed to ignore me and my colleague dressed as Elton John throughout the entirety of the meeting, going so far as to avoid eye contact when we shook hands at the beginning and end. While the previous meeting had raised some red flags, the subtext of our interactions on this date indicated that we were inappropriate and unprofessional in our Halloween costume choices, but that no one else was. Even our colleague, dressed in leather as Joan Jett, made note of their particularly tepid interactions with us. As is a common response to any microaggression, my colleague and I went back and forth between doubting ourselves and justifying the behaviour as unintentional for the longest time. What we learned from that experience was that our queerness made visible through our choice in Halloween costumes was not particularly welcome in that work environment.

Navigating transphobia and homophobia, particularly microaggressions, was particularly challenging to deal with. After transitioning, I had a colleague that continued to send emails to my teaching team with the greeting “hey ladies.” The first two times this happened, I ignored it, thinking that perhaps it was a mistake made in their attempts to fire off an email quickly between tasks. Then it happened a third time. Deciding that the third time was the charm, I called upon a classic tactic of passive-aggressive humour in my response. “Sorry,” I wrote, “I didn’t think that this email was addressed to me because it says ladies.” I don’t recall receiving a response to that email, but I do remember taking that as a sign that they humbly took my feedback and would change their behaviour for next time. This was not the case. I continued, for more than a year, to
receive group emails and even group text messages that started with “hey ladies.” I started to feel that this was intentional, that my colleague did not truly value or recognize my identity. Finally, I had to seek help from my administrators. They were supportive and agreed to speak to my colleague on my behalf, who later apologized and laughed it off as a silly mistake. Although I appreciated that it was finally addressed by an administrator, I could not help but feel that the response was disingenuous. In the end, I wondered if I had made a fuss over nothing. Why should I feel as though I am the inconvenience when these instances of homophobia and transphobia are far more harmful for queer folks?

Who is Building the Closets we Are in?

The assumptions that are made about being “in the closet” suggest that it is a matter of individual choice for LGBTI individuals to hide their true identity from others. Warner (1999) disputes this claim, however, arguing that it is less about being in the closet, and more an issue of the closet being built up around queer people by way of taken-for-granted assumptions and dominant discourses that dictate what is appropriate and inappropriate. Little by little, we learn what is appropriate to think, feel, say, and act, all the while concealing things that we have been told are inappropriate or out of the norm; “the closet” takes shape around us. Although I can identify many instances where I made choices to conceal or hide my queer identity, these choices were actually compelled by the social environments that I was acting within.

After I transitioned and my trans identity was no longer a secret, I felt more comfortable to begin to engage in advocacy and education concerning gender and sexual diversity within my school division. Although this felt like a newfound freedom, that feeling was short lived. A few months into the school year, one of my colleagues asked to speak with me outside of the classroom. One of their students had expressed that they felt more like a boy than a girl and that
they struggled to communicate this with their parents. They didn’t like to be called “she” and asked for their teacher’s help to navigate this. Given that I had just transitioned and had shared some of my knowledge around supporting LGBTI youth with my colleagues, she reached out for my help and asked if I would speak with the student. After a brief conversation with the student offering support and asking them what they needed and wanted to feel affirmed at school, I relayed this information, along with some resources, to the classroom teacher, counsellor, and administrative team. Feeling that the conversation went well and that the proper supports were in place at school, I returned my focus back to my own work and growing pile of marking.

I was surprised to be pulled aside by one of the administrators the next day asking about the conversation I had with the student. I explained that I had asked them what they needed to feel comfortable and that the student requested a different name and pronouns be used in school. Apparently, when the staff members met with the parents to facilitate a conversation, it had not gone well, and parents expressed concern that they were being pushed to do something that they did not want to do by the school. The implication was that I had perhaps influenced the student to start demanding that these changes be made by school staff. There appeared to be concern that the child had not arrived at this conclusion on their own, but that they were somehow coerced into feeling this way by the only trans adult at the school. At the request of one of the associate superintendents, my administrator told me that I should have no further contact with that student. I walked away from that conversation feeling deflated and as though I was responsible for what happened; that I had failed this student. Not only were their parents highly resistant to efforts to support their child, but I had also been cut off from supporting them as a result of what was presumed about our singular conversation. This was not the only time that I would experience this position of being simultaneously seen as a support or resource to students and colleagues,
while also being viewed as a threat or potential liability to head office. Many efforts to assist my colleagues or support students in other classes were most often met with additional surveillance and management from the school division. It was as though they, too, shared concerns that queer teachers, like me, were out to “convert” innocent children into the queer “lifestyle” (King, 2004; Munt, 1997). Although this discourse of “queers-as-predators” is fairly common amongst the conservative rural populations in Alberta, I was surprised to see it enacted by executive members of the school division to restrict my support of queer and trans students.

In the following school year, I started a rainbow club for elementary students, which was essentially a Gay-Straight or Queer-Straight Alliance, but catered to elementary students rather than junior and senior high students. A student from another class joined and immediately shared that they would like to use a different name and pronouns. At first, they asked to only use their new name and pronouns during our club meetings. Then, they shared that they were using this name and pronouns in their homeroom. I was pleasantly surprised to hear that they were comfortable asking for this, knowing that they were concerned about whether they would receive parental support. Nonetheless, I assumed that this was a sign that their parents were, in fact, on board. They continued to be active in both the rainbow club and the junior high GSA for weeks, until one of their parents showed up to the school one evening, looking for them because they had not come home. It turns out that their parents had not been privy to their participation in rainbow club and GSA, nor their new name and pronouns. After this incident, the student told me that their parents forbade them to participate in either club. I was also advised by administrators yet again that division office suggested I avoid contact with this particular student, so as to not cause more tension with parents. This was challenging to do, as this student sought my support again and again: when their parents refused to accept their identity and when they
expressed that they had self-harmed because of the isolation they were feeling. Despite working with the administrators and counsellors to ensure that this child was getting the support that they needed, I still felt like a liability and that any knowledge of my involvement might result in discipline from the school division. Even though I felt that my queerness was an asset that equipped me to better support LGBTI students, I found myself bumping up against barriers and restrictions around when and how I could be a supportive teacher because of my queer identity. As a teacher, I had a professional responsibility to ensure the safety of this student. Yet, the perception around my involvement was more important than how this child fared. Concern about parental perceptions seemed to be at the forefront in this particular situation, suggesting that moral panics about queer teachers “converting” their students continue to be granted credibility in the school context (Cavanagh, 2008; King, 2004).

Fast forward a year and I encountered yet another similar situation. This time, I was teaching junior high in the same K-9 school and received a call from a parent whose child had previously been in one of my grade five classes. This family was highly supportive and nurturing of their child who had come out as transgender. Over the phone, they raised concerns about the intended sleeping arrangements for their child on the overnight field trip that they were about to embark on the next day. Apparently, rather than sleeping in the boys’ cabin as had been the original plan, this child was being moved to a separate room away from the other students. Given my relationship with the parent and support of the student through the rainbow club, I felt comfortable attempting to work with my colleagues towards a solution that was less isolating for the student. Unfortunately, my involvement was viewed as inappropriate by one of the division office executives because while I had been this child’s teacher in the past, I was not one of their current teachers. It was challenging to feel as though I was being reprimanded once again in my
attempts to support queer and trans students, even though I had established positive relationships with their parents as evidenced by the fact that they reached out to me for guidance throughout this ordeal, which was not the case in prior incidents. I questioned whether other teachers would encounter such oversight when supporting LGBTI students, or if my trans identity was actually the greatest threat. Although the decisions to limit my involvement were all couched in concern for my own well-being and protection from potential pushback from parents, it still felt as though my supportive behaviour was being interpreted as menacing. The fear that any interaction I had with students might influence them, or merely give the impression of influence, remained prominent in their decision-making. Despite legislation protecting queer and trans teachers from discrimination, incidents like these remain common, suggesting a persisting suspicion about the LGBTI teacher and their “gay agenda” (Ferfolja, 2007).

Returning to Warner’s (1999) argument that “the closet” is in fact built around us, I now recognize that barriers were frequently built around me to contain my queerness because it was viewed as a potential problem or impediment to the work of the school division. While I do not fault my school administrators for their responses during these events, I feel it necessary to draw attention to the ways in which their actions and behaviours were coordinated more broadly. The discourses of parental rights and queer teachers as promoting the “gay agenda” underpin the aforementioned incidents and played a significant role in informing institutional responses. Later in this study, I examine these discourses further as they shape policy and legislation and appear within news media.

**Rewriting the Past**

As children, we are raised in highly gendered ways and socialized to embody and abide by normative gender expectations. Being immersed in a gendered society means that our day-to-
day actions and experiences are often determined by how our gender is designated according to the sex we are assigned at birth. Our memories and past experiences are not easily separated from these highly constrained ways of being gendered. As a result, decades of my lifetime were rooted in experiences that “defined” growing up as a girl: being in Sparks and Girl Scouts instead of Boy Scouts; being gifted Barbies and dolls on my birthday; playing on girls’ sports teams instead of on boys’ teams; doing the dishes instead of yard work; having my appearance scrutinized and “love handles” pinched when I gained weight; being told what I couldn’t be or do because I was girl; experiencing sexism and sexual violence as a norm. Although my gender identity has shifted and changed throughout my life, and will likely continue to do so, my formative years were spent being socialized as a girl. That did not change or go away once I transitioned.

One of the challenges that transgender teachers, in particular, face is the sense of obligation to erase or recreate their histories so that their past is congruent with their present identity. Some teachers may choose to rewrite their past as a way of reclaiming aspects of their childhood that they feel they lost, whereas others feel obliged to do so in order to appear gender obedient. One of the things I struggled the most with after transitioning was finding ways to talk about my experiences and my past. It was not that I did not want to share these parts of myself with my students, but rather that doing so would require me to directly address my trans identity. Given the ways in which I had been admonished in my attempts to support trans youth, I was made to feel as though such sharing would be considered inappropriate and unprofessional. Without wanting to stoke any further concern that I was “converting” youth and somehow encouraging them to become queer, I did not often talk with students about my trans identity outside of the GSA/QSA environment. As a result, my conversations with students about my past
were largely censored and evasive, which challenged my attempts to build rapport and positive relationships with them. Undoubtedly, this pressure to project a fixed and stable gender identity impacted my ability to connect with students and consequently, my practice as a teacher.

During my first-year teaching fifth grade and identifying as a man, I had a student whose last name I recognized from my time in high school: it was the same as my brother’s high school girlfriend. Being in a different town and recognizing how common last names can be, I decided not to dwell on it for too long. After the first month of school passed and my students grew more comfortable with me and the classroom environment, however, this student revealed that their family actually knew mine. It turned out that the student’s aunt was actually my brother’s former girlfriend. While this stirred up an immediate panic, wondering what they had talked about and what they knew, it became very apparent that my past would continue to be challenging to navigate alongside my present identity.

Teachers cannot engage in work with children and try to do so without acknowledging their past and prior experiences. Students are so curious and want to know how you grew up, including the when and where of it. Often, they ask questions about what you were like in school, always curious to know more about the figure at the front of the room. What was your favourite subject? What did you play at recess? Sure, there were always some things I could share with them without having to tread the waters of do I or don’t I in terms of outing myself. I talked about how I played Pokémon cards when I was also in Grade 5 too, and that I had also broken bones and received stitches as a child. As long as I stuck to the impersonal, non-gendered things, I was easily able to navigate their questions. At the same time, it still felt as though I was hiding a significant part of my life from them.
Later in the school year, one of my students got her first period while in class. Instead of being someone who she could turn to and be comforted by, I was someone she was too embarrassed to get help from, as though I had no idea what was happening to her and couldn’t possibly understand. But, I did. And then there were the girls who struggled with self-esteem, not hitting puberty at the same time as everyone else and feeling like ugly ducklings. That was how I had felt for the bulk of my life—out of sorts, not like the other girls, and like they had the manual for being a girl, but I was never given one. I never did share this information with them, mostly out of fear. But I continued to struggle with this burden of concealing the truth from my students in order to adhere to the norms of teacher heteroprofessionalism.

**Chapter Summary**

Since childhood, I have learned the explicit and implicit expectations concerning normative gender and sexuality, often by way of contravening them and “failing” at the gender I was supposed to be. Though challenging and often traumatizing, these experiences not only shaped my identity, but equipped me to navigate the rigid norms of teacher professionalism. My experiences with visibility, invisibility, and the professional “closet” as an LGBTI teacher serve as the standpoint for this study. Although the experiences of queer teachers are not universal, the anecdotes shared in this chapter indicate how heterosexism and transphobia operate on LGBTI teachers and are endemic to the school environment. As evidenced in the stories about my lived experiences, there are a number of challenges faced by queer teachers in the school environment, including: homophobia and transphobia from students, colleagues, and parents; pressures to hide their queer identities and project normative gender appearances; fears concerning the “queer contagion” or belief that queer and trans teachers may unduly influence the identities of their students; the body as site of surveillance and gender regulation; and physical and relational
barriers that are embedded within school sites. Even though there is legislation in Alberta aimed
to protect LGBTI teachers from discrimination, it is limited in scope and ill-equipped to address
the implicit and insidious ways in which heterosexism and transphobia are engrained in the
school environment. The next chapter includes a detailed analysis of such legislation, along with
policies and institutional texts that define and regulate teacher professionalism in the province.
This analysis will better contextualize the autoethnographic data within broader structures of
heteroprofessionalism that operate within the province of Alberta.
Chapter 5: Policy and Document Analysis

Although the structure of education in Alberta is broadly referred to as a system with multiple bodies and organizations working together across provincial and local levels, Smith’s (2005) definition of institutions helps to nuance our understanding in that it refers to complexes that are organized around delivering health care or education. For the purpose of this study, and as articulated in Chapter Three, I refer to the education system as an institution as per Smith’s definition, while also describing it as a system with various interconnecting parts. Smith (2005) argues that within institutions, the actions and activities of people are not coincidental, but are coordinated and mediated largely through texts such as workplace policies, procedures, templates, and documents. This coordination occurs in the ways that institutional texts connect the bodies of individual workers with the goals of the ruling relations by organizing the day-to-day activities of individual people with one another (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 2005).

As discussed in Chapter Three, Smith (2005) identifies that “ruling relations” are expansive complexes of connections that link us to one another and organize our daily lives, including media, corporate entities, and government agencies. Such complexes embed power structures within institutions to organize actions around particular discourses, especially those concerning gender (DeVault, 2006). Although individual actions are not necessarily prescribed by institutions, they are steered, meaning that they are greatly influenced and even compelled by institutional norms of accountability (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 2005). By analyzing the texts and language that are used to coordinate actions within the education system, I examine how teacher professionalism is coordinated around heteronormativity and cisgender normativity in ways that are often outside of teachers’ awareness and agency (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). The texts themselves and the ways in which they are activated and enacted in local contexts
reveal how heterosexism and cisgender sexism underpin teacher professionalism within the institution of K-12 education in Alberta.

The analyses of documents and policies stem from the standpoint of my personal experiences as a queer and trans teacher through shifting identities. I reflect on the ways in which my actions and practices as a teacher were coordinated institutionally through policies, procedures, and discourses at the local and provincial levels. To begin this analysis, I first map out the education system in Alberta, identifying the legislation and organizational bodies that provide structure and assign power within the institution. Because there are many actors and organizational bodies connected to the education system, this overview provides a frame of reference that can be used to understand the layers of power and different sources of institutional documents for teachers in their roles. As I map out the system as a whole, I also provide an overview of these institutional texts under consideration in this study and how they work in conjunction with and alongside other texts. For the purposes of this study, these texts are delimited to those which directly reference teacher professionalism, LGBTI teacher identities, or both.

I begin the policy analysis at the level of the school and school division, as this is the primary point of contact for teachers in their day-to-day work. To ensure anonymity and abide by my responsibilities to the Code of Professional Conduct, I have selected policies from three different rural school divisions that are near the urban centre of Calgary, Alberta to analyze alongside my own experiences (The Alberta Teachers’ Association [ATA], 2018b). Not only does this maintain privacy for my colleagues, but this also allows for a broader sampling of rural Alberta school division policies and analysis of similarities, differences, and common themes, drawing attention to how geographical contexts and demographics are a significant factor in
coordinating the actions of teachers around normative gender and sexuality. I then trace how these local policies and procedures map onto provincial legislation and standards that guide the work of the system as whole, while also examining how such standards have changed in recent years in response to shifts in provincial governments, with the platforms and axioms of governing political parties embedded within. Lastly, I account for the values and policies espoused by the professional organization representing teachers as a whole in Alberta, The Alberta Teachers’ Association (The ATA), and where they fit within the education system. This complex web of jurisdiction, legislation, and authority is difficult to navigate and complicates how teachers understand, embody, and enact professionalism. Competing discourses around gender and sexual diversity, “parental rights”, and educational “appropriateness” are also embedded within this web, creating an obstacle course for LGBTI teachers as they make sense of if and how their identities might fit into their role as a professional in an inherently relational field of work.

Overview of Institutional Texts

Legislation

In Canada, public education falls under the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial governments, with some exceptions where federal legislation concerning Treaty agreements and the Criminal Code defers this responsibility to the federal government (Alberta Education, 2019). The primary provincial legislation governing the education system in Alberta is the Education Act (2012) with separate legislation, the Teaching Profession Act (2000), governing the teaching profession in the province. Given that this study examines oppression and discrimination in regard to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, it is also prudent to consider province-wide legislation like the Alberta Human Rights Act (2000) as it works within the
education system and alongside legislation that coordinates education in Alberta. Although there are many other pieces of legislation that intersect with the education system and children and youth within it, the analysis in this section is delimited to the *Education Act* (2012), the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000), and the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000) as legislative texts that direct the education system and teaching profession at the highest levels.

**Ministry of Education Documents**

Alberta’s ministry of education is called Alberta Education and this department of the provincial government oversees many facets of the education system, including curriculum development, teacher certification, school funding, and school boards and authorities. Alberta Education (2019) outlines the provincial requirements for early childhood to grade 12 schooling each year in a document called the *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12*, hereinafter referred to as the *Guide to Education*. This document contains key requirements set out in legislation and guides the work of school divisions, schools, school administrators and teachers, making it one of the principal coordinating texts in education institutions. Additionally, Alberta Education (2018) outlines the requirements for teacher evaluation and certification in the *Teaching Quality Standard* or TQS as it is predominantly known. This document was updated under the New Democratic Party’s (NDP) governance in Alberta in 2018 and includes newer expectations for teacher competency, most notably being a requirement for demonstrated knowledge of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories and worldviews in order to earn teacher certification (Alberta Education, 2018). Although there were different TQS expectations outlined by Alberta Education during my early career and initial temporary and permanent certification processes, which is significant because I share my own experiences in this thesis, this section of the study includes analysis of the updated TQS which allows for additional consideration of the impacts
that shifting political parties have played in the experiences of and discourses concerning LGBTI teachers.

Prior to the release of the new TQS, the NDP majority government also released a document entitled *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, and Gender Expressions* hereafter referred to as the *Guidelines for Best Practices* (Alberta Education, 2016). This document was significantly impactful for LGBTI teachers and students and denoted a clear mandate from the provincial government to support gender and sexual diversity in schools, which was a novel experience in a province with a history of anti-LGBTI governmental policy and sentiment (Filax, 2006). As with the TQS, the release of this document was the result of a political shift and was not without controversy. Some of the news media analyzed in Chapter Six were selected from this time in 2016 when the document was first released and discourses around gender and sexual diversity became very public and often very violent. In this section, the *Guidelines for Best Practices* document is analyzed as an institutional text imbued with different power and force than other institutional texts within the education system. Furthermore, it illuminates how changes in policy do not guarantee changes in structures, environments, or the behaviour of those within them.

**School Division Policies**

School divisions in Alberta are accountable to Alberta Education and they establish their policies as required by legislation, ministerial orders, the *Guide to Education* (2019), and the TQS (2018), as per the ministry’s direction. Most school divisions refer to their policies as Administrative Procedures (APs) and these policies are made available to the public, including information about how each board engages in review and approval processes. In my experience as an educator, administrators and school division leaders have consistently emphasized the
importance of these policies in directing the day-to-day functioning of schools as well as the actions of school administrators and staff. Although individual schools may have school-specific procedures, they are still responsible for adhering to division-level policies, making APs important institutional texts that organize and coordinate the day-to-day experiences of teachers. Because APs are typically based on legislation as well as mandates from Alberta Education, many school divisions tend to have similar policies and administrative processes. That said, even with similar policy topics or processes, there continues to be a notable variance in administrative procedures across different school divisions, even within the same geographical regions or with comparable demographics. This variance is of particular interest in this study because it draws attention to how professionalism may be defined at a local level—both through local policy and local discourses—steering LGBTI teachers to navigate their identities differently despite provincially-defined expectations or practices.

