DISRUPTING HETERONORMATIVITY THROUGH LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE THEMES: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THREE TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES WITH INTEGRATING IDENTITY IN THE HSS CURRICULUM

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This dissertation is dedicated to all students

who hold an identity which lives at the margins,

and to all of the teachers who have worked

to make them feel as if they belonged in the center with everyone else.
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Abstract

This qualitative study sought to understand how three teachers’ stories reflected the degree to which they gave voice or contributed to the silence around LGBTQ-inclusive themes in history and social science (HSS) curricula, and how their professional preparedness undergirded these decisions. Three cisgender female participants were interviewed three times over the course of eight weeks. The study employed Queer Theory to understand how queering teachers’ narratives revealed the ways in which participants disrupted heteronormative discourse through the curriculum. Bowen and Blackmon’s (2003) Vertical Spiral of Silence Theory was applied to participants’ deconstructed narratives to determine the degree to which their gender and sexual identities in relation to public opinion in their respective school contexts repressed each participants’ contributions to organizational voice. Field texts were transcribed using Rev.com and analyzed using MAXQDA 8.0 software. An inductive, cross-case analysis of the data revealed four major themes from 483 coded segments. This study concludes with a discussion of four key findings: disruption of heteronormativity begins with awareness of self-identities; recognizing students’ identities gives rise to ethical dilemmas in practice; disrupting heteronormativity starts with the informal curriculum; teachers need explicit support from policy and administrators. Future implications for practice and research involve longer-term studies of educators of varying intersecting identities engaging in the study and implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogies in HSS classroom settings.

Keywords: heteronormativity, LGBTQ, history and social studies, curriculum, queer theory, spiral of silence theory, narrative inquiry, MAXQDA
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Statement of the Problem

In 2016, California’s Department of Education adopted the first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning (LGBTQ)-inclusive curricular frameworks for kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) history and social sciences (HSS) classes in public schools (California Department of Education, 2016). This action resulted from the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act of 2012, which legally requires public schools to use curriculum materials that represent individuals with disabilities and LGBTQ identities within the K-12 HSS curriculum. This was the first mandated curricular policy that sought to overcome the absence of LGBTQ-inclusive content through the omission or evasion of these topics at the local level, which is yet to be proved as a positive turning point toward this cultural group within the traditionally oppressive and institutionalized nature of public education (Demir & Yurdakul, 2015; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011). In January 2019, New Jersey became the second state to pass legislation S1569 that requires LGBTQ-inclusive curricular materials at the middle and secondary levels (New Jersey Legislature, 2019). Unlike California, New Jersey is not requiring LGBTQ inclusive materials at the elementary level. Though these curricular policies served to explicitly include LGBTQ identities, it is necessary to question whether policy-makers have considered the local teachers’ preparedness to broach these topics with students in a way that would positively contribute to the viewpoints of LGBTQ identities and collective histories in society.

In a recent publication, Hawkins (2017) suggested lack of LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources has hindered local curricular reform efforts in California. He concluded that though California “assures the contributions of LGBT[Q] people…even their social studies teachers still
have problems integrating LGBTQ issues” (Hawkins, 2017, p. 161). Making inclusive text resources available to teachers is only the first of many problems of practice for teachers across the nation. At the core of the education profession, teachers are responsible for creating a classroom environment that fosters a sense of belonging for all identities and allows for all voices to be heard (Franklin, 2014). To do this, teachers must act as educational leaders who use dialogue as a catalyst for social change among differing perspectives, worldviews, and identities (Shields, 2004). The difficult nature of social justice work for teachers in public education when seeking to create an open, accepting classroom environment relates to the various ethical dilemmas, or “inner conversation[s] with the self-concerning two or more courses of action” (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011, p. 648). Many times, such dilemmas-in-practice are surfaced when addressing LGBTQ topics that include discussions of gender and sexual identities that are outside of heteronormative constructs and may conflict with teachers’ personal views or belief systems. Because education is a field where “clear-cut guidelines to inform decision making are absent” (Barrett, Casey, Visser, & Headley, 2012, p. 891), many times teachers will choose to stay silent, or voice their own views which may, or may not, accurately portray LGBTQ identities.