For consideration in this study, I selected policies from Rocky View School Division No. 41 (RVSD), Foothills School Division No. 38 (FSD), and Golden Hills School Division No. 75 (GHSD) for analysis. Of particular interest were policies concerning teacher professionalism and conduct, LGBTI identities or similar topics (i.e. human sexuality, gender and sexual diversity), and controversial issues. Controversial issues policies do not often reference gender and sexual diversity directly, but they allude to such topics by way of delineating what is deemed “inappropriate” or controversial, which often includes sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. Because these policies often generate concern and fear about possible risks to job safety, particularly if teachers are on temporary or probationary contracts, they tend to carry a different weight than legislation or other institutional documents when teachers—especially queer teachers—are making decisions about their practice and their behaviour. Teachers are
primed to be concerned about “controversy” throughout their time in pre-service teacher education programs, so that teachers are already hypervigilant and extremely cautious when they enter the profession (Misco & Patterson, 2007, p. 537; Nganga et al., 2019). Such fear around potential risks to employment carry significant power for young teachers and this fear can change how individual teachers interpret and enact policies. The APs that I selected, especially the ones concerning controversial issues, affected many of my personal and professional experiences as an LGBTI teacher within rural communities and will be examined critically from my standpoint.

**The Alberta Teachers’ Association**

The ATA, also referred to as the Association, was formed in 1917 but did not earn legal authority over the teaching profession in Alberta until the first iteration of the *Teaching Profession Act* was given assent in 1935 (The ATA, 2019b). Legal responsibilities of the ATA have evolved over time to include collective bargaining rights and disciplinary oversight of the teaching profession (The ATA, 2019b). Although they are often referred to as a union because of their role in collective bargaining, they define themselves as a professional organization and emphasize their other functions, such as advocating for public education and providing professional development training and resources for teachers (The ATA, 2019b). *The Teaching Profession Act* (2000) in its current form ensures that membership in the ATA is mandatory for all teachers working in publicly funded schools (with exceptions for teachers in charter, private, and band-operated schools in the province). As such, the ATA represents more than 46,000 active members in the province and serves as the authoritative voice of the teaching profession in Alberta.
The ATA releases a variety of publications year after year, including news updates, teaching resources, research papers, magazines, brochures, policies, and more. Policies of the ATA are reviewed annually by member delegates of the Annual Representative’s Assembly (ARA) and all existing and updated ATA policies are published and made available to members each year in the Member’s Handbook (The ATA, 2019b). The policies of the Association represent the fundamental values of the organization and include “externally focused policies, internally focussed policies and immediate directives” (The ATA, 2019b, p. 90). Although such policies do not have the same power as legislation or Alberta Education mandates, they direct the broader work of the ATA and identify core values and beliefs of and for the teaching profession in Alberta. In addition to policies, the Member’s Handbook also includes key legislation and information about the structure and organization of the Association itself and is intended to be a resource document for teachers to refer to regularly (The ATA, 2019b).

Other ATA documents concerning professionalism and/or LGBTI teachers that are also examined within this section include: The Code of Professional Conduct (The ATA, 2018b), the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers (The ATA, 2018c), and Breaking the Silence: A Guide for Sexual and Gender Minority Teachers in Alberta (The ATA, 2018a). Such institutional documents establish and reinforce ideas concerning teacher professionalism within the province through language and that language then organizes and coordinates teachers’ day-to-day lives. By examining the common language and values that run through these selected Association documents, I can identify the extent to which the Association reinforces heteronormative and cisgender-normative ruling relations in accordance with other organizations within the education system and public discourses outside of the education system.
Summary

The education system in Alberta is complex, with a number of different organizational bodies creating structure and defining the roles and responsibilities for teachers who work within the system. There are a significant number of institutional texts that direct the day-to-day work of teachers, some with more influence than others. Refer to Figure 1 below for a visual map that I created to outline all of the institutions and institutional documents included within this chapter. Note that this visual does not capture all of the organizations involved in the education system (for example, the Alberta School Boards Association is absent); it focuses instead on identifying key governing bodies that have a direct impact on the experiences of teachers as professionals.

Figure 1
Visual map of the education system in Alberta, along with key institutional texts
Analysis of Institutional Texts

*School Division Policies*

**Overview.**

The three school divisions selected for policy analysis are located in southern Alberta, surrounding the urban centre of Calgary, and serve large geographic areas comprised primarily of rural communities. Rocky View School Division is the largest of these, serving 25,000 students in communities surrounding Calgary to the north, east, and west of the city (RVSD, No. 41, 2020). Foothills School Division operates schools in communities stretching south of Calgary, with 8,200 students enrolled in their schools (FSD No. 38, 2020). Lastly, Golden Hills School Division provides services to more than 7,000 students across the prairie communities northeast and east of Calgary (GHSD, No. 75, 2020). Similar policies were selected from each division for comparison and to identify the ways in which teachers are directed by institutional texts to embody a professionalism that adheres to and maintains normative gender and sexuality within the school environment. This study is delimited to analysis of four policies from each division concerning controversial issues, human sexuality education, safe and caring learning environments, and employee codes of conduct.

**Controversial Issues.**

*Rocky View School Division and Sensitivity.*

In Administrative Procedure 205, Rocky View School Division (2017) outlines their policy *Teaching About Controversial Issues*, with specific reference to the “instructional programs and materials” (p. 1) that teachers might employ. There is no clear definition in this policy as to what might be deemed as controversial, but the first policy point emphasizes that “the sensitivity of the community is to be considered by having teachers, administrators,
students, and parents involved in identifying controversial issues,” (RVSD, 2017, p. 1). Given that all parties within and outside of the school community are established as equal partners in determining what might be controversial, this policy creates opportunities for communities to label topics or ideas as controversial, when they might already be decided upon or clarified otherwise in legislation. As an LGBTI teacher, I have worked in communities where a large subset of the population believe that queer identities are not real or valid and oppose their inclusion. A policy like this suggests that parents or administrators are not only allowed to label references to gender and sexual diversity as controversial, despite clear provincial and federal legislation that recognizes such identities as legitimate, but that such homophobic or transphobic sentiments ought to be considered when communities are identifying which issues are controversial. Policies that include vague language, such as this one, deter teachers from including gender and sexual diversity in their instruction and normalizing queer identities in their classroom, particularly if their communities are known to be more conservative. Furthermore, LGBTI teachers might worry that their own identities could be considered controversial, especially in the school environment, and may intentionally conceal their identities by way of cisgender and heterosexual scripts in their performances as professionals.

The word choice in this policy is also concerning, calling on teachers and administrators to prioritize “the sensitivity of the community” when approaching controversial issues (RSVD, 2017, p. 1). While the policy asks for staff to consider the sensitivities of the community, the reality is that the sensitivities of certain community members are often of most concern when making decisions about what and how to teach certain subject matter. In the school community that I worked in for five years, it was widely known that there were parents who were active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and who were vehemently
opposed to the inclusion of diverse gender identities, expression, and sexual orientations in the school. On several occasions, school-based initiatives had to be altered as a result of these very vocal parents who represented a small fraction of the community. In one instance, the student council planned a “spirit day” where each grade level was to dress up in a different colour, then go outside to have a whole school picture taken from the roof of the school. Student leaders had planned to create a rainbow in the field with all of the students, demonstrating unity as a whole school. When they received news of this event, some of these parents called the school and school division to complain, suggesting that it was inappropriate and forcing LGBTI rhetoric on children and families in the community. As a result, the spirit day had to be changed so that it was no longer rainbow themed, even though the theme had nothing to do with LGBTI identities or sexuality education. In another instance, members of the school GSA had put up posters around the school advertising a new gender-neutral washroom that was available in the office for student use. On the posters, which they created themselves, students included an image of a “female” washroom symbol, a “male” washroom symbol, and a symbol between the two that included half of each, alluding to transgender or gender queer identities (see Figure 2). Again, a vocal few parents complained to school administration, trustees, and superintendents of the school division about these posters and in particular, the specific use of the “other” washroom symbol. After less than a week, administrators were forced by division office to have the posters removed, citing complaints by parents and members of the public who used the facilities after hours. Both of these examples indicate the ways in which a policy that prioritizes sensitivities of the community might enable a vocal minority of “hyper-sensitive” and privileged community members to dictate what is considered controversial or not within a division.
Figure 2
*Example of washroom symbols used in poster that drew parent complaints for being “inappropriate”*

The second point of this policy indicates that “information regarding controversial matters is to represent alternative points of view,” (RVSD, 2017, p. 1). Although this may be intended for other issues deemed controversial in the context of curricula, such as debates about electoral systems, an LGBTI teacher might interpret this policy as suggesting that homophobic and transphobic beliefs and values have a place in the classroom as “alternative points of view,” should LGBTI identities be included in instruction or classroom materials (RVSD, 2017, p. 1). Because institutional texts work to reinforce the ruling relations of normative gender and sexuality, these institutional policies cannot be read as though they exist in a vacuum. As a queer teacher, I have been primed to believe that my queerness and transness is “inappropriate” and has no place in the school environment, therefore I read these policies through that lens. This discourse is again affirmed in the third policy point that states that instruction and program materials “about controversial issues [are] to reflect the maturity, capabilities and education needs of the students,” (RVSD, 2017, p. 1). Controversial issues are not clearly defined within the policy, so it is reasonable to infer that topics such as gender and sexual diversity may not be viewed as age-appropriate nor as serving any educational purpose by the school division. It is not unreasonable to suggest that any teacher, LGBTI or otherwise, might read this policy and choose to avoid such topics if they were not confident that (a) their materials were age-appropriate, or
(b) educationally relevant, knowing that there are no explicit learning outcomes concerning LGBTI identities within any of the K-12 programs of study (Misco & Patterson, 2007).

Lastly, the final policy point emphasizes that “school curricula is to play a supportive role to parents in the areas of values and moral development,” which provides an introduction to the construction of “parental rights” in Alberta (RVSD, 2017, p. 1). There are advocates in Alberta who assert that parents have authoritative rights concerning their child’s education and they often refer to these “parental rights” in regard to school choice and the educational “appropriateness” of certain subject matter. Citing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 26(3), such advocates insist that “parents have the prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children,” (United Nations, 1948) despite there being no federal or provincial legislation that grants such authority in Canada. This construct of “parental rights” continues to gain traction in Alberta with the United Conservative Party in government and their commitment to parent choice and voice in regard to education (Bellefontaine, 2019; Heidenreich, 2019). The RVSD policy statement inscribes a hierarchy wherein parental values are the foundation of moral development and formal school education plays a secondary, supportive role. Arguably, a teacher might contravene such a policy if they teach anti-homophobia lessons to students whose parents firmly hold homophobic values as a part of their belief system. This policy disempowers teachers, particularly queer and trans teachers, from teaching about gender and sexual diversity by suggesting that such education ventures outside their scope and responsibility. Additionally, it places significant emphasis on the rights and sensitivities of parents, at the expense of LGBTI teachers who are navigating how their identities might be considered unprofessional or inappropriate by parents and colleagues.
Foothills School Division and Human Sexuality.

Foothills School Division’s Administrative Procedure 205 on Controversial Issues contains many similarities to the RVSD policy, including consideration of “different points of view,” “maturity…and educational needs,” as well as “sensitivity” to the “community in which the school is located” (FSD, 2018, p. 1). Furthermore, this policy also includes the same deference to parents around education concerning morals and values. Discourses concerning parental rights, especially pertaining to “moral” education, are largely rooted in religious conservatism and the desire for increased faith-based schooling that would be permit learning rooted in “biblical principles,” particularly in concern to sexuality (Banack, 2015, p. 938). The supposed “natural” bond between parents and their children, by way of heterosexual procreation, serves as the basis for Christian lobbyists and faith-based organizations (like the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association) to advocate for parental rights and wield their influence to shape Alberta’s education system (Banack, 2015). Although Foothills School Division is a secular district, you can see how elements of rural religious conservatism have seeped into their policies. In this Administrative Procedure, Foothills provides clarity around what controversial issues are in ways that Rocky View’s AP 205 was lacking—such as a direct reference to the section in the Guide to Education that address controversial issues and the benefits of studying them (Alberta Education, 2019). That said, what constitutes controversial issues remains undefined here. Of most interest, though, is the explicit addition of Section 50.1 of the School Act (2012) which requires parental notice regarding “subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality” (FSD, 2017, p. 1). Most school divisions have a separate Administrative Procedure addressing this legislation, as will be examined further on. With its inclusion in Foothills School Division’s AP 205, comes the definitive labelling of
human sexuality as controversial by the school division. This policy forces LGBTI teachers to reckon with how their identities are viewed as controversial, falling under the umbrella of human sexuality and the purview of the *Education Act* (2012).

**Golden Hills School Division and Specificity.**

AP 205 from Golden Hills School Division (2006) outlines how to address *Controversial Issues in the Classroom* and does so from a different lens than the other AP 205 policies previously discussed. The first line of the policy introduction states that “Alberta society is being increasingly affected by its membership in the ‘global village’” (GHSD, 2006, p. 1). It goes on to talk about the ways in which technology has provided access to growing information and how this has “produced an ever-growing multicultural aspect to our society,” with such forces “converg[ing] to create a situation in which there are more and more conflicting values and viewpoints held among Albertans” (GHSD, 2006, p. 1). The language in this introduction is coded with layers of ethnocentrism, suggesting that conflicting values and viewpoints are increasing as a result of multiculturalism. Not only is this problematic, but it inaccurately positions Alberta’s largely conservative viewpoints counter to the “multicultural aspect to our society” (GHSD, 2006, p. 1). This language signals to a common media discourse that often positions homophobic and transphobic values as a result of “other” cultures and religious values, particularly those who are Muslim, rather than the religious conservative populations that they typically stem from (Puar, 2017, pp. 13-20). Although this is not directly addressed within this particular Administrative Procedure, it is necessary to note the ways in which Golden Hills attributes the changing landscape of values in Alberta to a “multicultural” Other.

As in the Rocky View and Foothills Administrative Procedures about controversial issues, word choices in this policy include “alternative points of view,” material that reflects
“maturity…and education needs…as stated in the Program of Studies,” and “sensitiv[ity] to the community” (GHSD, 2006, p. 1). Given the similarities across school divisions, it is clear that school divisions have modeled their policies after information included in the Guide to Education (Alberta Education, 2019). There are, however, some notable deviations in this GHSD document. First is the note in the preamble that the goal of teaching controversial issues is to create “open-minded, sensitive, questioning, and empathetic attitudes among…students” (GHSD, 2006, p. 1). This deliberate use of language helps to shape how such policies might be interpreted, because the goals are to create thoughtful, considerate students through a holistic learning lens (GHSD, 2006, p. 1). While there are still sentiments that are problematic within this text, the intentional inclusion of this frame indicates that the primary goal of the policy is around learning experiences for students, rather than around who holds decision-making power when it comes to controversy.

Next, is an addition to the statement about being sensitive to the local community that clarifies that this sensitivity is not at the “exclusion of provincially, nationally and internationally accepted principles” (GHSD, 2006, p. 1). In this policy, the division is taking a clear stance, suggesting that legislation, along with commonly held principles, are not to be sacrificed for “sensitivity” within the community. As a queer teacher, this policy statement is a show of support for gender and sexual diversity, indicating that religious beliefs or conservative values are not more important that legislated protections from discrimination. The impact of this statement is tempered by the point that follows, however, reminding teachers that their “personal opinion shall be stated as such and care shall be taken to guard against over-emphasizing personal opinions” (GHSD, 2006, p. 1). In the context of gender and sexual diversity, teachers might be told that particular ideas—like the existence of diverse families with two mothers or
fathers—are “personal opinions,” when they are in fact not. Returning to my experience teaching in a school with a notable LDS population, a specific example comes to mind regarding conversations about evolution. I recall sharing with a small group of students my interest in birds because they evolved from dinosaurs. I was told by those same students that evolution was not actually real and that this was simply my opinion, something I chose to believe. Despite significant definitive evidence of evolution, student beliefs, rooted in religion, situated the information that I shared as a “personal opinion.” This policy point may deter teachers from sharing information about gender and sexual diversity for fear that such information will be labelled as personal opinion and become subject to this particular policy around controversial issues. Lastly, this policy speaks largely to physical learning materials, like media and written materials, and the need for teachers to preview them for appropriateness. The specificity and practicality of these points differ from many of the vague sentiments in the other two policies. This is relevant in that policies and directives that are unclear leave many teachers deferring to “safe” or “careful” options to ensure that they are meeting policy expectations. When policies include specific and detailed procedures, LGBTI teachers do not have to navigate the burden of interpretation or make sense of expectations through a lens that anticipates hetero-norms and cisgender-norms.

**Summary.**

After reviewing the controversial issues policies from each school division, it is evident that policy variability across school divisions is one factor that may result in different teacher experiences at local levels. Despite this variability, however, there are some clear themes concerning how institutional texts coordinate teachers toward specific actions and behaviours in response to controversial issues. Firstly, without a clear definition of what constitutes a
controversial issue, LGBTI teachers are likely to assume that gender and sexual diversity is included under that umbrella. This assumption is propped up by language that prioritizes the sensitivity of communities as well as educational relevance within K-12 programs of study, knowing that there are no learning outcomes that include LGBTI identities within K-12 programs of study. As such, queer and trans teachers working in rural communities often assume that gender and sexual diversity are deemed controversial, unless otherwise clearly stated.

Secondly, with policy emphases on parental values and the rights of parents to preview materials or withhold student participation in classroom discussions about controversial topics, many teachers are directed to avoid possible clashes with parental values and subsequent confrontation. This is particularly true for LGBTI teachers who are concerned about how they will be viewed and treated as professionals by parents, knowing that they are more likely to be viewed as incompetent or unprofessional compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Richard, 2016; Smith, 2010). Such policy points prioritize values and beliefs that may be influenced by religious affiliation rather than the expectations laid out in legislation, as is evident in the examples I shared about my own experiences. As a result, these institutional texts direct teacher actions around maintaining the status quo of normative gender and sexuality in schools, deterring them from practices that may be labelled as controversial or might disrupt their professional reputation and relationships. This is particularly impactful for teachers who are deciding how to navigate their queer identities in professional contexts and are made to feel that their identities and very existence in the classroom are controversial.

**Human Sexuality Education.**

Policies concerning human sexuality education or “sex ed” provide a frame of reference for LGBTI teachers around what might be acceptable or appropriate to discuss concerning
gender identity and sexual orientation. Often times, people assume that LGBTI identities fall under the purview of such policies, even though there are no explicit learning outcomes related to LGBTI identities within the scope of sexuality education in Alberta’s health curricula. By associating sexual orientation and gender identity with human sexuality education, we displace these topics from their origins (in identity, relationship-building, physical and mental health) and segregate them with topics that are often stigmatized and taboo. Some queer teachers may seek out this information to determine what they are able to disclose about their own identities, or to how they might go about including diverse stories and perspectives within their teaching practice. In 2009, changes were made to the *Alberta Human Rights Act* that allowed parents to remove their children from school during lessons explicitly discussing human sexuality (CBC News, 2009). While the legislation did not target incidental or unplanned conversations about human sexuality, many teachers feared such topics and veered away from them, concerned that their actions might result in human rights complaints. Although the majority NDP government later moved the relevant clauses from the *Alberta Human Rights Act* into the *School Act* (now the *Education Act* [2012] under the UCP majority government), the fear about broaching such topics remains pervasive across the teaching profession. The human sexuality policies from each of the three school divisions share similarities as per the *Education Act* (2012) but, will be analyzed for coded language that reinforces the ruling relations of heteronormativity and cisgender-normativity.

**Rocky View School Division and Family Life Education.**

Rocky View School Division outlines their policy on human sexuality education in AP 206, which is titled *Family Life Education* (RVSD, 2016). The school division deliberately chose an alternative name to what is commonly referred to as “human sexuality education” within the
Guide to Education (2019, p. 95) and the Education Act (2012, p. 58). While the policy contents discuss human sexuality, the name Family Life Education imbues a specific set of values, particularly that human sexuality centres upon reproduction as a biological imperative (Edelman, 2004) and the nuclear family. This name also calls on discourses of parental rights by invoking “family life” as the primary goal of human sexuality education. These rights are referenced explicitly in the first line of the document, stating that “parents are their children’s primary educators” (RVSD, 2016, p. 1). There is no debate that parents play a foundational role in educating their children. It seems strange for such a sentiment to be entrenched within not just one policy, but several, particularly when relevant legislation includes provisions around parental consent. Such repetitions serve to reinforce and affirm the construct of parental rights within Alberta’s education system. They also create a culture of fear around what parents might construe as appropriate or inappropriate about human sexuality, including a queer teacher’s identity.

Similar to the policy concerning controversial issues, AP 206 also refers to what is “appropriate to the student’s age level” (RVSD, 2006, p. 1). The K-12 programs of study organize learning outcomes by grade level, ensuring that learning goals are developmentally appropriate across the school system, including learning goals that address human sexuality. Although this policy speaks to appropriateness of instruction and learning materials and not just the learning outcomes, the discursive power of the appropriate/inappropriate dichotomy is often forcefully employed to censor information about gender and sexuality within schools (Robinson et al., 2017; Smith, 2015). In my tenure as a classroom teacher, I have not heard the language of “appropriate/inappropriate” be employed as consistently or as aggressively within any other curricular area to contest content or learning materials. Only in the context of human sexuality,
do we see such a consistent rhetoric arguing to censor instruction and yield to the construct of parental rights. Given the ways in which gender and sexual diversity are typically associated with human sexuality education, this rhetoric also reinforces the labelling and censorship of queer representation and identity as “inappropriate.”

**Foothills School Division and Duplicate Policies.**

Foothills School Division (2017) outlines their policy, *Human Sexuality Education*, in AP 207, detailing procedural expectations around parental consent that were included in AP 205, *Controversial Issues* (2018). This duplicate information is not only unnecessary from a practical lens, but it also raises questions about the purpose and intent of such repetition. Although there is no apparent explanation for this choice, there are consequential impacts for LGBTI teachers. As discussed previously, the labelling of sexuality as controversial sends a clear message to queer teachers that their identities are not seen as valid and should be subject to alternative points of view. Secondly, the repetition of these policies reinforces the notion that content related to human sexuality should be treated differently— with censorship and parental oversight— unlike other content areas. Lastly, because the core intentions of AP 205 and 207 are to clarify parental rights and outline procedures for informing parents of specific content, this duplication of information also serves to reify the construct of parental rights. Of note in this policy is how the choice of language differs from RVSD, suggesting that “teaching human sexuality is a responsibility that schools share with the home” (FSD, 2017, p. 1). Language around a “shared responsibility” aside, this policy still codifies input from parents into programming and materials in ways that are fairly intrusive, especially considering the professional expertise that teachers have and employ in their regular planning, instruction, and assessment practices. Such oversight
also threatens to bring LGBTI teachers under the scrutiny of parental values and concerns, particularly if their queerness is visible or presumed.

**Golden Hills School Division and Parent Comfort.**

In Administrative Procedure 206, Golden Hills School Division outlines their policy regarding the requirements for human sexuality education as per the *Education Act* (2012) and the *Guide to Education* (2019). This policy is notably more succinct than the others, but emphasizes similar requirements for written parental consent and the opportunity for parents to preview learning materials. AP 206 from GHSD begins on a different note, acknowledging first and foremost that human sexuality education is mandated by Alberta Education (RVSD, 2006). Interestingly, parental rights are not placed at the forefront of this policy, at least in a literal sense. The statement that follows, however, addresses the role of parents, stating that “the sensitivity of the subject suggests that special effort must be taken to assure that parents and staff are comfortable with the program” (GHSD, 2006, p.1). Of significance is the inclusion of staff alongside parents in relation to comfort level with the content. Though this policy does not validate the construct of parental rights as forcefully as the policies from FSD and RVSD, it still alludes to the need for special treatment given the “sensitivity” of the subject area. The language used in these policies continues to set aside sexuality and anything remotely associated with sexuality (including gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation) as *separate* and *different* than “regular” content in school. As such, it relegates LGBTI identities outside the normal and day-to-day of teaching and learning. Such implicit messages steer LGBTI teachers to conceal their identities and confine those aspects of their selves to their personal and private spheres (Rudoe, 2010).
Summary.

Several themes emerge from the analysis of RVSD, FSD, and GHSD policies concerning human sexuality education. Firstly, as with the policies about controversial issues, parents are prioritized and empowered to have oversight of content and learning materials that relate to the broad subject of human sexuality. Apart from having consent over their own child’s participation, parents are also invited to have a say in what is taught and how, with the potential to steer a teacher’s approach to sexuality education. This affirmation of parental rights in the context of sexuality education can open LGBTI teachers up to additional scrutiny of their own identities, as parents are given power to determine what is appropriate or inappropriate for their children. As a result, many LGBTI teachers will likely be cautious about the ways in which they express or conceal their identities in professional contexts.

Another theme that stands out across policies is the specification that material and content should be appropriate for the age of the students. Given that teachers have learned specialized knowledge about child and adolescent development and have access to programs of study that are structured around age-appropriate learning outcomes across the grade levels, it seems unnecessary to include such information with school division policy. However, because sexuality education is viewed differently than other content and intersects with religious and political values, terms like “age-appropriate” are often codes that reinforce the practices of values-based, rather than research-based parental decision-making. For example, according to some conservative religious beliefs, there is never an age in which it would be appropriate to teach minors about gender and sexual diversity. Such codes further prop up the constructs of parental rights and invite the opportunity for content to be determined by members of the public who might not have specialized knowledge about development learning stages, access to
pedagogical best practice, or sound and vetted material that best reflects knowledge consensus in
the area of human sexuality. LGBTI teachers approach coded language like this with caution,
particularly because we find ourselves already under additional scrutiny from parents. Knowing
that parents have policy-backed power to define what is appropriate or inappropriate can impact
how LGBTI teachers experience and perform their identity, as well as how we broach topics
related to human sexuality within the classroom.

Lastly, these policies clearly communicate that human sexuality is unlike other content or
learning materials and should not be treated the same way. Human sexuality includes a broad
range of topics and ideas and is not simply about sexual intercourse or reproduction. However,
reductionist rhetoric oversimplifies human sexuality education to sex ed (emphasizing sex as in
the act). Gender and sexual identities are then conflated with “sex” and scrutinized and censored
as a part of human sexuality education, largely by public and parent populations, and this directs
how such policies take shape across the education system as a whole. While these public
discourses will be analyzed more closely in Chapter Six, the impacts of such discourses are tacit
in the ways that school board policies are constructed to heed the views of parents and
communities for all things “sexuality.”

**Inclusive Learning Environments.**

All school divisions in Alberta have policies that define and establish conditions for safe
and caring schools, as per the *Education Act* (2012). Some school divisions have created
additional policies intended to create environments that are explicitly respectful of gender and
sexual diversity. In late 2015, the Education Minister mandated the creation of LGBT-inclusive
policies within all school boards across the province (Bellefontaine, 2015). This announcement
was followed by the release of the *Guidelines for Best Practices* in 2016, with specific policy
recommendations and examples that school divisions could use in the creation of their own policies for diverse gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations. Most school divisions abided by the mandate and some even referenced the optional Guidelines for Best Practices, but there were several boards who refused to create specific policies and others that created vague and ineffectual policies that did not even reference LGBTI identities (French, 2016; Huncar, 2017). Although the change in provincial government in 2019 has effectively nullified this mandate, there are still several school divisions who have maintained policies that outline the ways in which LGBTI students are to be included within the school environment, whether on sports teams, in school washrooms, or on overnight field trips. That said, policies alone do not erase the ways in which heteronormativity and gender normativity are entrenched within the education system and the numerous institutional texts that coordinate the system from local to provincial levels. As this policy analysis will indicate, there are many catch words and phrases cunningly employed by school divisions that are intended to evade local controversy, while still projecting an image of inclusiveness. The analyses in the next section are delineated to policy points that relate to LGBTI staff and inclusion within the workplace.

Rocky View School Division and the Presumption of Straightness.

In Administrative Procedure 207, entitled Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, and Gender Expressions, RVSD outlines 12 different procedures that are intended to make schools more inclusive to queer genders and sexualities. Of course, a learning environment cannot be inherently respectful on its own as that depends upon the people who occupy the environment, but the policy has broad aims, nonetheless. Both staff and student identities and rights are affirmed in the background to this document, indicating that the school division recognizes that they may employ staff members who are not straight or
cisgender. The absence of LGBTI teachers from mention in other LGBTI-inclusive policies suggests that school divisions do not always believe that they have staff members who identify as queer. The inclusion of staff within this preamble is an explicit acknowledgement of the existence of LGBTI staff in RVSD schools. Administrative Procedure 207 has a two-fold purpose: (1) ensuring that students with diverse genders and sexualities have their educational needs met; and (2) equipping all students with competencies for respecting diversity. While teachers are not mentioned in this purpose statement, it is constructed around students and learning, safely distancing it from any political discourse or “gay agenda” that it may be accused of having.

The first point of interest in this policy is in the second procedure, where it states that “parents/guardians are encouraged to play an active role in their child’s education” (RVSD, 2018, p. 1). Whereas other RVSD policies prioritize the rights and roles of parents in their child’s education, this policy takes a softer stance and suggests that parental involvement is encouraged. The shift in language is noticeable, but it is not necessarily clear what the difference is intended to communicate. I can only infer that such a difference stems from the ways that this policy addresses systems and structures in schools, rather than content, so it is perhaps less threatening and concerning to parents and less relevant to the legislation governing human sexuality. Nonetheless, the approach to parents in this AP appears to be different than in their other policies.

Most of the remaining procedures refer directly to students and do not include staff. After the preamble, procedure eight makes mention of school again, stating that “8. Staff will be provided with professional learning to develop the awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to: 8.2 Create learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender
identities and gender expressions” (RVSD, 2018, p. 2). While this policy point speaks to teachers and other faculty of RVSD, it positions school staff as inherently lacking knowledge and requiring learning around gender and sexual diversity. Without disputing the necessity for ongoing professional development for all teachers, it remains important to note that all staff are framed the same way: as lacking knowledge. I suspect that the underlying assumption is that teachers do not have this knowledge because they do not have lived experience in this area. So, while the policy preamble affirms the rights of LGBTI teachers alongside students, this policy fails to acknowledge LGBTI teachers, their experiences (as LGBTI people, as parents of LGBTI kids, or as support people for LGBTI family members or friends), and the ways in which they might serve as a resource within schools. Erasure and exclusion from policies that directly concern gender and sexual diversity sends a message to queer educators that gender and sexual diversity is acceptable amongst students, but not amongst staff.

**Foothills School Division Lacking LGBTI Staff Protections.**

Foothills School Division (2017) outlines a similarly named policy, *Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions*, in AP 307. This policy makes more than one mention of queer staff, with a fairly robust policy statement that ensures:

…students and staff with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions:

1.2.1 are treated with dignity and respect; 1.2.2 have the right to be open about who they are, including expressing their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression without fear or unwanted consequences; 1.2.3 are actively included in the collaborative decision-making process that supports the implementation of this administrative procedure; 1.2.4 have the right to privacy and confidentiality (FSD, 2017, p.1)
This is the only policy analyzed within the scope of this study that frames LGBTI teachers as having the “right to be open about who they are…without fear or unwanted consequences” (FSD, 2017, p. 1). As a trans educator, this policy not only recognizes my identities, but goes on to indicate that they are valid and I should not be required to stay quiet about them, nor should I garner any less respect because of them. As encouraging and inclusive as this message may be, it is largely overpowered by numerous other implicit and explicit messages about queerness being incompatible and inappropriate in the professional context. Despite being a model policy, the question remains how much power a policy like this has amongst a cornucopia of heteronormative messages across policies and institutional texts.

The remainder of this four-page policy addresses supports for students on overnight field trips, during extra-curricular activities, with regards to names and pronouns used in administration and by staff, and more. Most of this policy draws from the exemplars set forth in the Guidelines for Best Practices and provides significant policy-based supports for the inclusion of LGBTI students in schools. Despite being very thorough in terms of supports offered to students, this policy has significant gaps around practices for LGBTI teachers. For example, during my second year as a grade 5 teacher, just over one year into my transition, my class was selected for an overnight field trip to one of Alberta’s national parks. The field trip took place just six weeks into the school year and because of these timeline constraints, it was challenging to find male chaperones to support the field trip. Because the policy within my division dictated sex-segregation for overnight field trips, I was incredibly worried about what this overnight experience might entail as the lone chaperone for the male students. Knowing that many transphobic and homophobic discourses position queer and trans people as predators, I was worried about how it might be perceived and how parents might react if or when they learned
that the only chaperone was a trans guy. Furthermore, using the washroom and showers and wanting to take my chest binder off at night—these were things that I had to navigate completely on my own. In the end, no parental complaints came out and no one raised concerns about their child’s educator being trans, but it was still an extremely challenging and stressful experience. As affirming as it is to read a policy that recognizes my rights to be unapologetically who I am, there remains few or no structures in place beyond mere affirmation that would support LGBTI teachers in their day-to-day experiences as educators.

Golden Hills School Division and the Absence of LGBTI Policies.

Golden Hills School Division (2018) does not have a stand-alone policy supporting gender and sexual diversity within their schools. Instead, they have included related provisions within AP 350, which is the board’s policy on Safe and Caring Environments, Student Conduct and Discipline. The only mention of gender and sexual diversity is within procedure 1.4 that gives students the responsibility of contributing to the creation of an environment that “respects diversity of all school and community members regardless of their…gender identity, gender expression…or sexual orientation” (GHSD, 2018). There are no mentions of the responsibility that staff and parents have towards queer and trans folks within the school context, save for the indirect references made in procedures 6.1 and 6.2 that reference gay-straight and queer-straight alliances (GHSD, 2018). In other words, there are no formalized obligations for staff or teachers to ensure equitable treatment of LGBTI students in the school environment. The words “safe,” “caring,” and “welcoming” are repeated at least a half dozen times throughout the policy, without clearly delineating what constitutes such an environment. Rogers (2011) would suggest that this litany of terms constitutes lexical cohesion: the manufacturing of authority by way of repeated terms and phrases. This repetition also serves as double-speak, communicating two
different messages to two different audiences. On one hand, maintaining the appearance of “inclusion” to appease mandates from former governments, while on the other hand, refusing to establish policies specific to the needs of the LGBTI community and failing to acknowledge their existence within the school environment. The discursive absence of LGBTI identities in this institutional text reinforces hetero- and cis-normative values in the school environment. Queer and trans educators recognize their absence from policies as well as the scripted overuse of words like “safe,” “caring,” and “welcoming” as empty rhetoric. As a result, we are more likely to navigate these environments by maintaining secrecy around our identities and calling on straight and cisgender codes (e.g. tone of voice, style of dress, mannerisms, etc.) in order to avoid appearing “too queer” in an environment that does not welcome that kind of diversity.

**Summary.**

With a change in political tides in 2015 and the election of a socially progressive NDP government, new mandates and guidelines emerged from Alberta Education around the inclusion of diverse genders and sexualities within the school environment. School boards responded to these directives in different ways, with some embracing the suggested policy changes, and others attempting to meet the bare minimum standards while opposing specific protections for LGBTI identities. The three policy texts analyzed in this section indicate a wide range of practices occurring at local school board levels. Despite a clear mandate set out by the former government, there remain unclear, vague, and mixed messages communicated in local contexts about the extent to which queer and trans identities are permitted, accepted, or even embraced within schools. This highlights how varied the experiences of LGBTI teachers must be across the province, with some teachers likely interpreting the specifically inclusive policies of their school
division as supportive, and others—who do not see themselves represented in their particular school division policies—likely experiencing the chilling effect of such exclusion.

**Employee Codes of Conduct.**

School divisions hire a wide range of employees, from teachers to bus drivers and administrative staff. Although teachers have their own *Code of Professional Conduct* established by the Alberta Teachers’ Association (2018b), they are also subject to locally developed conduct policies as an employee of their specific school division. Such policies serve to define and establish expectations around professionalism, which can play a role in how LGBTI teachers make decisions around their identities within the workplace. From the policies examined to this point, we see how rarely institutional texts in the Alberta education system explicitly recognize and affirm the unique experiences of gender and sexually diverse teachers. That said, it is necessary to examine the ways in which implicit policy messages coordinate the work lives of LGBTI teachers in ways that reinforce heteronormativity and cisgender-normativity. The analysis of the following institutional texts is delimited to points that address professionalism and how it should be enacted within local school environments.

**Rocky View School Division and Interpersonal Conduct.**

In Administrative Procedure 404, Rocky View School Division (2018) outlines their *Employee Code of Conduct* which largely speaks to what employees are prohibited from doing in order to maintain their employment. Of concern in this study is the way that employee professionalism is largely constructed around respectful conduct and honesty. The second procedure states that all employees “shall treat everyone with dignity, respect, and consideration, fostering the highest standard of professional and personal interaction” (RVSD, 2018, p. 1). Here, a professional demeanour and kind attitude are established as *preferred* professionalism
What is challenging with this policy is that employee professionalism is tied closely to “niceness.” As a queer teacher, I have had multiple encounters with students, colleagues, and parents that were rooted in homophobia and transphobia. In one particular case, a parent set up multiple meetings with the administrators in my school objecting to the possibility that their child might be in one of my classes. This parent went out of their way to actively discredit me as a professional and as a person to my administrators because—as I found out afterwards—he did not want his child to be exposed to a trans teacher. In light of situations like this, LGBTI teachers are expected at all times to maintain respect and be “nice” in their interactions, even when those interactions expose them to homophobia and transphobia. This is not to say that disrespect is due on such occasions, but it does speak to the ways that policies do not account for how LGBTI teachers are exposed to violence in the course of their work and how that impacts us. Maintaining a professional demeanour takes a toll, as LGBTI teachers—especially Indigenous and racialized LGBTI teachers—encounter microaggressions, discrimination, and structural oppression as a part of the job. Sometimes, “the highest standard of professional and personal interaction” is not possible, nor warranted, despite what policy dictates (RVSD, 2018, p. 1).

The third procedure point in this text raises questions around how queerness intersects with employment responsibilities. It states that “employees shall conduct their employment responsibilities respectfully, honestly, and with the utmost integrity” (RVSD, 2018, p. 1). The deliberate choice of “honesty” in this policy is interesting, particularly as a queer teacher who has been intentionally dishonest about my identity and experiences in the workplace. While I do not believe such a policy would intend to force teachers out of the closet, it does make the experiences of LGBTI teachers more complicated. For example, when students were calling me
Justin Bieber in the early parts of my career, I chose not to bring the issues up to my supervising teacher or my administrators because I knew that revealing the context behind the joke would mean I would have reveal my queer identity. When my colleague discovered that students were texting about me and discussing that I looked like a lesbian, we also dealt with those behaviours at the classroom level when such behaviours might normally be escalated to the level of administrators. Such actions might normally call for support or intervention beyond the classroom, but I did not feel like that was an option. Later in my career, after I transitioned, there were many instances where I felt as though I had to lie to my students so as to not disclose my trans identity or not do so in a highly visible way. When they asked personal questions, I would have to recreate my past for them, or intentionally omit things that would communicate to them that I was raised as a girl. Eventually, as a GSA/QSA teacher supervisor, I was able to have more honest conversations with some of my students and could engage in queer mentorship. This meant, though, that the same students who knew I was queer and trans, also watched me engage in deception or avoidance about my identity with other students, without understanding the reasoning behind my choices. While this policy demands honesty from employees, it does so alongside policies that suggest that gender and sexual diversity are not always appropriate or are controversial. As such, LGBTI teachers are forced to make choices around what might cause the least harm, rather than what might create a supportive learning environment.

_Foothills School Division and “Best Interests.”_

Foothills School Division (2018) outlines their policy around employee conduct in Administrative Procedure 410. Although many aspects of this policy are similar to the policy laid out by RVSD, there are some noted differences. First, the policy states that “It is expected that employees shall represent the Division positively…while acting in the best interests of the
students and the Division” (FSD, 208, p. 1). This policy demands the impossible, particularly for LGBTI teachers, because it suggests that the best interests of students and the division are one in the same, or at the very least, compatible (Murray, 2006). Often times, what is in the best interests of students is not in the best interests of the school board. When our student council put up inclusive posters advertising the gender-neutral washroom, they were sending explicit messages of affirmation to gender diverse youth around the school. Because the symbol sparked a politically charged response from a minority of parents, school board officials demanded that it be removed. In this instance, the administrators were unable to act in the best interest of students because of the interests and authority of the school board. LGBTI teachers are often made to prioritize the best interests of their employer because their job security depends on it and the school boards demand it. In some cases, this results in a failure to meet their students’ needs.

The second point of discussion for this policy concerns procedure 1.2.2 which states that employees will “Conduct themselves as positive role models for students” (FSD, 2018, p. 1). As indicated earlier, this policy sets forth a challenging task for LGBTI teachers, particularly as it functions alongside other board policies that erase queer teachers or suggest that queerness is controversial. How might any teacher model anti-oppressive attitudes and practices if such values might be deemed controversial by the community? How might an LGBTI teacher be a positive role model for students if the school board prohibits them from engaging with LGBTI students? LGBTI teachers who are seeking ways to mentor queer and trans youth, while also navigating fears around job safety and professional expectations of straightness, are confronted with mixed policy messages and have to make decisions on a day-to-day basis about how to navigate identities amidst job related expectations.
**Golden Hills School Division and Professionalism.**

In Administrative Procedure 492, Golden Hills School Division outlines their *Employee Code of Conduct* which includes a section to be signed by employees and retained in their personnel file. Most of the policies discussed to this point have lived as texts only to be read and referred to, but this particular policy lives as an interactional text: an agreement between the employer and employee. Aside from this structural difference, though, there are two key additions in this policy that are absent in the other two. First, is a procedure about discrimination that states “Employees shall not discriminate against, coerce, or harass a student or Division employee on the basis of sex…[and] sexual preference” (GHSD, 2010, p. 1). Although the absence of gender, gender identity, and gender expression are noted on that list, this conduct policy is the only one that explicitly prohibits discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. As a queer and trans teacher, I would feel more empowered and supported to address instances of discrimination and microaggressions because of an anti-discrimination policy.