Ultimately, public education is a state matter, and schools must adhere to state policies. State Constitutions “guarantee some basic level of educational opportunity for students, though the language employed in these state constitutional educational clauses varies greatly” (Lee, 2014, p. 279). Ideologies and values vary between states, thus each state approaches LGBTQ-inclusive education very differently. Today, many states still do not have safe school laws that include LGBTQ students or have nondiscrimination policies that include sexual orientation. As of 2017, Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas still
enforce “No Promotion of Homosexuality” or no promo homo laws that restrict educators’
ability to participate in any discourse surrounding LGBTQ issues in schools (GLSEN, n.d.).
Discourse encompasses language where it is enacted as “a social practice” beyond speech or text
that serves to shape, and is shaped by, social structures (Barrett & Bound, 2015). State-level
policies like the no promo homo laws restrict LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. These policies
reflect anti-LGBTQ ideologies and continue to shape public discourse on issues of LGBTQ
inclusion. Moreover, education policies in the remaining 47 states that do not explicitly restrict
LGBTQ-inclusive discourse in schools are complicit contributors to the exclusion of LGBTQ
identities in the curriculum. With or without LGBTQ-inclusive policies and text resources, are
elementary HSS teachers truly prepared to disrupt heteronormative discourses through the
inclusion of LGBTQ identities and histories for all students’ benefit when faced with such
conflicting cultural messages? This question frames the problem that this research study sought
to explore.

Research Problem

Bishop and Atlas (2015) explained that “schools tend to respond to the political
influences of the group in power…Thus, it appears that decisions regarding curricula are often
based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual” (p. 769). These heterosexual and
conservative “knowledge constructs and value structures are embedded within the curricula,
policies, and practices of many [early childhood education] programs and elementary schools”
(Duke & McCarthy, 2009, p. 399). The intersection of these social and political constructs has
resulted in a workforce of teachers who, in many cases, “do not recognize homophobia,
heterosexism, and sexism as interconnected forms of social oppression” (Duke & McCarthy,
2009, p. 398). Therefore, the problem is that teachers are not adequately prepared to address
LGBTQ-inclusive curricula from outside of a heteronormative perspective, which “assumes heterosexuality as the normal and all assuming sexuality” (van Leent & Ryan, 2016, p. 713), ultimately marginalizing individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. Further complicating this problem, teachers’ own ideologies and belief systems may conflict with local curriculum, practices, and policies, hindering attempts to address LGBTQ topics in elementary HSS education (Flores, 2012; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Kintner-Duffey, Vardell, Lower, & Cassidy, 2012).

**LGBTQ vs. Queer**

This research study will focus on a specific population as it exists within U.S. society. Individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ) are culturally grouped together. It is important to recognize that each subgroup within the LGBTQ population has specific identity markers that differ from one another. More specifically, gender and sexual orientation intersect differently for LGBT or Q people. Transgender-specific issues should not be marginalized nor overlooked when teaching LGBTQ issues in the elementary classroom setting (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013), as they are not necessarily the same as LGB issues. Many individuals whose sexual orientation identity is lesbian, gay, or bisexual are cisgender, which refers to the alignment between a person’s gender assignment at birth and one’s gender identity (Human Rights Campaign, 2016). Cisgender is a privileged identity in Western society in comparison to transgender individuals who were not assigned at birth the gender through which they identify, thus creating an important distinction in experiences of transgender individuals in terms of gender privilege from most LGB individuals in Western society.
It is important to further clarify that the focus of this research study on the LGBTQ population included intersecting identities that go beyond gender and sexual orientation and should not be misinterpreted as an attempt to group this population collectively under the term “queer.” Schmidt (2010) explained in reference to Sumara and Davis (1999) that “[q]ueer’ is not meant as a signifier that represents gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered identities…Queer, as a theory, interrogates how performances of sexuality are normalized” (p. 317). The term *queer* in this study is used to represent individuals who self-identify as queer, and not LGB or T. It is both an identity marker and the theory that will be employed to understand the intersections of gender and sexual orientation. Thus, this research will seek to understand how teachers and the curriculum they enact address issues related to LGBTQ people, while not marginalizing the complexity of individuals’ intersecting identities.