The second difference is in procedure 7.2.3 that states “The employee fulfills contractual obligations to the Division by publicly respecting and supporting the decisions made by the Division. Employees must not criticize the actions or decisions of the Division” (GHSD, 2010, p. 3). While the language of “best interests” used by Foothills School Division was veiled, Golden Hills School Division explicitly prohibits vocal public criticism of decisions made by the school board, no matter what it might entail. This policy could prove challenging to any employee whose values differ from those of the school division but poses a specific challenge for LGBTI teachers who may be demanded to publicly support homophobic or transphobic directives. When school board officials demanded that the gender-neutral washroom posters in my school be taken down because the trans-inclusive washroom symbol was deemed offensive, I was vocally
opposed to that decision and even called the Alberta Human Rights Commission to determine if it had constituted a discriminatory act as per legislation. Not only did I disagree with that choice, but I continue to speak openly about how the school board committed a transphobic act by censoring a specific symbol. Under this particular policy, however, carrying on with such vocal opposition might result in disciplinary repercussions. Furthermore, the policy permits opposition, but only through the existing channels. If teachers are working in schools with openly homophobic and transphobic administrators, the existing channels of communication are not helpful. Policies like this put LGBTI teachers in a position where they are forced to comply with and support board-level decisions that might directly attack their queer and trans identities. When put in situations like this, gender and sexually diverse teachers may be forced to choose between their identities or their job security in ways that cisgender and heterosexual teachers do not.

**Summary.**

The school board policies concerning employee conduct across the three school divisions in question share a number of similar themes. First, they tie professionalism to nice and respectful attitudes. Such policies not only fail to address numerous facets of professionalism beyond one’s attitude, but also fail to account for the ways in which LGBTI and other marginalized teachers experience verbal abuse or racist, homophobic, and transphobic violence as part of their job. In a sense, they perpetuate an institutional violence that demands professional attitudes be disconnected from personal identities (Edling, 2015). Secondly, policies around employee conduct position the “best interests” of school boards above all else. Although a few of the policies also reference the interests of students, such policies do not adequately represent how the best needs of a school board are often incompatible with the best needs of students. Lastly, these policies often demand things from employees, like honesty and public support of
school board decisions, that put LGBTI teachers into positions where they have to be strategic about their actions in ways that cisgender and heterosexual teachers do not. Queer and trans teachers have to consider job security when they consider whether to share parts of their identity, or when they disagree with school board policies or decision-making that harm them as LGBTI people.

**Key Themes in School Division Policies**

Policies from Rocky View School Division, Foothills School Division, and Golden Hills School Division were analyzed closely to examine how such institutions coordinate LGBTI teachers around hetero- and cis-normative professional expectations. A number of themes emerged across different policies and divisions and suggest that similar discourses are likely to exist in many school boards across the province. Few mentions of LGBTI teachers at all suggest that many education institutions do not recognize or validate the existence and experience of queer and trans teachers. While some school divisions have robust policies that support LGBTI students, others suggest that where gender and sexual diversity should be affirmed amongst students, it should not be accommodated the same way amongst staff. Policies concerning controversial issues primarily position parents and community members as authoritative in determining what should be classified as controversial or not. For many LGBTI teachers, their identities and experiences are viewed as controversial, whether implicitly or explicitly, and the institutional texts direct them to defer to “sensitivities” of their communities. The continued association of gender and sexual diversity with human sexuality content also reinforces a number of discourses around the appropriateness or educational relevance of LGBTI identities in school environments. Despite some evidence of policies that explicitly support LGBTI teachers in being out and open about their identities without consequence and being protected from discrimination,
these policies exist amongst numerous other school board policies and institutional documents. The often-contradictory messages that LGBTI teachers encounter at the local level can create challenges in how they experience and perform their identities alongside day-to-day expectations around teacher professionalism.

School board policies provide a local level of institutional texts that teachers interact with as a regular part of their day-to-day work and as directly connected to their employment. Additional institutional texts exist at the provincial level, however, that have the capacity to impact teacher experiences within their local schools. These texts include provincial legislation as well as documents from Alberta Education and The Alberta Teachers’ Association. In the next section, the local documents will be traced to provincial texts and legislation that impact the professional experiences of LGBTI teachers. The key themes and discourses identified within school board policies are examined alongside discourses that exist at other levels within the education system.

**Provincial Documents and Legislation**

**Overview.**

The Alberta Government oversees education in the province both through Alberta Education and legislative measures. In this section, specific ministerial documents and legislation are analyzed to understand how teacher professionalism is constructed around cisgender and heterosexual norms. Although Alberta Education works primarily with school boards to provide funding and manage student information, it is also responsible for establishing curricula and standards for learning across the kindergarten to grade 12 system. These standards and benchmarks are contained within grade-level and subject-specific programs of study, which are accessed by teachers regularly throughout the course of their planning and assessment. Much
of what occurs in schools is mandated by Alberta Education and included within the *Guide to Education* (2019), which outlines hours of instruction, reporting policies, and more. It is an essential text within Alberta’s education system and is therefore an important document to analyze for implicit and explicit messages about normative gender and sexuality. Given the role that this text plays in directing the day-to-day actions and activities of teachers, it has been included for analysis with a particular interest in how it constructs parental rights, controversial issues, and sexual and gender diversity.

Teacher certification also falls under the purview of Alberta Education, meaning that teachers are required to demonstrate a certain standard of professional practice before they are deemed fit to work in the classroom. By outlining the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for teacher certification and evaluation, Alberta Education (2018) has defined its standard for teacher professionalism within the *Teaching Quality Standard*. The TQS is used to evaluate teachers as they seek permanent certification and also defines teacher competency at a provincial level. Given the role that this institutional text plays in teacher supervision, evaluation, and certification, it carries tremendous weight for teachers who are seeking accreditation in the province of Alberta. For the purpose of this study, the analysis of this document is delimited to statements and standards that shape how LGBTI teachers understand and engage in their professional duties as educators.

Legislation regulating both the education system and teaching profession includes the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000), the *Education Act* (2012), and the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000). Many of the aforementioned institutional documents, including the *Guide to Education* and the *Teaching Quality Standard*, are based upon these particular pieces of legislation (Alberta Education, 2019; 2018). With this in mind, it is necessary to recognize that these documents are
imbued with the political values of the Alberta government of the day. Significant shifts in Alberta’s political landscape occurred after the 2015 provincial election resulted in the formation of a majority government, led by the Alberta New Democratic Party. After more than four decades of Conservative majority rule, an NDP government brought tides of change rooted within their progressive political platform. The education system as a whole experienced a number of changes, including many notable policy and legislation additions aimed to support LGBTI youth within schools. Because regulations concerning education shifted again as a result of the 2019 provincial election, when a conservative majority returned to government, the legislation analyzed for the purposes of this study include only those which are currently in effect.

In addition to changes to the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000), the *School Act* (replaced by the *Education Act, 2012*) and the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000), one of the most impactful government efforts was the introduction of the *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, and Gender Expressions* (Alberta Education, 2016). The *Guidelines for Best Practices* were not a government mandate, but rather a framework to support school divisions in developing local policies to support LGBTI students, which was a requirement set out by the Education Minister at that time (Bellefontaine, 2015). Although the *Guidelines* are an institutional text created by Alberta Education (2016), school boards do not have a responsibility to abide by them in the same way as they do the *Guide to Education* (2019), the *Teaching Quality Standard* (2018), or relevant legislation. As such, this institutional text framed around creating welcoming environments for gender and sexual diversity is very much optional for school boards and educators. Despite the replacement of the NDP government by the United Conservative Party
(UCP), the Guidelines remain an Alberta Education resource and are included for analysis in this study, particularly in how they are framed as noncompulsory compared to other institutional texts.

**The Guide to Education.**

The Guide to Education is a 154-page document that serves multiple purposes, including: “to support Alberta Education’s objective of providing consistent direction,” “to provide information about ECS to Grade 12 programs,” “to communicate information useful in organizing and operating Alberta schools,” and “to serve as the key policy repository for the ministry” (Alberta Education, 2019, p. 1). It is intended for use by those who work in the education system in Alberta, and coordinates most of what occurs within schools. As a policy repository, it includes relevant legislation, regulations, policies, but also shares the specific principles and values that serve as a foundation to the education system as a whole in Alberta. One of these values, that is shared within the “program foundations” section of the Guide is that “Parents are the first and ongoing educators of their children” (Alberta Education, 2019, p. 4). Although this statement is framed matter-of-factly and seems innocuous, when read within the broader context of parental rights discourses in Alberta, it generates cause for concern. The construction of parental rights in Alberta is associated largely with religious conservatism and proponents believe that parents should have the ultimate authority over what their children learn under the umbrella of public education (Filax, 2006; Grace, 2018; Parents for Choice in Education, n.d.). In the Alberta context, this right is largely exercised in the legislated requirement for schools to notify parents about content concerning human sexuality. As mentioned in the previous section concerning school board policies, gender and sexual diversity are often mischaracterized as pertaining to “sex” (as in the act) and relegated to the jurisdiction
of human sexuality education as a result. When they are not associated with human sexuality education, however, they are often considered to be controversial issues, which also fall within the scope of Alberta Education.

The Guide to Education (Alberta Education, 2019) reaffirms the legislated right of parents to withdraw their children—without penalty—from any “course of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, [that] include subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality” (p. 95). This occurs in several sections, under the Human Sexuality Education policy on page 27, under the subsection about Career and Life Management (CALM) on page 57, under the subsection addressing delivery of human sexuality education on page 95, and under the subsection addressing controversial issues on pages 96 to 97 (Alberta Education, 2019). The continued references to parental rights throughout this institutional document are noticeable, as is the placement of information pertaining to human sexuality education just one paragraph away from the section concerning controversial issues. After comparing this document to the administrative procedures previously analyzed, it has been made apparent why Foothills School Division (2018a) included human sexuality within their AP about controversial issues because they have been surreptitiously associated with one another by Alberta Education in their deliberate placement on the same page.

Unlike the administrative procedures written about controversial issues, however, the Guide to Education provides a clear definition, referring to them as “those topics that are publicly sensitive and upon which there is no consensus of values or beliefs,” including “topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree” (Alberta Education, 2019, p. 95). While these issues are framed as opportunities for learning, critical thinking, and developing strategies for participating in society, their definition is inherently problematic, especially where human
rights legislation is concerned. The reference to “reasonable people” within this policy statement conjures up a different political era in Alberta, where the Premier of Alberta opposed human rights protections for homosexuals because “‘severely normal’ Albertans do not support such measures” (Filax, 2006, p. xiii). The creation and continued prevalence of dichotomies such as reasonable/unreasonable and normal/abnormal are repeatedly used to position heterosexual and cisgender identities as the norm with which all other genders and sexualities are compared. It is therefore more unreasonable for queers to expect everyone to accept gender and sexual diversity, than it is for “reasonable people” to refuse to respect queer and trans identities.

Furthermore, whereas some topics continue to be up for public debate and are viewed as contentious (and rightly so) there are many issues that are considered “settled” in that they have been decided through legal means by way of provincial and federal legislation. Although legislation does not suggest global consensus from a given population, nor is it a system free from prejudice or oppression, it does offer a legal framework for some issues. In the context of this study, the legal foundations set out for the protection of LGBTI people from discrimination within the Alberta Human Rights Act (2000) communicate that gender and sexual diversity are real, valid, and legally recognized categories of identity. As such, they should not be considered as controversial, because while people may hold different values and beliefs about LGBTI identities, the law enshrines their validity as identities that cannot be discriminated against.

Unfortunately, matters of sexual and gender diversity continue to be approached with caution, with a particular deference to the “sensitivities” of a community. The word “sensitivity” seems to be a couched in a permissiveness or acceptance of homophobia and transphobia, particularly that which stems from religious beliefs. Individuals who embrace discriminatory values and object to gender and sexual diversity are not homophobic or transphobic, just “sensitive” to
values that contradict their own. This reductive mischaracterization of homophobia and transphobia as a “difference in values” rather than as violent and oppressive poses a significant threat to LGBTI students and teachers as they are encouraged to defer to these discriminatory attitudes shared within a community to “ensure that students and others are not ridiculed, embarrassed or intimidated for positions that they hold” (Alberta Education, 2019, p. 95). Ultimately, we are reminded that “the school plays a supportive role to parents in the areas of values and moral development” even though values concerning inclusivity and diversity are fully embedded within the law (Alberta Education, 2019, p. 96).

Although there is a caveat to the policy about human sexuality education that states that notice to parents does not apply “to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality,” this caveat is mentioned less frequently than other statements concerning parental notification and student exemption (Alberta Education, 2019, p. 96). Furthermore, because this parental right was initially established within the Alberta Human Rights Act (2000), teachers faced the potential of human rights complaints if they were found in contravention of the legislation. Despite assurances from Alberta Education and The Alberta Teachers’ Association, this legislation had a chilling effect on classrooms (Wallace, 2012). This chill has yet to lift, particularly for LGBTI teachers, even though the legislation has since been amended so that parental notice falls under the domain of the Education Act (2012). While these requirements are “not intended to disrupt instruction or the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom,” nor should teachers “feel the need to stop classroom discussion” if such topics arise, they continue to have a censoring effect (Alberta Education, 2019, pp. 96-97). This censorship disproportionately affects content concerning gender and sexual diversity, with
LGBTI teachers particularly concerned about possible negative repercussions in response to their identities.

**Summary.**

The *Guide to Education* (2019) provides the foundation for school board policies concerning controversial topics and human sexuality education. Although there are differences amongst the local administrative procedures, in tracing them to Alberta Education’s institutional mandate, it is evident that key discourses exist in both the local and provincial levels of the education system. First, is the association of human sexuality with controversial issues, not only suggesting that the two are related, but that there is convergence where sexuality *becomes* controversial and that is defined by the values and beliefs of those within a community. Second, is the institutional reverence of parental rights and the inviolability of censorship pertaining to controversial issues and human sexuality. We can trace this construct from a provincial to local level and not just in reference to human sexuality or controversial content. Lastly, is how homophobic and transphobic beliefs and values are framed as “sensitivities” that local communities might have. Not only does this coded language construct homophobia and transphobia as passive—a sensitivity only emerging in response to something provocative—but it also minimizes their harm. Teachers are positioned to carry the burden of responsibility for any homophobia or transphobia that arises, because it is incumbent upon them be conscientious of such sensitivities and defer to those values and beliefs.

**The Teaching Quality Standard.**

Whereas the *Guide to Education* (Alberta Education, 2019) is an institutional document that steers the work of a variety of actors within the education system, the *Teaching Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2018) is specific to certificated teachers within the province. The
TQS “provides a framework for the preparation of professional growth, supervision and evaluation of all teachers,” in addition to maintaining “consistent standard[s] of professional practice for all teachers in the province” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 2). The analysis of this document focuses on how teacher professionalism is constructed by Alberta Education and whether this construction is inclusive of the diverse genders and sexualities that teachers embody. The six areas of competency addressed within this text include: fostering effective relationships, engaging in career-long learning, demonstrating a body of professional knowledge, establishing inclusive learning environments, applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and adhering to legal frameworks and policies (Alberta Education, 2018, pp. 4-7). Teachers are expected to meet these TQS competencies throughout their careers.

The first competency—fostering effective relationships—emphasizes the importance of relationship-building with key stakeholders, including students, colleagues, parents/guardians, and community members. Indicators for this competency include “acting consistently with fairness, respect and integrity,” and “demonstrating empathy and genuine caring for others” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 4). This language is consistent with local administrative procedures concerning safe and caring learning environments but, goes further to specify that teachers can build these relationships by “providing culturally appropriate…opportunities for students” as well as “honouring cultural diversity” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 4). By acknowledging that teachers have a responsibility for cultural competency in their practice, this policy point goes beyond the vague language used by school boards. That said, there is a noted absence of competencies concerning gender and sexual diversity. This is particularly problematic because racialized and Indigenous folks are queer and trans, too. As discussed within Chapter Two, queerness is often constructed as a “white thing” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 9). Because this competency
indicator fails to recognize gender and sexual diversity, it also serves to perpetuate incomplete and one-dimensional representations of racialized and Indigenous people.

In regard to career-long learning, Alberta Education (2018) outlines one indicator of this competency as “building capacity to support student success in inclusive, welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments” (p. 4). The continuous use of noncommittal feel-good language across local and provincial levels serves to perpetuate empty rhetoric. The refusal to define “inclusive” and “welcoming” spaces with the explicit mention of gender and sexual diversity is an active choice that may be intended to placate communities with particular “sensitivities.” Where teachers are encouraged to build their capacity, there is no clear benchmark or standard to meet, which contributes to ongoing knowledge and skill gaps within the teaching profession and leaves LGBTI students without adequate support. Furthermore, the absence of LGBTI identities reinforces the idea that professionalism and queerness are mutually exclusive. This absence is a key theme across institutional texts, not only suggesting that LGBTI teachers are to remain invisible within the profession, but that queer identities are not valuable or of benefit to the profession. As discussed earlier, the education system fails to recognize how LGBTI teachers or teachers with LGBTI family members or friends might have something to offer the profession that other educators do not.

The fourth competency focuses on learning environments, stating that teachers need to cultivate “inclusive learning environments where diversity is embraced and every student is welcomed, cared for, respected and safe” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 6). Here, we recognize the continued use of jargon, like “inclusive” and “diversity,” that are intended to signal acceptance and belonging, without specifying what kinds of diversity are embraced (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 6). Unfortunately, this distinction is necessary, knowing that gender and sexual diversity
are often excluded from “welcomed” categories of diversity. This section goes on to state that teachers who demonstrate this competency will “[foster] in the school community equality and respect with regard to rights as provided for in the Alberta Human Rights Act” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 6). By referring to overarching legislation, this policy point references established human rights, but still avoids specificity about which identities or categories of person are protected under human rights legislation. Furthermore, this indicator is framed “with regard to rights,” which does not adequately capture the broad range of experiences that LGBTI people might have that are not included within the Alberta Human Rights Act (2000).

Where gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation are concerned, the Alberta Human Rights Act (2000), largely prohibits discrimination on those grounds, specifically in reference to employment, access to public services, and housing. Although these assurances are valuable, especially within the school environment, the legislation serves to set a minimum standard for what is acceptable and tolerable. While an environment can be free from many forms of discrimination, that does not guarantee that it is accepting, nurturing, or welcoming of certain identities. Furthermore, the erasure of gender and sexual diversity in schools is not necessarily captured as a distinct form of discrimination as per Alberta’s human rights legislation. It is not just that individual queer and trans people are experiencing discrimination, it is that the whole education system perpetuates normative genders and sexualities and works to avoid deliberate and explicit inclusion of gender and sexual diversity. By committing to upholding the minimum standards set out by legislation, this indicator of professional competence contradicts its goal as stated—on one hand suggesting that all students be included, while on the other hand suggesting that only the bare standards for conduct need to be upheld.
The last competency area concerns teachers’ adherence to legal frameworks and policies and makes a distinct connection between such adherence and professional conduct. One of the competency indicators states that teachers must engage in “practices consistent with policies and procedures established by the school authority” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 7). This statement suggests that compliance with policies and procedures is a core component of teacher professionalism. Knowing how local school board policies can vary significantly, this standard for teacher professionalism suggests that LGBTI teachers might be faced with the responsibility to uphold policies, even if they are homophobic, transphobic, or personally harmful. This standard of professionalism was certainly enforced when posters representing a transgender washroom symbol were taken down at my former school, in response to complaints from community members. Despite disagreeing with the school board’s actions, the school administrators were still responsible for complying with the order and we, as teachers, were bound by our “professional responsibility” to the school authority. Furthermore, where school boards do not have explicit policies to support LGBTI people within the school community, like in the case of Golden Hills School Division, then teachers who fail to include gender and sexually diverse students within their classrooms could technically be seen as appropriately adhering to school board policies. The unfortunate side effects of coupling professional conduct with obedience is that homophobic and transphobic values might be reinforced amongst teachers whose school boards fail to recognize gender and sexual diversity within their policies.

**Summary.**

The *Teaching Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2018) defines teacher competence and structures how it is evaluated within Alberta schools. In doing so, it also establishes institutional values about teacher professionalism. Without explicit mention of gender and sexual
diversity within this text, there is a clear disconnect between professional conduct and queerness. Additionally, the repeated used of vague language such as “welcoming,” “safe,” and “inclusive” in coordination with the *Guide to Education* and other institutional texts fails to address how structures of oppression are embedded within and function as part of the education system (Alberta Education, 2018; 2019). An “inclusive” environment is not possible when the education system erases the identities and experiences of marginalized communities, including Indigenous, racialized, queer, and trans folks, through “color/gender” and queer-blind strategies “that emphasize sameness and are organized around one social grouping or identity that everyone is believed to share in common” (Ward, 2008, p. 38). Teacher professionalism, as established within the TQS, involves committing to support a “glossy representation of diversity” (Ward, 2008, p. 7) while remaining obedient to policies established by one’s school board.

**Guidelines for Best Practices.**

The final institutional text from Alberta Education (2016) for consideration in this study is the *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions.* As mentioned previously, this document was released by Alberta’s NDP government in 2016, less than one year after their election. The document itself cannot be addressed without also recognizing how political values shaped its creation and also dominated how school divisions and the public received and responded to its release. After decades of conservative political rule in Alberta, the NDP government was able to instill progressive political values, such as the support of gender and sexual diversity, into educational policies and legislation. Although the United Conservative Party has since repealed many of the significant changes established by the NDP while in governance, the *Guidelines for Best Practice* remain as an Alberta Education (2016) resource in
circulation (Bruch, 2019). The analysis of this institutional text is delimited to specific recommendations concerning LGBTI teachers and teacher professionalism.

As established earlier in this chapter, this text from Alberta Education (2016) differs from the others in that school boards are not mandated to abide by it, they are only “advised to use these best practices” (p. 1). Although this softened approach was largely a political strategy, the “non-binding” characterization of these LGBTI-inclusive practices suggests that such inclusion should be optional in schools (Maimann, 2016). As a result, this document of compiled best practices does not have the same institutional weight as others. School boards and teachers are not required to refer to this institutional text, like they are the Guide to Education (Alberta Education, 2019). Therefore, no matter how strong these policy recommendations are, they have ultimately been weakened as voluntary, rather than mandatory practices. This is particularly disappointing as an LGBTI teacher, because this is the only document from Alberta Education (2016) that explicitly acknowledges “staff with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions” (p. 3).

The principles that guide the practices outlined in the Guidelines text emphasize self-identification as a measure of identity and that LGBTI individuals (including teachers) have the right to be out and open about their identities without recourse (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 3). The language used by Foothills School Division within Administrative Procedure 307 mirrors that of the Guidelines, making a notable inclusion of LGBTI staff along with students. The Guidelines go on, however, to include numerous policy suggestions explicitly for queer and trans staff members, whereas AP 307 from Foothills School Division does not. The twelfth and final research-based best practice shared in the Guidelines for Best Practices proposes “ensuring that school staff have work environments where they are protected from discrimination based on their
sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions” (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 4). Although the other 11 best practices are intended primarily for students, the explicit inclusion of LGBTI staff in these suggestions is profound and impactful. This next section outlines the recommended practices specific to LGBTI teachers.

In reference to the Alberta Human Rights Act (2000), the preamble to this section of the Guidelines emphasizes that employment discrimination on the grounds of gender or sexual identity are prohibited (Alberta Education, 2016). It goes on to say that “research confirms individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or gender expressions are more likely to experience discrimination and harassment in the workplace (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 15). Not only does this document identify that gender and sexual diversity exist amongst the teaching profession, but it also speaks to the unique experiences of LGBTI teachers and their increased likelihood of experiencing discrimination in the workplace, even when that workplace is a school. Prior to detailing the indicators for best practice in this area, the text states that when “school and school authority leaders ensure a safe and welcoming work environment is available to all staff,” this “has a positive impact on students” (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 15). This is an interesting point to include because it frames the ultimate purpose of this best practice around students, not just for LGBTI teachers in their own right. This is not to say that developing inclusive practices for queer and trans teachers should not have a positive impact on students, but rather that discourses concerning LGBTI teachers are often framed around students and not the teachers themselves; as though the benefits of supporting queer and trans teachers are less about the quality of life of these teachers, and more about how this inclusion benefits students. Because discourses continually conflate queer and trans identities with “sex” or sexual activity, LGBTI teachers are often positioned as “threatening” the childhood innocence of the students that they
teach (Connell, 2015; Russell, 2010). This deeply rooted discourse shapes what advocacy looks like for LGBTI teachers. Rather than being able to argue for the queer and trans people who work as teachers, thereby risking the deployment of more violent discourses that associate queerness with hypersexuality and the sexual recruitment of minors (King, 2004), such advocacy needs to be framed around the benefits to students (Ferfolja, 2008a).

The Guidelines continue to repeat the phrase “welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments” throughout the text, in line with the school board policies and Alberta Education documents that have already been examined. This phrase can be traced to the Education Act (2012) and although its use is intended to bring such texts in line with legislation, its overuse is noticeable and reduces the phrase to a script. That said, the indicators for this best practice are not vague or overly general but actually include explicit suggestions to support LGBTI teachers, including that “school and school authority leaders anticipate, support and value staff diversity” (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 15). Not only do the Guidelines acknowledge and welcome the existence of queer and trans teachers, but they suggest that school leaders need to anticipate and be ready for these teachers, rather than responding with supports only when a teacher has come out or requested them. This is a significant departure from the institutional texts that have been examined thus far.

It goes on to suggest that LGBTI teachers should be made to “feel comfortable to seek out school and school authority leaders…to discuss their particular needs and concerns,” which speaks directly to the silencing discourses that impact LGBTI teachers as they navigate professionalism (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 15). This suggests that conversations about queerness and experiences of discrimination should be welcomed in professional contexts so that educators advocate for themselves, without having to disguise it as advocacy for students.
Furthermore, another key indicator of best practices suggests that staff should be able to “have professional conversations about issues related to diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions” which once again affirms that gender and sexual diversity need not be constructed as incompatible with professionalism (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 16). Lastly, and of great significance, is a statement concerning the harassment or discrimination of LGBTI teachers (even that which is perceived) from members of a school community. This point indicates that such harassment should be taken seriously and addressed by school leadership in a timely manner (Alberta Education, 2016). Whereas many of the local school board policies reinforced constructions of queerness as “controversial” and opposition to queerness as “sensitivities” or a difference in values, this statement sets a clear and unprecedented standard for the treatment of LGBTI teachers within the Alberta education system. Of course, these indicators for best practices are guidelines, and do not carry the full force that other institutional texts do. As a result, teachers continue to experience discrimination from members of their school community and from school boards as well, without having strong recourse and school-based supports to be able to respond.

**Summary.**

The *Guidelines for Best Practices* (Alberta Education, 2016) remain an important institutional text in Alberta, offering clear and definitive strategies for the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity within schools, particularly for school staff. Whereas most of the institutional documents scrutinized within this study fail to acknowledge the existence of queer and trans teachers, this text goes beyond acknowledgement and addresses many of the actual lived experiences of LGBTI teachers, like myself: incidents of harassment or bullying from students and parents, fear of negative repercussions for being out in the school environment, and
lack of supports within the workplace as the “first” or “only” queer or trans teacher. It is disappointing that such thorough and well-written policy suggestions remain optional for school divisions across Alberta. However, the existence of a document like the *Guidelines for Best Practices* in an overwhelmingly conservative province is nonetheless a crucial starting place in the shift away from existing discourses about queerness in schools. As the first document in Canada to address supports for LGBTI parents and teachers as well as students, it continues to serve as an important resource and institutional text (Sinnema, 2016).

**The Alberta Human Rights Act.**

All of the institutional texts discussed until this point have made reference to the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000) because it provides a foundation for all other legislation in the province, making “every law of Alberta…inoperative to the extent that it authorizes or requires the doing of anything prohibited in this act” (p. 3). The principles within the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000) are then paramount to those laid out in other legislation. Therefore, this law serves as a good starting point for in the examination of Alberta’s educational legislation. The preamble to the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000) establishes principles of dignity, equal rights for all, and justice as core to freedom and peace in the world. It goes on to clarify equal rights for all to mean “dignity, rights and responsibilities without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation” (*Alberta Human Rights Act*, 2000, p. 2).

Alberta public policy is required, as per this legislation, to ensure these equal rights, and this includes the *Education Act* (2012) and the *Teaching Profession Act* (2018). The preamble also establishes as a fundamental value, “that Albertans should share in an awareness and
appreciation of the diverse racial and cultural composition” of the province and “that the richness of life in Alberta is enhanced by sharing that diversity” (*Alberta Human Rights Act*, 2000, p. 3). In stating this, the legislation not only provides a framework to protect people from discrimination based on their identity, but also emphasizes the value that diversity adds to the province. Gender and sexual diversity are often framed as complex controversial issues—especially when associated with sexuality education—that are challenging to address in educational settings (Clark, 2011). The framing of diversity as more of an asset than an issue is a noticeable departure from this norm. By establishing diversity as enhancing life within the province, the preamble to the Alberta’s human rights legislation suggests that diversity should be framed as an asset, not a controversy.

The overarching standards set out in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000) ensure that people are free from discrimination in employment practices, union membership, or the access of public goods and services based on different intersecting aspects of identity as set out in the preamble (p. 8). This includes teachers who are seeking employment or becoming members of the teacher’s union (The Alberta Teachers’ Association) as well as students accessing publicly funded education. While this legislation establishes basic protections for gender and sexually diverse Albertans in the public sphere, some wording within the act contradicts these fundamental beliefs. Under the “equal pay” heading, the *Act* reads “where employees of both sexes perform the same or substantially similar work,” employers are required to pay employees the same (*Alberta Human Rights Act*, 2000, p. 7). The use of the word “both” in reference to assigned sex reveals several heteronormative logics within this document—the same logics pervasive within the education system.
The first of these is the conflation of assigned sex with gender identity. Here, the protections around equal pay are attached to people’s sex that was assigned based on their genitalia (presumably at birth), rather than the gender they identify with and live in the world as. To reinforce sex as a primary identity is harmful for people who identify as transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, and more because it suggests that physiology (specifically, genitalia) tells more about a person’s identity than the language that they use to describe themselves. The second problem with this language is in the qualifier, “both,” which reinforces binary thinking about sex and subsequently gender (because the two are confounded) and erases the experiences of intersex people. So, while the Act generally aims to protect individuals from discrimination based on sex, gender identity, and gender expression, a reliance on binary gender within this particular clause calls this purpose into question. While discourses of normative gender and sexuality are evident in this section, they can also be traced throughout other institutional texts at the provincial and local levels, like the Family Life Education administrative policy within Rocky View School Division (2016).

In summary, the Alberta Human Rights Act (2000) ensures protection from discrimination on the grounds of multiple facets of identity and does so with influence over other provincial legislation. The Act protects LGBTI teachers from employment discrimination and discrimination in regard to membership with The Alberta Teachers’ Association. Where it falls short, however, is in the inconsistent use of language concerning gender diversity. While on one hand, it states protections for gender identity and expressions, on the other hand, it reinforces harmful gender norms, including the misconceptions that sex and gender are the same and that both are binaristic. This example further supports the supposition that institutional texts within the education system in Alberta perpetuate normative gender and sexuality.
**The Education Act.**

Originally passed in the Alberta Legislature in 2012, the *Education Act* was never proclaimed into law by the government that created it (The Canadian Press, 2019). Instead, it was revived by the United Conservative government seven years later, replacing the 1988 *School Act* that had been revamped by the New Democratic Party during their tenure in government (The Canadian Press, 2019). The *Education Act* (2012) governs all aspects of education system, including attendance, programs of instruction (including those outside of K-12 schooling), student discipline, school boards, elections of trustees, funding, school properties, and employees of school divisions, including teachers. The 176-page long document directs the work of Alberta Education and local school boards. For the purpose of this study, only those sections pertaining to gender and sexual diversity and teacher professionalism have been included for analysis.

In the preamble for the *Education Act* (2012), the fifth objective states that “students are entitled to welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self” (p. 10). Here, we can recognize that the continued repetition of “welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe” in other institutional documents, like local school board procedures and the *Guide to Education* (Alberta Education, 2019), actually stems directly from legislation. Whereas the use of this language brings local and provincial policies in line with the law, as discussed earlier, the overuse of such language can hinder its impact. That said, the legislation clearly states that students deserve learning environments that respect diversity. Where it continues to be limited, though, is that it does not clarify what kinds of diversity are to be respected—knowing that gender and sexual diversity are often excluded from forms of diversity that are most often embraced.
This limitation is also evident in Section 16 of the *Education Act (2012)* that requires course curricula and instructional materials be reflective of “the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta” and “honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans” (p. 27). In this statement, diversity is tied to heritage, which is synonymous to tradition, and subsequently suggests that Alberta’s history serve as a template for the reflection of diversity within the province. In calling upon Alberta’s heritage, this particular statement suggests that diversity refers specifically to cultural and racial diversity as tied to Alberta’s settler colonial history. Another concerning statement within this section is the promotion of respect for “common” beliefs and values of Albertans. While there is no definitive measure of homophobia and transphobia in Alberta, there is a wealth of information that indicates that homophobic and transphobic values are dominant and commonplace (Callaghan, 2018, p. 20; Filax, 2006). Furthermore, Alberta’s history under conservative governments, like that of Ralph Klein, have actively constructed discourses about “severely normal” Albertans who oppose same-sex marriage and view LGBTI people as a threat to families and children (Filax, 2006). Therefore, a respect of Alberta’s heritage and common values can be easily interpreted as permissive of, or unopposed to homophobic and transphobic values within school. Whereas Section 16(2) states that the aforementioned courses and materials cannot promote “doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority of prosecution,” it does not limit materials that promote particular gender and sexual norms, such as the “traditional” family (*Education Act, 2012*, p. 27). Although the purpose of this Act (2012) emphasizes respect for diversity, the statutes laid out within Section 16 present a very limited scope to this intent.

The *Education Act (2012)* continues to reinforce the construct of parental rights that is pervasive within the education system, stating that “a parent has the prior right to choose the
kind of education that shall be provided to the parent’s child” (p. 37). Where this “prior right” is established within Canadian law, however, is unclear. Article 26 of the United Nations’ (1948) *Universal Declaration for Human Rights* (UDHR) states that “parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children,” and this declaration continues to be cited in conversations concerning parental rights. However, while the UHDR created a common framework for human rights around the world, no clear statement concerning parental rights exists in Albertan or Canadian legislation. Therefore, where this legislation might intend to establish parental rights for school choice, there is no clear prior right established.

The last section for analysis within the *Education Act* (2012) pertains to the requirement for schools to provide notice to parents when content concerning human sexuality or religion is going to be taught during instructional time (p. 58). Section 58.1 has been continuously cited throughout the local policies and Alberta Education documents considered within this study (*Education Act*, 2012). Throughout the analysis, it has been made clear that parents in Alberta can decide to remove their children from the classroom, without academic penalty, during instruction or the use of materials that concerns “subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality” (*Education Act*, 2012, p. 58). Given the way that gender and sexual diversity are discursively tied to the subject of human sexuality more broadly, rather than identity, such legislation remains unclear about whether instructional activities or learning materials concerning LGBTI identities falls under the scope of Section 58.1 (*Education Act*, 2012; Rayside, 2014). As such, it stands to reasons that the failure of this legislation to clarify the inclusion or exclusion of content pertaining to gender and sexual diversity under its purview has resulted in different interpretations amongst local school boards, with some teachers
fearing parental opposition or employer reprimand if they include content about LGBTI identities in their classrooms.

Summary.

The Education Act (2012) is the primary legislation governing the education system in Alberta, although it was only proclaimed into law in 2019. Of note for this study, is how the Act establishes that students are entitled to environments that are safe, caring, and welcoming—key terms that have been scripted throughout institutional texts at the local and provincial levels. This document also establishes the importance of diversity in Alberta schools, stating that learning materials should represent the importance of diversity in connection to Alberta’s heritage. There are no specific inclusions of gender and sexual diversity, but rather emphasis on culture as a marker of diversity. This lack of inclusion also generates confusion around Section 58.1, which requires parental notice for instruction about human sexuality (Education Act, 2012). Without a clear directive outlining gender and sexual diversity as it pertains to the requirement for parental notice, we can see how school boards and teachers, particularly LGBTI teachers, are forced to decide whether or not it is considered outside the scope of Section 58.1 and bear any potential repercussions (Education Act, 2012).

The Teaching Profession Act.

One of the most notable provisions of the Teaching Profession Act (2000) is the establishment of The Alberta Teachers’ Association (The ATA), the professional association that regulates the teaching profession in the province. It states that membership in the Association is compulsory for teachers in Alberta, with exceptions for those working in school board positions or who work in charter and band-operated schools (Education Act, 2012; Teaching Profession Act, 2000). As such, the ATA’s membership comprises the vast majority of teachers within the
province and this legislation entrusts the organization to represent them and improve the teaching profession in areas concerning teacher working conditions, professional conduct, and professional competence (*Teaching Profession Act*, 2000). Furthermore, it vests The Alberta Teachers’ Association with a role in “advanc[ing] and promot[ing] the cause of education in Alberta” (*Teaching Profession Act*, 2000, p. 4). This positions the Association as an influential agent within the education system, although it exists as a distinct and separate entity from local school boards and the Ministry of Education.

Of note within this legislation, are a number of parameters around teacher conduct. The first is the inclusion of “a code of professional conduct” (*Teaching Profession Act*, 2000, p. 7). While this code will be examined in the next section as an institutional text of The Alberta Teachers’ Association, it should be noted that the *Code of Professional Conduct* is firmly rooted in legislation governing the teaching profession (The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2018b). This connection to the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000) imbues the *Code of Professional Conduct* with legislative weight, in ways dissimilar to other institutional documents of the ATA (The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2018b). The second parameter includes a clear definition of unprofessional teacher conduct. This is important because while LGBTI teachers are made to feel as though their gender identity and expression or sexual orientation are unprofessional or inappropriate (Connell, 2015), this statute authoritatively defines what constitutes unprofessional conduct. It states that:

> Any conduct of a member that, in the opinion of a hearing committee, (a) is detrimental to the best interests of (i) students as defined in the *Education Act*, (ii) the public, or (iii) the teaching profession, (b) contravenes sections 16 to 65 or a bylaw made under section 8(f) or (g), or (c) harms or tends to harm the standing of teachers generally, whether or not that
conduct is disgraceful or dishonourable, may be found by a hearing committee to constitute unprofessional conduct. (*Teaching Profession Act*, 2000, p. 14)

For the purpose of clarity, “sections 16 to 65” refer to the Discipline section of the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000, p. 14), “section 8(f)” refers to the *Code of Professional Conduct* (The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2018b), and section 8(g) refers to disciplinary proceedings. Therefore, conduct is considered unprofessional when it is: detrimental to students, the public, or the profession; violates codes of conduct or disciplinary measures outlined within the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000); or harms the standing of teachers in Alberta. Although there may still be room for interpretation given that these statements depend on the interpretation of the hearing committee charged with overseeing disciplinary processes, this legislation provides an explicit structure for the interpretation of professional conduct in Alberta. The third and final note concerning teacher conduct within the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000) is a detailed framework concerning disciplinary processes. While this section of the Act is not under consideration in this study, it is crucial to note that this legislation charges The Alberta Teachers’ Association, *not* Alberta Education or local school boards, with the responsibility of overseeing matters of professional conduct.

In summary, the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000) outlines the role of The Alberta Teachers’ Association as the representative for the teaching profession as a whole in the province. It also establishes a framework for the interpretation of professional conduct, not just for teachers, but for all key stakeholders in education like school boards, parents, community members, and students. Although this institutional text may be accessed infrequently by teachers, it still offers a comprehensive outline of their legislated responsibilities in terms of ATA membership and professionalism. It also administers authority to the ATA’s *Code of*
*Professional Conduct* and prioritizes that institutional text above others within the ATA, given its roots in the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000). This authority will be examined more closely with the analysis of the *Code of Professional Conduct* in the following section (The ATA, 2018b).

**The Alberta Teachers’ Association Documents**

**Overview.**

The Alberta Teachers’ Association was first established in 1917, as the Alberta Teachers’ Alliance, but did not fully establish the teaching profession until 1935, when the first iteration of the *Teaching Profession Act* was proclaimed (The ATA, 2019b). Since that time, The ATA has burgeoned the rights of teachers by way of advocacy and collective bargaining. It has also elevated Alberta’s teaching profession, making it a world leader and establishing Alberta’s education system as one of the country’s highest performers (The ATA, 2012a). In connection to its numerous roles within the education system, The Alberta Teachers’ Association produces a number of publications each year, including informational updates to teachers, resources for professional development, guidelines for different areas of practice, or material for public consumption. In addition to newly published materials, the ATA also has some important long-standing institutional texts that continue to direct the work of teachers and guide their professional practice in the province. Five of these documents are considered for analysis in this study to understand how The Alberta Teachers’ Association constructs professionalism, particularly as it intersects with gender and sexual diversity.

**Policies of The Alberta Teachers’ Association.**

The *Members’ Handbook* is a comprehensive resource released yearly by the Association (The ATA, 2019b). It is intended to be a reference for teacher members and includes relevant
legislation, the *Code of Professional Conduct*, information about ATA Locals, and all policies and bylaws of the ATA. Because this study is concerned with how institutional texts coordinate the work of teachers around particular values and definitions of professionalism, this analysis is delimited to the policy statements within the *Handbook* that address teacher professionalism and gender and sexual diversity. Such statements include “fundamental beliefs, externally focussed policies, internally focussed policies and immediate directives” of the Association (The ATA, 2019b, p. 89). Policies undergo review every six years, rotating through the docket at the yearly Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) meetings, where representatives from each Local of the Association convene to revaluate existing directives and debate emergent policy proposals (The ATA, 2019b). Ultimately, the policies of the Association are determined through democratic process by the 425 teacher delegates who come from across the province—from large, small, rural, urban, public, Catholic, and Francophone school divisions—to attend the ARA meetings. This is information is necessary to help contextualize the analysis of language, values and beliefs that govern particular ATA policies.