The purpose of this research was to understand how elementary HSS teachers describe their awareness of their contributions to heteronormative discourse, which may reveal their level of preparedness to disrupt heteronormativity through LGBTQ-inclusive themes within their local curricula. Through this research project, three K-8 teachers who integrate history and social studies themes in their respective instructional roles, were invited to share their experiences with LGBTQ-inclusive themes in the form of narratives. The narrative process *is* the phenomenon being studied (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). The exploration of teachers’ stories may reveal the complexities of how teachers understand themselves, their practice, and their environment at a given time, and the transformative potential toward more LGBTQ-inclusive practices.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

LGBTQ-inclusive curricular frameworks are an area of educational policy in the United States that have only recently emerged. Implementation of curricular policy at the local level
must be carefully planned and executed because “a disregard for potential implementation
difficulties can reduce the likelihood of achieving positive results” (Baumer & Van Horn, 2014, p. 148). Positive results, yet to be measured through research, could reveal LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum as a causal link toward an increasingly positive school culture for and toward LGBTQ individuals. The 2016 Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators’ Network (GLSEN) report *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate Revisited* found through a survey of 1,105 secondary teachers in the U.S. that LGBTQ-inclusive lessons were most prevalent in English Language Arts (ELA) and HSS content areas (Greytak, Kosciw, Villenas, & Giga, 2016). These findings further support HSS as a primary content area through which to study LGBTQ-inclusive curricula. Furthermore, these findings reaffirm the paucity of LGBTQ-inclusive research of teachers and students in elementary settings, supporting the rationale for the participants in this study.

Socially-progressive shifts in states’ curricular frameworks require more accurate representations of LGBTQ individuals’ lived experiences throughout U.S. history within HSS courses. Though LGBTQ-inclusive themes are addressed more frequently in secondary classrooms, LGBTQ-inclusive themes are particularly relevant, yet predominantly absent, in early childhood and elementary education. Flores’ (2014) research on elementary teachers who worked cooperatively with parents and caregivers through LGBT-inclusive lessons, explains that young children are “cognitively and psychologically capable of grasping and comprehending injustices, unfair treatment, family diversity, and pluralism” (p. 117). These topics, among others, are the broader goals of social studies education at the elementary level (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994), though there is a common assumption in our society that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum involves teaching about sex, promotes homosexual lifestyles, or that it
would not relate to anyone in the class (Flores, 2014; Kintner-Duffey, et al., 2012). Such assumptions reflect heteronormative discourse that shape curricular policies and practices, which collectively contribute to the perpetuation of silence around LGBTQ-inclusive curricula in early childhood and elementary education.

Most teachers in the U.S. have historically lived and worked within a heteronormative society that has silenced, omitted, and evaded LGBTQ topics and individuals within the classroom. As a result, elementary settings have been found to reinforce heteronormative discourse as privileged through values represented in textbooks, and by teachers’ and students’ daily interactions (Renold, 2000; Ryan, 2016). Duke and McCarthy (2009) go further to suggest that such heteronormative learning environments actually damage children because interrelated forms of oppression such as homophobia, heterosexism, and sexism are “reinforced and reproduced” in early childhood education (p. 386). This problem raises questions about how HSS teachers can appropriately address LGBTQ-inclusive curricula within their classroom if unprepared to recognize a personal contribution to these same heteronormative discourses. Thus, it is important for teachers to recognize their own identities and consider the ways in which they contribute to heteronormativity, before seeking to disrupt it in practice.