My process in analyzing this text was to look for key language that communicated the Association’s beliefs and values concerning teacher professionalism and gender and sexual diversity. As a result, this section is approached in a sequential manner, moving from the beginning of the policy section to the end. Several thematic connections are also addressed throughout, particularly as they concern the discourses identified in other institutional documents. It is also important to note how such policies are utilized by The Alberta Teachers’ Association. Much of the externally focussed policies shape the way the ATA engages in advocacy, particularly with the provincial government. Even though these policies establish the
values of the Association, this does not necessarily guarantee that any such changes will take place in the education system, nor that these values will be enacted within the Association itself.

The first policy point that was striking in its departure from the gender binary was 1.3.5.1, which encourages “members of all genders and from diverse backgrounds” to run for leadership positions within the ATA (The ATA, 2019b, p. 97). First passed in 2009, this internally focussed policy not only identifies that teachers have diverse genders but, suggests that such teachers should pursue leadership roles within the organization. Where other policies frame gender and sexual diversity as something to be addressed or dealt with, this particular policy recognizes that LGBTI teachers have something to offer the profession as a result of their lived experiences.

Next, in the section addressing externally focussed policies for curriculum and supports, there are several policies that address parental rights and notification concerning instructional content and materials that address human sexuality. In 2.2.14.1, the policy reads that “schools should provide information about their family life and human sexuality education curriculum to parents” (The ATA, 2019b, p. 103). First passed in 1983, this statement indicates that there are long-held beliefs within the profession about the right for parents to know what students are learning under the theme of human sexuality. The use of “family life” within this statement identifies how human sexuality education is often focussed on heteronormative relationships, reproduction, and the nuclear family unit. It also echoes the ways in which rural school boards, like Rocky View School Division, continue to call on “traditional” values in their policies concerning sexuality education.

The policy that immediately follows, however, seems to push back against these values. In 2.2.14.2, it reads that “The Government of Alberta should repeal any legislation that obliges
teachers to notify parents in advance when courses of study…deal primarily and explicitly with
religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation” (The ATA, 2019b, p. 103). Here, we see the
argument that teachers should not be forced to notify parents about this content, with particular
mention of sexual orientation. This policy is contradicted once more, however, by immediate
directive 2.4.0.3 which mandates that “the Association affirm and respect the right of individual
parents to exclude their children from participation in instructional activities relating to human
sexuality” (The ATA, 2019b, p. 103). These conflicting statements indicate the continued
contentious nature of human sexuality education in Alberta, along with the pervasiveness of
parental rights discourses. Given that the ATA is comprised of teachers—and parents—from
both public and Catholic school divisions, it is not surprising to see competing sentiments that
likely stem from conflicting values and varying composition of ARA delegates year after year.

Policy point 6.1.0.3 states that “diversity is an asset in school communities,” once again
affirming the idea that diverse identities are advantageous rather than problematic in schools
(The ATA, 2019b, p. 107). That said, this policy does not provide any further information
pertaining to whether aspects of identity, gender and sexual diversity may be included under that
umbrella. Given that this policy was established in 2003 and before same-sex marriage was
legalized in Canada, it is doubtful that LGBTI-diversity was the primary goal of this policy
statement. That said, where explicit support of queer and trans identities may be absent, the
vague language of this particular policy opens opportunities for LGBTI diversity to be
interpreted as implicit. This policy point also aligns with language in the Alberta Human Rights
Act (2000) that establishes the richness that stems from communities that embrace and celebrate
diversity.
In 1992, the Association passed a resolution that encourages school boards to “embody a culture that is sensitive to the racial, religious and cultural makeup of the communities they serve” (The ATA, 2019b, p. 110). Whereas the intentions behind this point may vary and serve to create environments that are more inclusive, the use of the word “sensitive” prompts a skeptical response, particularly when considering how it is often used to reinforce the exclusion of gender and sexual diversity from schools. In analyzing how Alberta Education and local school boards construct “controversial issues,” it was evident that “sensitivities” is used as a code for religiously inspired homophobic and transphobic values. Whereas this ATA policy may be intended to create environments inclusive to newcomers to Canada (given the year it was approved) it could also support school decision-making that yields to vocal religious minorities within a community, to the exclusion of others. These concerns are not unfounded given how commonplace this was within my own experience working at a school in rural community.

What follows, in section 6.2.15.0 of the Members’ Handbook, is a collection of policies that address “sexual and gender minority students,” tracing back to the year 2005 (The ATA, 2019b, p. 114). For such policies to have been well-established for more than a decade suggests that the ATA has long been a progressive bastion within the province. The first of these policies advocates that school instruction should “prepare students to live in and contribute to an open, pluralistic, democratic society in which people are not discriminated against…on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression” (The ATA, 2019b, p. 113). This statement is of particular interest, not only in the way that it includes all aspects of real and perceived gender and sexual diversity, but also in the way that it argues that such inclusive values are important for all students to learn. This policy point is framed very strategically, suggesting that the development of respectful and inclusive beliefs and attitudes is
necessary for success in society, arguing that discriminatory beliefs do not effectively prepare young people for a life outside of school. What follows, includes suggestions that teacher preparation programs include topics addressing LGBTI identities (6.2.15.2), that the Association supports the creation of GSAs/QSAs (6.2.15.3), and that the list of government-approved resources for language arts include literature representing LGBTI identities and stories (6.2.5.13) (The ATA, 2019b. p. 113). Whereas it is encouraging to see such supportive policies for the nurturance of gender and sexual diversity in schools, it is also limited because ATA policies do not have the legislative mandate that Alberta Education and local school boards do. These policies are intended to frame the advocacy that the ATA engages in and therefore still play an important role in the work of the Association, despite lacking the same ability to affect change in the day-to-day experiences of teachers. Despite these limitations, it is evident that representatives of the Alberta teaching profession are committed to supporting LGBTI youth.

Following the policies for sexual and gender minority youth, is a series of immediate directives that were established in 2019, in the month following the Alberta election that saw the UCP take majority control over the provincial government. Given that the UCP education platform promised to rescind education legislation aimed to protect LGBTI students, it is no surprise that members of the Association hoped to increased advocacy in these areas. This contextual information likely informs why these policies were classified as “immediate directives.” First, policy 6.4.0.1 urges that Alberta school divisions be mandated to provide training specifically concerning gender and sexual diversity (The ATA, 2019b, p. 31). Whereas this particular policy does not seem to respond directly to the platform promises of the UCP, it does endeavour to ensure that gender and sexual diversity be considered as an area of professional competency for teachers. Second, 6.4.0.2, speaks to tangible concerns following the
election of the UCP. It urges the government to “ensure that changes in legislation respecting education do not diminish the protection provided to teachers and other school authority employees against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression” (The ATA, 2019b, p. 114). This statement goes on to urge the government not to make changes that protect students from disclosures about their participation in GSAs and QSAs, in response to the UCP promise that they would repeal such protections (The ATA, 2019b, p. 114). Whereas policymaking within the Association offers avenues for agile responses to political shifts within the province, it does so without the ability to enforce change beyond such symbolic practices. As such, while these statements serve as a strong response to UCP threats to rollback legislation, such responses remained largely emblematic. We know now that such changes have already been made, in spite of the advocacy efforts of the ATA and multitudes of other community organizations and groups (Bruch, 2019).

Section 19 of the Association’s policies addresses staffing practices in schools and includes a number of policies intended specifically to support LGBTI teachers. The first, urges school boards to “develop clear, explicit and comprehensive policies that address the health, safety, and employment concerns of sexual- and gender-minority staff and those who are perceived as such” (19.2.11.4) (The ATA, 2019b, p. 137). Enacted in 2006, this policy goes beyond inclusion to suggest that school boards should develop comprehensive policies with the express purpose of supporting the inclusion of LGBTI staff. As discovered in the analysis of three school board policies, there are few institutional supports for queer and trans teachers, particularly in institutional texts, which makes these policy recommendations all the more urgent. Following 19.2.11.4, comes policy points that urge the provincial government to allow teachers to change their names and gender markers on official documents and employment
records and ensure that LGBTI teachers are protected from “unwanted disclosure of their sexual identity” (The ATA, 2019b, p. 137). Given the shifts in provincial legislation protecting the privacy of LGBTI youth in late 2017, it appears that these policy points serve to urge the extension of those privacy rights to teachers in 2018 (Bennett, 2017).

Under the heading “Local Issues,” policy 19.3.17.3 suggests that the ATA (2019b) “encourages its locals to create and maintain gay-straight/queer-straight alliances for teachers” (p. 143). This is an interesting new development within the Association, where Locals are not only encouraged to build communities of support for LGBTI teachers and their allies, but the ATA has also created a guide to support Locals in doing so (The ATA, 2019a). While there is little research about teacher GSAs and QSAs, it appears that the Association endeavours to be at the forefront of LGBTI teacher supports in the profession. This is notable in comparison to other institutional texts where queer and trans teachers are primarily completely excluded. Where LGBTI teachers are included, such policy provisions typically pertain to matters and logistics of employment and the workplace, and do not offer the opportunities for community-building and institutional supports that this teacher GSA/QSA policy does.

**Summary.**

The policies outlined in the *Members’ Handbook* differ quite significantly from the institutional texts analyzed thus far in this study (The ATA, 2019b). This is in large part due to the fact that these policies are non-binding; while they frame how The Alberta Teachers’ Association advocates within the education system, they do not have jurisdiction over local school boards or Alberta Education. Although this text does not coordinate the work of teachers in the same way as other institutional texts, it does document the core values of the Association and raises concerns about key issues affecting the teaching profession in Alberta. Whereas most
of the institutional texts analyzed in this study fail to even make mention of the existence of queer and trans teachers, these ATA policies indicate that the Association values and supports teachers with diverse genders and sexualities (Rayside, 2014). For teachers who are navigating their queer identities within the confines of heteroprofessionalism, this document at least offers some solace and affirmation—directly from the profession itself—that queer and trans teachers do belong in the classroom and that their queerness is an asset.

**The Code of Professional Conduct.**

As established within the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000), the Alberta Teachers’ Association (2018b) *Code of Professional Conduct* outlines the “minimum standards of professional conduct of teachers.” Teachers who are in violation of these standards may undergo disciplinary processes as per the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000), which puts them at risk of being charged with unprofessional conduct and the potential of losing their membership within the Association. Because membership in the ATA is required to teach in Alberta (with few exceptions), the possible consequences for charges of unprofessional conduct are significant. This institutional document is important for teachers because it specifies how teachers are supposed to behave as professionals with regard to students, school boards, colleagues, and as de facto representatives of the teaching profession. Alongside ATA documents, the *Code* illustrates the specific day-to-day practices required of teachers to embody professionalism.

As discussed in Chapter Two, LGBTI teachers are often made to feel that their identities are unprofessional or improper in the school context and, as a result, engage in diligent self-regulation (Connell, 2015; Gray & Harris, 2014). Whereas some discourses of professionalism centre on how teachers appear or perform in the school context, the *Code of Professional Conduct* defines professionalism around how a teacher upholds their responsibilities to
educational stakeholders (The ATA, 2018b). For instance, the first responsibility outlined in the *Code of Professional Conduct* (The ATA, 2018b) dictates that teachers must teach “in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice” as per the grounds protected within the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000). Rather than being concerned with interpreting the “sensitivities” of the community and censoring content as a result, here a teacher’s primary responsibility is to ensure that their practice is not discriminatory. Furthermore, this particular responsibility is framed around the interests of students, rather than the political interests of a community.

Another point for consideration is that the *Code of Professional Conduct* does not include responsibilities to parents but only to students, colleagues, and school boards. Whereas local policies construct a professional responsibility to parents that is deferent and sometimes diminishing of the expertise and specialty training of a teacher, the *Code* does no such thing. This is not to say that parents should not be involved as a supporting partner in their child’s education. Rather, it is that the construct of parental rights is problematic, particularly in how it currently operates in Alberta. The *Code of Professional Conduct* states that “the teacher is responsible for diagnosing educational needs, prescribing and implementing instructional programs and evaluating progress of pupils” and that teachers “may not delegate these responsibilities to anyone who is not a teacher” (The ATA, 2019b). Therefore, it is a matter of professional responsibility for teachers to oversee all aspects of instruction in their classroom and make informed decisions based on their expertise and training. To relegate any degree of authority over instructional content or materials to parents is a direct affront to teacher conduct, as indicated by the *Code of Professional Conduct* (The ATA, 2018b). Where local school board
policies suggest that teachers make educational choices in the interests of parents, the Code maintains responsibility first and foremost to students.

The *Code of Professional Conduct* is just one document within a complex web of institutional texts that implicitly and explicitly define teacher professionalism in different ways. Although teachers are required to adhere to it, as per the *Teaching Profession Act* (2000), teachers also have other contractual and legislated obligations that shape their conceptualizations of teacher professionalism. For LGBTI teachers, the Code offers a framework for teacher conduct that is not shaped by discourses of parental rights.

**Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers.**

Comprising part of the ATA’s Constitution, the *Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers* (2018c) outlines the rights entitled to teachers within the province of Alberta. Although it is not clear what jurisdiction this text holds, it identifies core values of the professional organization and reinforces conceptualizations of professionalism set out in the *Code of Professional Conduct* (2018b). In the preamble, it states that “a teacher has professional knowledge and skill gained through formal preparation and experience” (The ATA, 2018c). This statement suggests that professionalism is not only how one conducts themselves but, is also earned by way of education or training in the teaching profession. Furthermore, it affirms the role of teachers as the educational experts within the education system. In so doing, it implicitly resists the ways in which Alberta’s education system is granting parents the ability to influence teachers’ professional practice.

Also, of significance to this study is the ninth statement in this document, which states that “teachers have the right to be protected against discrimination on the basis of prejudice” on the grounds protected in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* (2000). Although these grounds stem...
from provincial legislation, the inclusion of “gender identity,” “gender expression,” and “sexual orientation” continue to have an impact on how policies concerning teacher professionalism are read. Because many of the institutional texts examined to this point do not mention queer and trans teachers, they discursively construct LGBTI teachers as abnormal, uncommon, and outside educational contexts. This erasure is very damaging to LGTBI teachers and perpetuates the notion that queerness does not belong in the teaching profession. Therefore, when policy statements directly acknowledge gender and sexually diverse teachers, such acknowledgements have an affirming and validating power. The Alberta Teachers’ Association has been noticeably consistent in acknowledging and granting protections to LGBTI teachers within their institutional texts.

**Breaking the Silence.**

As indicated in Chapter One, The Alberta Teachers’ Association released their first publication specifically for gender and sexually diverse teachers in 2018, titled *Breaking the Silence: A Guide for Sexual and Gender Minority Teachers in Alberta*. This brochure advocates for the inclusion of LGBTI teachers while also providing information about employment rights and practices in the province. It identifies that there continue to be several issues facing LGBTI teachers in the province, including discursive silence about sexual and gender minority (SGM) teachers despite increasing legislation of supports for queer students, fear of employment ramifications for coming out, complaints from parents and students, and being forced to remain “closeted” (Rayside, 2014; The ATA, 2018a). Unlike the policy statements *about* LGBTI teachers in the *Members’ Handbook*, this institutional text indicates a turning point and “breaking of silence” where the Association speaks directly to LGBTI teachers. Although this document marks a distinctive path forward for the relationship between gender and sexually
diverse teachers and their professional association in Alberta, there remains significant work to be done by the ATA to advocate for improved conditions for LGBTI teachers in the province.

The introduction to the brochure states that “while protection for SGM students is enshrined in Alberta legislation, it is equally important to ensure that our school communities are also…inclusive environments for all staff” (The ATA, 2018a, p. 2). This note indicates that there is a disparity in protections for LGBTI individuals in the school system, depending on if they are a student or staff. Several local policies echoed these remarks on the state of the education system, with protections for LGBTI youth written into institutional texts with greater frequency than protections for teachers. On the following page, it is noted that “if schools are not safe and inclusive places for SGM teachers, they’re not safe for SGM students either” (The ATA, 2018a, p. 3). Although undoubtedly true, it is necessary to revisit the problem wherein the rights of LGBTI teachers are frequently couched alongside the rights of students, as though such rights do not matter unless they provide positive benefits to LGBTI children and youth. This is not to say that the ATA should not advocate for queer and trans youth equally, but rather that queer and trans teachers have inherent value and importance within the school system in their own right, even when SGM students do not benefit from their presence. Gender and sexually diverse teachers experience harassment from students and colleagues alike, suggesting that the protections already in place for LGBTI students do not necessarily extend to LGBTI teachers (The ATA, 2018a, p. 6). As such, it is clear that the inclusion of LGBTI teachers requires a different approach than that of students within the process.

The brochure goes on to state that “no teacher should have to hide who they are in order to teach,” and that gender and sexually diverse teachers “can serve as important role models to GSM students…and are an important sign that diversity, equity and human rights are valued
within a school community” (The ATA, 2018a, p. 3). Here, the Association indicates clear support for LGBTI teachers by suggesting that they should not be made to feel as though their identities are unprofessional or inappropriate, nor should they be made to feel as though their identity is a burden in their role. Although it explicitly states the important mentorship role that LGBTI teachers can serve in schools, it only mentions SGM students and their families as possible beneficiaries. Mentorship and relationship building are important amongst the queer community and across generations, but LGBTI teachers can also have a profound impact on students who do not identify as members of the queer community. Queer and trans teachers can also play a role in shifting school cultures and reducing homophobic beliefs by way of developing positive relationships with students who do not identify as LGBTI.

Included in *Breaking the Silence* (The ATA, 2018a, p. 6) are reports concerning harassment of LGBTI teachers and indicate that harassment from students about LGB or presumed LGB identities (67%) and gender expression (23%) is more common than harassment from colleagues (26% and 10% respectively). Whereas significant policies exist to protect teachers from being harassed by their colleagues and school boards, there is not significant institutional support in place to address workplace violence experience by LGBTI teachers from students. Although this section of the document indicates a research-based policy gap, it fails to address solutions beyond the development of anti-harassment policies. Interestingly, addressing homophobic and transphobic harassment from students is not indicated as a concern or point of advocacy within any of the ATA’s other institutional texts. Opportunities exist to not only strengthen policy approaches but, improve curriculum as well to address the disproportionately frequent experiences of homophobic and transphobic harassment by students.
The remainder of the text includes information about how The Alberta Teachers’ Association advocates for LGBTI teachers as well as answers to teacher questions about their rights concerning protection from discrimination. It serves as a fairly detailed resource to be accessed by LGBTI teachers and plainly states the Association’s support of gender and sexual diversity in the teaching profession. What contradicts such statements from the ATA, however, is the way in which teachers are represented in the visual imagery, which can also be analyzed (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Aside from what is written, there are a number of stock photos included within this text and images that represent teachers interacting with colleagues, with students, and more. This collection of images, when viewed across the document, sends a powerful message to LGBTI teachers concerning normative gender and sexuality. While it may be “breaking the silence” about LGBTI teachers in the profession, this document shows that perhaps queer identities should be heard, but not seen.

The pictures on the brochure cover and on pages three, five, nine, fourteen, and fifteen include representations of teachers that appear to gender-conforming, or abiding by gendered norms of dress, hair, jewelry, etc. (The ATA, 2018a). This is not to assume that anyone’s identity can be determined based on simply looking at them, or that these folks are in fact cisgender and heterosexual. However, it does raise questions about the deliberate association of LGBTI teachers with gender conformance, particularly given how gender conformance is often closely associated with teacher professionals. The implicit messaging may be intended to suggest that LGBTI teachers are “normal” and “just like everyone else,” so as to avoid making assumptions about someone’s identity based on their experiences. The unfortunate side effect of this choice is the way in which this texts constructs “invisible” queerness as preferable to queerness that can be seen or recognized. Whereas not all queer and trans folks express their queerness by visible
means—through style, makeup, clothing, and jewelry—there are many queer folks who do. Although caution is necessary to ensure that stereotypes about queerness are not unfairly perpetuated or reinforced through images of a particular kind, this text falls short in fairly representing the incredibly diverse array of queer identities within the teaching profession.

**Summary of ATA Documents.**

Institutional texts from The Alberta Teachers’ Association communicate a number of values about teacher professionalism and the inclusion of LGBTI teachers within the profession. What is most notable, in comparison with the other institutional texts from Alberta Education and local school boards, is their recognition that teachers have diverse genders and sexualities and that such diversity is an asset to the profession. Although these documents do not carry the same weight as other institutional texts within the education system, they communicate that The Alberta Teachers’ Association accepts and supports LGBTI members and is advocating to improve their experiences in the province. Furthermore, the ATA texts conceptualize professionalism differently than organizations in the education system, emphasizing that teachers have specialized expertise and that their professional conduct is defined by competence and responsibility to students, employers, and the profession. Rather than framing teacher conduct around anticipating the “sensitivities” of communities, obeying school board directives, and being deferential to parental preferences, they position teachers as experts who should be granted more agency within the system. Although there continue to be competing values within the profession concerning parental rights, there is no debate that The Alberta Teachers’ Association stands for the inclusion of LGBTI teachers within the profession and supports the continued advancement of LGBTI-inclusive strategies and policies across the province.
Chapter Six: Media Analysis

Given the very public nature of the education system, discussions pertaining to school legislation and policies are common within the public arena. News outlets and social media threads are particularly active in cases where policies or legislative changes are deemed controversial. Alberta has long been known for its conservative values, especially with respect to gender and sexual diversity and its place in schools (Filax, 2006). Discourses concerning gender and sexual diversity are not often addressed in Alberta without also making reference to the construct of parental rights: the assertion that parents should have primary authority over their child’s education as a result of their “natural,” biological ties (Banack, 2015). Because schools do not operate in a vacuum, teachers are impacted by the relevant and prevalent media discourses concerning the school system (Edling, 2015) and the teaching profession and LGBTI teachers are particularly affected by this often heterosexist and transphobic discourse that seeks to “protect” children from sexual and gender diversity (Ferfolja, 2007).

In this section, editorial articles concerning LGBTI issues in schools are analyzed, particularly those that are connected to key institutional texts that have already been considered in this study. The intent behind such analysis is to identify the ways in which public discourses shape the production and interpretation of institutional documents within the education system, while also shaping the hidden curriculum of teacher professionalism. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, I have selected four articles from 2016 that capture the eruption of anti-LGBTI sentiments that arose from the release of the Guidelines for Best Practice (Machin & Mayr, 2012). It can be challenging to capture data about anti-LGBTI sentiments at the school level, because they often emerge as microaggressions that can occur through gossip or discussions in secret social media groups, thereby remaining largely invisible. For example, in one of the
schools that I worked in, we were told about a secret Facebook “parent group” that used the online platform to disparage teachers, administrators, and school-based decisions or events. Although most teachers did not have access to it directly, we would hear whispers from parents about what was being communicated, and this contributed to a culture of fear about parental backlash and critique. As a queer and trans teacher, there were additional depths to my dread as I regularly wondered which homophobic and transphobic discourses might be directed towards me in online and offline spaces, without my knowledge. With this in mind, I have selected these articles because they effectively capture many of the sentiments shared by religiously conservative parents that are difficult to detect and “collect” as data because of their surreptitious nature. Not only have these sentiments informed my own decisions as a queer and trans professional, but they have a broad impact on if and how gender and sexual diversity should be taken up in school and classroom environments.

Critical Discourse Analysis

A Genderless Utopia

The release of the Guidelines for Best Practices in 2016 stoked controversy in the province, sparking an increase in homophobic and transphobic rhetoric, including calls to the “protect” parental rights and families from what was dubbed a dangerous “gender ideology.” The at times violent responses to the resource generated significant fear amongst teachers, especially gender and sexually diverse teachers like me. Despite having legislated protections and policy protections established by the Ministry of Education, there remained concern about the possibility of backlash for providing LGBTI-inclusive instruction and materials in the classroom.

An opinion piece published in the Calgary Herald shortly after the release of the Guidelines for Best Practices argued that the document made “schools…favour ideology over
reality” (Carpay, 2016a). Written by Carpay, an affiliate of Parents for Choice in Education in Alberta, the article suggests that the NDP’s Guidelines would “violate students’ privacy rights [and] undermine parental rights” (Carpay, 2016a). As a not-for-profit, PCE advocates for improved school choice and increased parental consent in schools, arguing that the “natural and permanent tie that parents have with their own children” positions parents as the drivers of excellence in education (PCE, n.d.). In the opinion piece, Carpay invokes contrived moral panics about schools “allowing boys to use the girls’ washrooms and changerooms” and letting “boys…attend a girls’ sex education class” in order to legitimate and perpetuate discourses of parental rights (Carpay, 2016a). As a lawyer, Carpay leads with his professional designation and title as president of the Justice Centre for Constitutional freedoms to lend discursive weight to his opinions (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Such opinions are rife with transphobic beliefs: “every Alberta student, male and female alike, now has the right to use the girls’ washrooms and change rooms, depending not on the reality of biology, but purely on the student’s own feelings” (Carpay, 2016a). Carpay describes this idea as “absurd,” and uses scare quotes around the terms gender expression and self-identification to undermine their credibility.

Although this article argues primarily against the NDP’s Guidelines for Best Practices, it does so by way of arguing against “self-identification,” and for biological essentialism, suggesting that it is “scientific fact,” “credible evidence,” and “objective research” (Carpay, 2016a). The author goes on to state that the Guidelines for Best Practices (Alberta Education, 2016) are not informed by “evidence and research,” but are influenced by “ideological advocacy on the part of bureaucrats, special interest lobby groups and the teachers’ union” (Carpay, 2016a). Here, we can see the author constructing “advocacy” and “scientific fact” as oppositional to one another, calling on more powerful binaristic constructions of fact/opinion and true/false.
By constructing gender identity and gender expression as based upon an “idea” that is “subjective” and “personal,” rather than sex (as in, visible genitalia) which is “scientific” and “reality,” the author positions biological essentialism as truth, diminishing the value of any other framework for understanding gender as “opinion.”

Next, Carpay echoes Klein’s conceptualization of Albertans as “severely normal” (Filax, 2006, p. xiii) when suggesting that “most parents [emphasis added]” in Alberta “reject the idea that one’s personal, subjective feelings should oust the scientific fact that people are either biologically male or biologically female” (Carpay, 2016a). Here, the use of “most” is intended to construct such beliefs as majoritarian. Furthermore, we see a distinctive discursive choice to personalize “parents” while depersonalizing others as “bureaucrats,” “lobby groups,” and “the teachers’ union” (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This construction positions people who espouse such transphobic and homophobic beliefs on the side of the majority (concerned parents) and those in opposition to biological essentialism as a part of larger, powerful organizations (lobby groups and unions). As a result, this juxtaposition insinuates that parents who are worried about the well-being of their children are battling organizations that are detached, impersonal, and have seemingly dubious political agendas. This portrayal of parents as victims to a more progressive government agenda has a long history in Alberta, with similar discourses arising in the 1990’s (Filax, 2006). Fears of a “predator state” and “powerful homosexual lobby” that were raised in response to legislation protecting people on the grounds of sexual orientation continue to reverberate throughout Alberta in response to protections for gender identity and expression (Filax, 2006, p. 130).

The article speaks in support of parental rights, suggesting that the Guidelines for Best Practices “attacks the bond between parents and their children” by encouraging teachers to
maintain a child’s privacy about their identity or their participation in a GSA/QSA club, if they do not want their parents to know (Carpay, 2016a). Rooted in heterosexism and biological essentialism, the article insists that “parents love their children more—and know their children better—than any politician, bureaucrat or lobbyist” (Carpay, 2016a). Such a statement claims that the bonds established through heterosexual procreation reign supreme, while also reinforcing the idea that the individuals in support of the *Guidelines for Best Practices* are only related to the work by means of political agendas. Carpay constructs a false oppositionist “for us (parents) or against us (politicians)” dichotomy, which Van Dijk (1998) describes as “ideological squaring” (as cited in Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 40). Rather than explicitly stating one as “good” and the other as “bad,” Carpay (2016a) structures the opposition between the constructed categories of “parents” and “government,” then deploys words like “absurd” and “bureaucrats,” to denote support for one side over the other (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Ideological squaring is a common discursive tactic used to position gender and sexual diversity as incompatible with the family unit and family values and is evident within a number of other opinion pieces considered in this study.

*Not (Just) About Bathrooms*

As discussed earlier, Parents for Choice in Education (PCE) are a grassroots organization in Alberta that are interested in advancing religious conservatism through changes to publicly funded education (Banack, 2015). Upon the release of the *Guidelines for Best Practices* in 2016, PCE engaged a public campaign in opposition to many of its suggestions, including the protection of privacy for any students who attended a Gay-Straight or Queer-Straight Alliance (GSA/QSA). Through petitions, protests, and opinion pieces, Parents for Choice rallied for increased parental oversight within the school system in order to “protect” the rights of parents to
instill their own values and beliefs, free from government interference (Ng, 2016). Within their media outreach, they continued to reinforce the discourse that sexual and gender diversity are based on “value systems” and “ideology,” rather than lived experience, and should therefore not be mandated within public schools (Ng, 2016). In June of 2016, Ng (a member of PCE) wrote an opinion piece in the Edmonton Journal appealing to parents about government “intrusion” (para. 15), while simultaneously arguing that opposition to the Guidelines for Best Practices (2016) was not just about the issue of whether transgender children and youth could use the washroom aligned with their lived gender, rather than their assigned sex.

Ng (2016) begins the article with reference to rallies held in Edmonton and Calgary to protest Bill 10, which had been passed by the previous Progressive Conservative government and mandated that all schools permit the creation of GSAs and QSAs should students request them (Lamoureux, 2016). Because the rallies were organized in opposition to Bill 10, Ng situates the position of PCE in this debate as dominant by explicitly quantifying the attendees as “over 4,300” (para. 2) between the two cities, while continuously citing “tens of thousands” (para. 13) of supporters (2016). This claim is disputed by a different article—that is not an opinion piece—which suggests that the crowd in Edmonton was actually in the “hundreds” whereas the rally in Calgary saw “about 1,000” people (Lamoureux, 2016). Ng opens the article with these seemingly inflated numbers to establish that values concerning parental rights are prevalent—possibly even majoritarian—amongst Albertans. In reality, PCE actually represents a minority of religious conservatives who, by way of leveraging political affiliations, have been able to gain considerable influence over educational policy decisions in the province (Banack, 2015).

After characterizing the rally as a “tremendous success,” Ng goes on to address the primary concern that motivated the event: a matter of “who has authority over children and their
education in Alberta” (2016). Ng suggests that the opposition to Bill 10 and the mandate for school support of GSAs/QSAs boils down to a fundamental question of authority over student learning. Moves by the government to protect LGBTI students through the *Guidelines for Best Practices* (2016) and Bill 10 are characterized by Ng as “undermining” (para. 5) the role of parents in determining what is best for their children. Ng continuously calls on scripts pertaining to the construct of parental rights throughout this article, including the moral authority of parents who *inherently* have the best intentions for their children. An image included within the article shows attendees at the event holding signs with a number of different statements, including: “encourage relationships, not secrets” and “school is for 12 years, family is forever.” These “concerned parents” are then contrasted with an ominous and impersonal government that is attempting to withhold information about children, “dictate for all people which value systems are ‘approved’,” (para. 12) and unduly “impose a specific ideology” (para. 14) on a “captive, impressionable audience” (para. 12) of children. Again, the tactic of ideological squaring is used to position parents and a depersonalized government in opposition to one another (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The choice of language throughout the article frames these supportive policies for LGBTI students (that are inclusive of gender and sexual diversity) as sinister, secretive, and intent on eroding parental rights in the province. Protest signs that say “we have ALL kids in mind” also imply that government actions are framed aimed at a small minority, where the concerns of parents are more far-reaching (Ng, 2016).

In the argument against Bill 10 and the *Guidelines for Best Practices*, Ng (2016) attempts to establish a series of “facts,” by alluding to research and citing a portion of the *Education Act* within the argument (2012). Stating in paragraph five that “we know [emphasis added] every child’s success is strengthened when parental involvement is supported,” Ng (2016) constructs
the idea of a simultaneously common and research-backed notion that children are unequivocally more successful with parental involvement. Because there is no citational reference to any research, the ambiguity of this claim makes it difficult to counter, while also making it easy for readers to accept as truth or common knowledge. These tactics are referred to by Fairclough (1995) as the “discourse of information,” or the “sense of imparting facts” to an audience (as cited in Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 44). This, in combination with an “informal lexis” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 44)—including the use of questioning to imply dialogue between the author and audience and the construction of author and reader as a collective “we” (para. 5)—allows Ng to impart the discourse of parental rights as representative of the “common” Albertan. In so doing, Ng once again suggests that such perspectives are widespread in Alberta and shared by “tens of thousands of people across the province” (para. 13).

In the seventh paragraph, Ng (2016) alludes to another prominent argument against the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity in schools: “age-appropriateness.” According to many conservative faith-based communities, there is never an appropriate age to teach about gender and sexual diversity, particularly when religious values that are rooted in Biblical teachings state that homosexuality is wrong (Banack, 2015). While Ng’s statement stokes fear about the same content about human sexuality being taught “whether your child is aged 5, 10 or 15” (para. 7), it is not clear whether Ng actually believes if any content concerning “sensitive topics of sexuality and identity” (para. 10) should be taught. This “hedging” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.192) suggests that while Ng is projecting concerns about the age-appropriateness of content, there remains a strategic ambiguity around what, if any content about human sexuality Ng believes should be taught. In other words, Ng is strategically characterizing this concern so as to avoid revealing any religious or anti-LGBTI sentiment that may undermine or discredit their advocacy.
This ambiguity serves to conceal the conservative values underpinning Ng’s arguments that in other forms of online media are more explicit, including the framing of conversion therapy as an appropriate “treatment” for gender identity (Include Parents, 2017). And while Ng’s religious affiliation is not a concern of this study, what is of concern is how discourses in opposition to gender and sexual diversity are strategically framed to deliberately obscure their origins in religious conservatism, and instead suggest that they are matters of “freedom” and family (Ng, 2016, paras. 14, 17). Such obfuscation aims to re-frame heterosexist and transphobic beliefs as rights that ought to be protected in regard to Alberta’s education system.

The implicit association between gender and sexual diversity and “peril” of families that is conveyed through Ng’s article is a longstanding matter of homophobic discourse that has been employed across generations to challenge the advancement of queer rights, including gay adoption and public health interventions during the AIDS crisis (Filax, 2006). Stemming from biological determinism and religious values concerning heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family, narratives “that [have] masqueraded as family values” continue to persist in Alberta, with Parents for Choice in Education leading the way (Filax, 2006, p. 130). Filax (2006) writes that conservative values remain rooted in the “concept of family,” but not just any kind of family: only those who are “exemplified by white, Euro-Western descendants,” and “ordained by God to live within a traditional family, with ‘man’ as dominant over the planet and all its life forms” (p. 109). This narrow definition of the “traditional family” continues to be discharged, albeit through slightly different messaging, to oppose LGBTI people, rights, and LGBTI-positive policy and legislation. In response to the Guidelines for Best Practices and Bill 10—both aimed to support LGBTI children and youth specifically—Ng suggests that both family, parents, and value systems are under attack by “politicians manipulat[ing] our education system” (2016, para. 14).
If religious conservatives view supportive policies for LGBTI students as threatening to the family (Hill, 2009), one wonders how they might view the presence of LGBTI teachers in the schools.

The “Anti-Parent” Alberta Teachers’ Association

In December of 2016, an opinion piece was published in the Edmonton Sun by Trimble, the Executive Director of the organization Parents for Choice in Education (PCE), that positions The Alberta Teachers’ Association as “anti-family, anti-parent and anti-choice” (Trimble, 2016). The release of the Guidelines for Best Practices in January 2016 sparked province-wide conversations about proposed policies and changes within schools, of which the PCE were actively involved (Carpay, 2016a, 2016b; Ng, 2016). This opposition to the Guidelines continued for the better part of 2016, including references to “gender studies” within Trimble’s December 2016 argument. Given PCE’s characterization of parental ties as “natural” and “permanent,” it is evident that the organization embodies heteronormative values within their work.

Throughout this article, Trimble characterizes The Alberta Teachers’ Association and subsequently, the teaching profession, as “anti-family, anti-parent, and anti-choice in education” and a “detrimental influence” to the NDP government in power at the time (2016). The chief concerns raised by Trimble include changes to the School Act that “decidedly [circumvent] parents” and “[enforce] one-size-fits-all clubs and activities into all schools” (2016). This statement both reinforces the construct of parental rights and also attempts to frame Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) as ideological clubs by suggesting that they have a one-size-fits-all “agenda.” Trimble goes on to say that “opt-out provisions for sensitive topics have been weakened and children can now be taught controversial lessons like ‘gender studies’ through polarizing resources like the ATA Prism Toolkits, without parent knowledge” (Trimble, 2016). Here,
Trimble calls on the code of “sensitivity” in reference to gender studies, suggesting that topics concerning gender and sexual diversity are value-laden and require parental oversight and censorship. As discussed in the analysis of local school board policies, the term “sensitive” has become a code in the context of Alberta’s education system, suggesting that gender and sexuality education are volatile. Given Trimble’s attacks of the Association within this article, it seems rather that the topic itself is less thorny than the discourse of parental rights that it is steeped within.

Throughout the article, Trimble (2016) collectivizes parents who are opposed to the educational changes and frames them as “caring,” “concerned citizens” with “legitimate concerns,” in juxtaposition to the ATA which is portrayed as “polarizing” and attacking the education system, “showing [no] concern for student outcomes,” and labelling parents as “fearmongers” (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Trimble (2016) also positions parent concerns alongside “research”, but uses words such as “failed,” “disregard,” “experiment,” and “tampered” to describe the work of both the Association and Alberta’s education ministry (at the time) in relation to the changes in educational policy. By positioning supports for LGBTI youth in opposition to parental rights, Trimble couches homophobic and transphobic rhetoric within the fight to “[protect] the family unit,” “parent their own children,” and oppose “two-tiered education in Alberta” (2016). This article provides an example of how parental rights discourses are rooted in heterosexism and indicates a growing movement to delegitimize The Alberta Teachers’ Association as a result of their support for progressive and inclusive educational policies.
Parents and the “Final Say”

The final article for consideration in this chapter comes once more from Carpay, an affiliate of Parents for Choice in Education. While it chronologically precedes both Ng’s and Trimble’s articles, its anti-LGBTI messages are much more explicit than the others and has therefore been reserved for the “final say” as further evidence of the homophobic and transphobic discourses that shape the construct of parental rights and the debates against LGBTI-inclusion in Alberta’s education system. The opinion piece, published in the Calgary Sun, responds to the critique faced by Roman Catholic Bishop Frederick Henry after he reacted to the Guidelines for Best Practices in early 2016 with a scathing letter that called the NDP government “totalitarian.”

Carpay deploys a series of rhetorical questions at the beginning of the article—seven in total—largely to rebut and discredit the critiques aimed at Henry. Each question challenges specific words used to characterize Henry’s letter—such as “harmful” and “dangerous”—by sharing phrases (presented as facts) that seem to be sourced both from Catholic doctrine and Henry’s letter. For example, the first question asks, “Was it ‘hateful’ for the bishop to explain Catholic teaching that ‘God created people as male and female’ and the God ‘gave equal dignity to both man and woman’?” (Carpay, 2016, para. 3). Here, Carpay delivers this particular Catholic teaching as fact, while discrediting the word “hateful” with the strategic use of scare quotes. Furthermore, the rhetorical and sarcastic tone of this series of questions serves to minimize and ridicule the concerns raised in response to Henry’s letter. A few paragraphs later, Carpay poses the question “Was it ‘unfounded’ for the bishop to point out that Gay-Straight Alliances and Queer-Straight Alliances are incompatible with Catholic teaching because these ideological clubs accept the idea that all forms of consensual sexual expression are legitimate?”
(para. 9). Carpay strategically isolates single words from the criticisms leveled at Henry, and then proceeds to argue these singular, decontextualized words with lengthier recitation of doctrine, as though such doctrine is credible and unbiased. In so doing, Carpay makes it appear as though he is engaging a fulsome counterargument to the critiques of Henry, when in reality, he is merely reciting heterosexist Catholic doctrine rooted in biological essentialism.

After Carpay ceases the opening lines of questioning, he moves on to frame his argument around the values of free society, including the importance of debating all “issues,” like what comprises “appropriate sexual behaviour” (2016b, para. 10). Here, Carpay is engaging two separate claims: one, that because everything is up for debate in a free society, including “views of sexuality,” his argument is merely an “honest” and “frank” approach to such debates; and two, that gender and sexual diversity are tied to sexual behaviour, rather than identity. In the first point, Carpay suggests that gender and sexual diversity are a view of sexuality, as though they are a product of abstraction and not grounded in reality. Then, he employs a reductionist argument that LGBTI identities are about sexual behaviour and this is a dog whistle to the broader fears of “the queer predator,” and other moral panics concerning the “threats” to children, especially in school environments (Filax, 2006, p. 130). In so doing, Carpay (2016b) attempts to appeal to religious conservative values indirectly, by way of coded language like “free society,” the “right[s] of parents,” and opposition to “politicians and bureaucrats.”

Whereas Ng and Trimble alluded to the argument that LGBTI-inclusion serves as a threat to the family, Carpay suggests that the implementation of the Guidelines to Best Practices in Alberta’s education system is analogous to how “totalitarian regimes have used the public education system to indoctrinate children into the state’s ideology” in the past (2016b, para. 11). While Carpay does not directly associate the NDP’s actions to Nazi Germany in this particular
article, he would later draw an explicit connection between the rainbow flag and swastika as symbols of totalitarianism at a conference in 2018 (Rieger, 2018). The rhetoric deployed against gender and sexual diversity in Alberta often takes these extreme forms, intending to frame the LGBTI-inclusive practices not only as a violation of parental and religious rights, but as a much larger issue of the “dangers” facing free society. In the 1990s, these fears were initially framed as “the predator state operating in the interests of a powerful homosexual lobby” (Filax, 2006, p. 130). One conservative media commentator at that time suggested that because queer people “can’t cheat death the way the rest of us do by having children who carry on after us…they have to do it politically, basically by taking over other people’s children” (Filax, 2006, p. 116). Decades later, we can see that the belief that the state is trying to indoctrinate children not only persists in Carpay’s argument but, has evolved to become a question of “totalitarianism” versus “free society” (2016b).

In this opinion piece, Carpay only directly addresses two of the Guidelines for Best Practices: the first, being about washrooms and changerooms (where he calls on myths of boys using the girls’ washroom), and the second being about prohibitions concerning reparative or conversion therapy. Carpay argues that parents should be allowed to seek out therapy to “repair or heal Gender Identity Disorder…a recognized mental illness” because “if undertaken in childhood, [it] has a solid record of success in re-connecting gender identity to biological reality” (2016b, para. 12). Here, Carpay breaks from the subtext of his earlier comments about “views of sexuality,” and instead explicitly “reject[s] the idea that one’s personal feelings should oust the scientific fact that people are either biologically male or biologically female” (2016b, para. 12). As his argument progresses, it becomes less concerned about a “free society,” and more about the actual legitimacy of transgender identities, as though that is up for debate. Although Carpay
goes on to say that “whether one agrees or disagrees with Catholic teachings on human sexuality is irrelevant” to this debate, he does not shy away from espousing such values and wielding them in opposition to the Guidelines for Best Practices (Carpay, 2016b, para. 14). The troubling trend that can be traced throughout Carpay’s, Trimble’s, and Ng’s opinion pieces is a continued assertion that the concerns about the Guidelines for Best Practices are about families and freedom, and not particular religious values. Yet, the underlying values core to each argument are in fact, rooted in religiously inspired homophobic and transphobic discourses. To disguise these religious beliefs in supposed democratic values of rights and freedoms is a deliberate discursive tactic used by Trimble, Ng, and Carpay not only to make their arguments more mainstream to social conservatives who are not religious (Banack, 2015), but also to appeal for changes to be made across the education system and not only within the parameters of religious education (Kumashiro, 2010, p. 61). The persistent argument by Ng and Trimble about school choice reflects this: parents want to be able to choose a school that best suits their children, but also want to ensure that such schools do not teach values about gender and sexual diversity that conflict with their religious conservatism. Therefore, it is a matter of not only protecting the rights of families to access religious education, but the belief that all educational offerings should not be teaching these “ideologies” that potentially conflict with religious doctrine.

Summary

Public discourses about educational policy are not uncommon, given that education systems are critical infrastructure and play a consequential role within local communities and across Alberta as a whole. While community members, politicians, parents, and educators have wide-ranging opinions on matters affecting the education system, like standardized testing and classroom sizes, nothing seems more contentious in the public domain than questions concerning
gender and sexual diversity in schools. Alberta has a long-standing history of social and religious conservatism, particularly in response to LGBTI identities and human rights protections for queer and transgender individuals (Banack, 2015; Filax, 2006). It is no surprise, then, that the release of the *Guidelines for Best Practices* by the progressive NDP government in 2016 brought such values to the forefront of public conversation by way of homophobic and transphobic discourses shared across different media platforms. Examples of such discourses are evident in the four editorial articles analyzed within this chapter and make visible many of the elements of the hidden curriculum of teacher professionalism in the province. The authors of these opinion pieces exploit various tropes within their arguments, including that queerness as predatory (King, 2004) in nature (i.e. “boys in the girls’ washrooms”), that gender and sexual diversity threaten the “traditional” family, that the inclusion of LGBTI students is a matter of government-approved “gender ideology” and indoctrination, and that protections for marginalized populations pose a threat to individual freedoms and free society as a whole. Despite a number of these notions finding their roots in religious doctrine, the authors of the opinion pieces within this chapter largely claim that religious beliefs are irrelevant and that such matters concern the “rights” of parents to make decisions about their children’s education. No such rights are protected by provincial or federal law in Canada but, Carpay, Ng, and Trimble insist that such rights are contravened by educational policies and practices that support gender and sexually diverse students and staff in schools. Many of these homophobic and transphobic discourses have been employed publicly and privately within communities across the province for decades, and this has shaped how many LGBTI teachers navigate their identities in professional contexts. Even teachers who do not identify as LGBTI might worry about teaching inclusive content in their classrooms because of such discourses. Despite explicit legislated protections for LGBTI
students and teachers, as well as educational policies that are intended to create inclusive environments that are free from discrimination, heterosexist and transphobic discourses remain highly influential and impactful on LGTBI teachers in Alberta’s schools (Ferfolja, 2007).
Chapter Seven: Towards a Queer/ing Teacher Professionalism

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex teachers face exceptional constraints around identity and expression in response to the discourses of teacher professionalism that are reinforced through institutional texts, legislation, and media discourses. Such discourses position gender and sexual diversity as inappropriate in the classroom, particularly when shared with students, and suggests that queerness poses a threat not only to the “innocence” of the child, but to the family unit as well (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; Russell, 2010; Smith, 2015). Although these discourses are largely influenced by religiously conservative values in the context of Alberta, such values continue to persist, even gaining traction within the domain of public schools. Constructs of “parental rights” within the province of Alberta pose a particular challenge to publicly funded educational institutions that are secular in nature. Despite many “parental rights” activists arguing that gender and sexual diversity are an affront to individual freedoms and a “free society” at large, such arguments remain closely tied to religious values, including the belief that heteronormative procreation grants particular God-given rights to parents concerning their role in public institutions, like the education system. The expressions of teacher professionalism that are most valued within educational institutions are those that project gender obedience and heteronormativity, reifying the construct of the traditional family comprised of heterosexual parents (Halberstam, 2011) by way of teachers acting in loco parentis (Khayatt, 1990).

Through various institutional levels, from local schools to government ministries, teachers are made to believe that their role precludes them from being able to have a gendered and desiring self, or at least sharing that gendered and desiring self if it is not gender conforming and heterosexual. Not only do these standards condone and normalize homophobic and
transphobic violence within the work environment, but they have a considerable impact on the mental health and well-being of LGBTI teachers, even those who work in more “inclusive” school environments (Giuffre et al., 2008). The continued policing of curricular content around LGBTI identities, whether through “controversial issues” policies or legislation that allows parents to opt their children out of aspects of health instruction that include sexuality, suggests that concepts concerning gender and sexual diversity must be treated separately and with more scrutiny than any other curricular content. Even when Alberta’s brand of religious conservatism has a longstanding opposition to environmentalism and Indigenous rights education as other “threats” to the family, such topics experience far less policing and government intervention than gender and sexual identities (Filax, 2006, p. 109). With the “closet” as an imperative of teacher professionalism in Alberta, queer and trans teachers have to navigate additional barriers to developing rapport and building relationships with students, colleagues, and community members when they are made to feel as though foundational aspects of their identities are “off-limits” and require self-restraint (Ferfolja, 2009).

In this chapter, I revisit the key themes that emerged from this study, tracing not only how they show up at the level of lived experiences within the school environment, but how they are shaped by policies at the local and provincial levels, along with public discourses. With these themes under consideration, I then propose opportunities and potentialities for a queer/ing teacher professionalism in Alberta. Although a queering of teacher professionalism requires continued consideration in future studies, this chapter serves as a starting point for redefining teacher professionalism outside of the heteronorm.
Discussion

Heteroprofessionalism is used by Mizzi (2013, 2016) to describe the ways in which heterosexuality is a compulsory aspect of teacher professionalism. Often, professional conduct is framed around what is appropriate or inappropriate because children and youth are the primary audience within the school environment. Concerns about maintaining “childhood innocence” remain pervasive, motivating parents and policymakers to intervene in learning environments to censor a whole host of topics and subject matter, even when it may be otherwise deemed as age appropriate by experts. Because heteronormativity is embedded in society writ large, it is not shocking that the same gender and sexual norms that operate in our day-to-day lives are deeply entrenched and reinforced within schools. What is surprising, however, is that while some progress is being made to improve supports within schools so that they are more inclusive for LGBTI children and youth, the impacts of these changes are not felt amongst queer and trans teaching staff. This is particularly true in Alberta, where new legislation and Ministerial resources have been developed since 2016 to ensure the development of safe, caring, and welcoming school environments for gender and sexually diverse students.

Through a review of literature and autoethnographic analysis of my own experiences, this study details a number of experiences that are likely common amongst LGBTI teachers in Alberta’s schools. One of these is that educators are faced with ongoing short-term and longer-term decision-making around coming out as queer in the school environment and to whom. They may come out in some environments and not others, to some colleagues and not others, or may find it easier to conceal their identities altogether. It might feel safe to come out in one school or district, but not others, depending on the extent to which provincial policies and protections are enacted at local levels. Having been employed in a number of different schools and school
divisions, I worked in diverse environments and my decisions around coming out differed drastically over time and based on place and context. Even when I was “out” in one environment for a long period of time, I would find myself still having to come out and share my identity to new colleagues again and again. When people presumed that I was straight and cisgender, I would clarify that that was not the case, thereby feeling compelled to share my identity to avoid erasure, instead of feeling compelled to maintain secrecy so that I would not experience homophobia or transphobia. So, whereas some scholarship on the experiences of queer teachers ask whether teachers should come out or not (Connell, 2015), I would instead suggest that the implications are of having to make repeated daily decisions around “coming out” or “staying in” over the course of one’s teaching career requires further consideration.

A second common experience drawn from this research is the impact of notions of parental rights in Alberta alongside constructions of childhood innocence. Whether through policies, discourse, parental concerns, or ministerial documents, language such as “sensitivities,” “age-appropriate,” and “controversial issues” can trigger anxiety and concern from teachers who are looking for ways to teach about gender and sexual diversity or create safer spaces for their LGBTI students. Religious and social conservatism have a long history within the province and have normalized anti-LGBTI sentiments within provincial politics and institutions (Filax, 2006). Parental rights continue to be enmeshed in educational legislation, requiring parental notification and the right to opt out of subject matter directly concerning religion or human sexuality. When this legislation was first established, it was enshrined in the Alberta Human Rights Act (2000), suggesting that not providing parental notification for such content would be a violation of human rights. Although these clauses were eventually moved under the umbrella of the School Act, the fears around such extreme responses to content that may address human sexuality has
created a culture of fear amongst teachers, particularly those who are LGBTI. As a result, terms like “sensitivities” and “controversial issues” are interpreted by teachers through the lens of fear, forcing them to approach such topic matters with extreme caution, or not approach them at all. Furthermore, if the implication is that human sexuality requires parental oversight, then LGBTI teachers are made to feel as though they simply cannot share information about their identities, for fear that it might enter the territory of the “inappropriate” or “controversial.”

Another common theme concerns the number of myths that continue to pervade public discourses around gender and sexual diversity in the province and re-emerge in debates regarding changes—potential or actual—to legislation or educational policies. This is particularly true when such changes are perceived to encroach on “parental rights” as they are constructed in the Albertan context. Often times, these myths frame queer people as predators (King, 2004), call on tropes about queer and trans identities as contagions that may be spread through knowledge of or interactions with queer folks or “ideological” clubs, and frame queer identities as political “ideologies” that are not “real.” Long-standing narratives of an overreaching “state” generate false controversies about legislative measures that are intended to protect marginalized youth but, are read as intrusions on “the family” (which is defined as a “traditional,” family with heterosexual parents). Over time, these narratives have evolved from explicit homophobic and transphobic sentiments to now take shape as advocacy for the “protection” of family and “free” society. Although these sentiments seem to arise more frequently in rural contexts, they exist in the urban centres as well, including Edmonton and Calgary, which suggests that LGBTI teachers are exposed to these harmful sentiments regardless of their location in the province (Banack, 2015; Filax, 2006).
In spite of the challenges faced by LGBTI teachers navigating hetero- and cisprofessionalism, there are elements of hope for greater institutional advocacy, particularly from The Alberta Teachers’ Association. The Association has a number of long-standing policies that affirm the existence of queer and trans teachers and advocate for their protection and inclusion within school contexts. Furthermore, the ATA has released a number of resources directed towards LGBTI teachers, offering information and direct support for gender and sexual diversity within the teaching profession. Though imperfect in their approach, these institutional texts offer signs of affirmation for gender and sexually diverse teachers in the province amongst a landscape of policies and discourses that do the opposite. Continued advocacy and action are required to improve the experiences of LGBTI teachers in the province of Alberta, particularly to ensure that legislation and educational policies are enacted to protect teachers at local levels. And while teacher professionalism continues to be constructed around normative gender and sexuality in the province through institutional texts and discourses, an increasing number of queer spaces (GSAs/QSAs) in schools has opened up opportunities to begin to explore a queering of teacher professionalism.

**Futurities for Queer Teacher Professionalism**

Queer theories resist definition and fixedness, dismantling the assumption that there is one universal way of *being* queer. Therefore, imagining the futurities (Muñoz, 2009) of queer professionalism is an exercise of liberation or dissent (Carnes, 2019), rather than restriction, so as to avoid the replacement of heteroprofessionalism with a different narrowly defined or singular manner of queer professionalism (like Duggan’s conceptualization of “homonormativity,” as cited in Lenon and Dryden, 2015). Because gender and sexual norms already compel particular actions and performances, queer professionalism should do the
opposite, carving out agency amongst queer and trans teachers to determine for themselves what it means to take up and take on a queering of professionalism. As such, what follows is by no means a mandate or prescription for queer-ing professionalism, but rather an invitation to consider and create opportunities to disrupt cisgender and heteroprofessionalism in the teaching profession.

Queer Kinship

Queer and transgender teachers often face pressures to come out to students, to serve as a “role model” or example for queer youth (Ferfolja, 2009; Russell, 2014). Khayatt (1997) problematizes the notion that LGBTI teachers should out themselves for the purpose of role modelling, suggesting that “one cannot decide to be a role model for anyone” (p. 137) because students’ self-conceptualization is not directly tied to the identity—shared or otherwise—of their teachers. In this, Khayatt asks “what kind of theory of learning makes the body of the teacher so central to [their] pedagogy?” (1997, p. 136). Despite these contentions about the construct of the queer role model, there persists a recognition that exploring shared queer and trans identities amongst teachers and students can open up possibilities to redefining relationships and community. Because much of queer and LGBTI history has been rooted in dispersal and isolation (Filax, 2006, p. xvi), a reclamation of queer community offers an alternative to the “role model” construct. It also resists the notion that knowledge transmission and relationship-building are developed unidirectionally (e.g. from teacher to student only), suggesting more accurately that such processes are reciprocal. Through Bhattacharyya’s interpretation of community as solidarity (as cited in Carnes, 2019) by way of “shared identity and a code for conduct,” (p. 121) queer community is then possible amongst LGBTI teachers and students (Munt, 1997). As such,
the notion of queer community-building serves as a key facet and process of queer/ing teacher professionalism.

A queer/ing professionalism examines opportunities for intergenerational community-building and mentorship that are not constrained by hierarchical roles, like teacher-student, nor mandates around “role-modelling” and the transmission of “acceptable” queerness. One example of this that comes to mind stems from my own experiences volunteering at a summer camp for LGBTI youth. Part of the camp’s programming involved a queer history activity, which included a visit from older members of the LGBTI community dubbed “rainbow elders,” who came to camp to spend time with the youth and talk about their experiences. I recall watching groups of youth sit in a circle with the rainbow elders talking, teaching one another, sharing knowledge and experiences, and I recognized an uncanny familiarity with one another embedded in their interactions. Outside the constraints defined by institutions, this circle was one of mutual sharing, learning, and connection. Both the youth and the rainbow elders left that circle having experienced a pure and genuine connection, reciprocity of learning, and inter-generational validation that was transformative. I recall reflecting on how those interactions were different from any others that I had seen. As a witness to these experiences, I have been able to think differently about what the possibilities are for reframing inter-generational relationships and community amongst queers.

It is unfortunately common for many queer and transgender individuals to encounter some form of family rejection—whether temporary, ongoing, subdued, or extreme—when they come out, or as they navigate their shifting and changing gendered and desiring selves. As a result, some queer folks miss out on the transmission of generational learning amongst family. The sharing of queer and trans identities and the recognition of being validated by other
members of the LGBTI community, especially across generations, is transformative and can often combat the harmful experiences of family rejection. Recognition and validation of queerness opens up opportunities for intimate knowledge of one another, particularly for those individuals who are unable to share their queer identities in other aspects of their lives. And so, a queer/ing teacher professionalism trades the construct of “role modelling” for a radical kind of queer kinship that exists outside of heterosexual constructions of family and institutional constructions of hierarchical teacher-student relationships (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019).

Ultimately, this frame of kinship revolves around building relationships that are not mandated—like how family relationships are couched in obligation by way of reproductive and biological ties, and how professional relationships revolve around the legislated fiduciary responsibilities of teachers for their students.

Notions of this kind of non-familial kinship are hardly new and have in fact existed within and amongst Indigenous communities across Turtle Island from time immemorial. When I worked in an Indigenous community, I was gifted with knowledge by students, community members, colleagues, and knowledge keepers. One particular teaching was about the value of wahkohtowin, which is a Plains Cree word for kinship and was included within the school’s daily morning prayer. The way that it was explained to me was that wahkohtowin is a kind of kinship that transcends the binds of blood relations and biological family. As such, kinship relationships are more about a shared humanity and the value of seeing the humanity in one another, than viewing family through biological ties, as it is defined through colonialism, capitalism, and religious conservativism. And so, to conceptualize a queer kinship is not possible without recognizing that the roots of such notions come from Indigenous knowledges and communities and have survived through colonial violence, both past and present. Therefore, a radical queering
of community-building through the approach of kinship must be anti-colonial and take on a
decolonizing agenda.

*Performing as Queer*

Given that heteroprofessionalism and cisprofessionalism mandate particular gendered performances, it seems appropriate that a queer and queering professionalism would *not*. Without stopping there, it would seem that a queer/ing professionalism would be invested in embracing the non-normative, working to destabilize the construct of the white cisgender and heterosexual teacher who is both docile and compliant. Such actions and choices would not serve as queering performance alone but, would offer opportunities to learn about the impacts of such norms and how they constrain and control those who are socialized to adhere to them. Without falling into the trap of “role modelling,” this could instead serve as a way to construct queer professionalism and the teacher-as-professional around the practices of intervention and interrogation. Not only does this reframe teacher professionalism so that it is no longer defined from the top-down, but it also invites anti-oppressive practice into the teaching and learning equation, giving precedence to *unlearning*. Performing queerness would not be a matter of shifting gender expressions alone (although it very well could and should be) but, would include a vast number of non-normative practices outside of gender and sexual diversity. Masculine teachers intentionally engaging in nurturing behaviours would be one example of a transformative destabilization of such norms (Hedlin et al., 2019). Given the ways in which schools are rigidly constructed around normative gender and sexuality, there are vast opportunities to break down the norms by intentionally performing non-normativity and resistance to conformity in opposition to the confines of hetero- and cis- professionalism.
Queerness as an Asset

Despite being viewed as a threat or a liability in a lot of schools and school districts, queer and trans identities are inherently valuable, especially in the context of education. Queering teacher professionalism necessitates a reframing of the narratives that view LGBTI teachers as a detriment or inconvenience in the school environment. Whereas many efforts have fallen short by suggesting that queer and trans people are “just like us,” and “normal,” a queer/ing professionalism would not construct queerness antithetically as sameness but, would instead frame gender and sexual diversity as extraordinary. In this way, queer and trans teachers would not be made to feel as though their identities were inappropriate in schools, but that their identities are an asset to the profession and the education of students. LGBTI educators can bring a wealth of knowledge into classrooms by way of their own lived experiences. For instance, because of my childhood experiences feeling ridiculed and left out in gym class when we had to form lines of “boys” and “girls” in class, I have developed a whole host of different options for splitting students into groups in my classrooms in ways that do not value gender as a primary descriptor, nor humiliate students because they are made to feel like they do not belong. This suggests that the professional knowledge of queer and trans teachers is not just limited to content concerning gender and sexual diversity—which is often presumed—but rather that such knowledge is expansive and significantly under-explored.

Implications for Future Research

Given that this study is focussed through the lens of my own experiences as a queer and trans educator, future research will be necessary to capture the experiences of LGBTI teachers more broadly across the province, particularly concerning how they navigate their identities in response to norms of teacher professionalism. Furthermore, in an effort to conceptualize
possibilities for radical queer counter-professionalism(s), it would be necessary to explore the ways that LGBTI teachers already enact resistance to heteroprofessionalism in their practice. Such resistance likely looks different across rural and urban school divisions, suggesting that continued consideration of geographical contexts is necessary. Furthermore, given that this study was framed through the lens of my own whiteness, future studies will need to consider in greater depth the role that whiteness plays as a protective factor against some forms for homophobic and transphobic violence. Lastly, consideration should be given to the formation of professional organizations that explicitly work to support LGBTI teachers. Although there are few, if any, such organizations across Canada (outside of GSAs and QSA.s that are specific to teachers), there are a number of organizations that have historically existed in the US and around the world that are organized around the advocacy and advancement of LGBTI teachers. Examples of such organizations include the Lesbian and Gay Teachers Association of New York City (no longer in existence) and the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation’s LGBT+ Teachers’ Group. The role that such organizations play in confronting heteroprofessionalism requires further consideration, particularly in terms of what such organizing efforts might look like in the Alberta context. Given the power and reputation of The Alberta Teachers’ Association across Canada and even globally, one wonders whether such organizing power could be harnessed by LGBTI teachers within the province to more formally align against the ongoing efforts to maintain teacher heteroprofessionalism in Alberta’s schools.
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