Mayo Jr. (2016) commented on a prevalent theme that emerged from seven research articles on sex, gender, and sexuality in schools about the “degree to which well-meaning educators [of all grade levels] are simultaneously creators of change and complicit actors in sustaining discourses and power dynamics that run counter to their efforts to effect change” (p. 105). This places an onus on teachers to recognize how they contribute to power structures and oppressive discourses. Moreover, teachers must also understand how to facilitate change in their classrooms without enough text resources free of bias, relevant professional development or
preparation, or support from the wider school community related to LGBTQ-inclusive topics (Greytak, et. al, 2016). It is reasonable to conclude that without the proper training or experience that “many ethical dilemmas [will] stem from lack of confidence in educational abilities and a sense of failure to act properly” (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011, p. 654). Bullough Jr. (2011) summated his analysis of multiple authors’ research on ethics in education that to teach “is to be embedded in a world of uncertainty and of hard choices, where what a teacher does and how he or she thinks is morally laden” (p. 27). Teachers must critically reflect on their own assumptions and belief systems to understand how such ethical decisions are made in local practices (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). The homophobic climate in early childhood education, exacerbated by [teachers’] unexplored assumptions of LGBTQ families has not yet created “an ethical imperative to prepare teachers to be accepting of all families and children” (Kintner-Duffey, et al., 2012, p. 212). In this way, ethics may play a role in teachers’ internal negotiations whether or not to explicitly address LGBTQ issues in the curriculum. Moreover, it is essential for teachers to explore and understand their own belief systems and positionality to overcome such pervasive social and cultural assumptions of LGBTQ topics in early childhood and elementary education toward more ethical and equitable practices. This is especially true for educator preparation program curricula that do not support the awareness and development of such practices in pre-service candidates. Therefore, more research is needed to understand how elementary HSS teachers explore their own belief systems and assumptions surrounding LGBTQ-inclusive curricula and their preparedness to disrupt heteronormative discourses.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

LGBTQ-inclusive curricula continue to be approached sporadically across regions of the U.S. (Barrett & Bound, 2015; Greytak, et. al, 2016; Patterson, 2013). These findings further
support earlier research on LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum as “one of the most neglected areas in the literature” (Griffin and Ouellett, 2003, p. 112). Maguth and Taylor (2014) explained in their review of the literature on bringing LGBTQ topics into social studies curricula that “there has been a paucity of work done on this topic by practitioners and researchers in the field of social studies education…[though existing] research indicates that teachers are grossly unprepared to bring LGBTQ topics, events, and people into the social studies” (pp. 24-25). Furthermore, Greytak et. al’s (2016) report on secondary teachers’ and students’ perspectives on school climate “did not find inclusive curriculum to be related to improved climate for students in general or more positive student attitudes toward LGBT[Q] people” (p. 95). These findings support Patterson’s (2013) research on Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in secondary settings that these extracurricular groups may contribute to improved climate for and toward LGBT students, but the “[i]ssue of cause and effect are…still unclear” (p. 194). Miller (2015) notes that though there are research studies to suggest climate toward LGBTQ students has improved historically, due to shifts in national and state policies and amendments advocating for LGBT[Q] rights, state anti-bullying laws, increased number of …GSAs, and a wider social acceptance of [lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans[gender]*, intersex, agender/asexual, gender creative, and questioning (LGBT*IAGCQ)] people, school still struggle to normalize the inclusion of LGBT*IAGCQ-positive curricula (p. 37).

Thus, teachers’ lack of preparedness to address LGBTQ-inclusivity in HSS content (Maguth & Taylor, 2014), sporadic attempts at curricular inclusion (Barrett & Bound, 2015; Greytak, et. al, 2016; Patterson, 2013), and the inconclusive results of GSAs as a cause for improved climate in schools (Greytak et al., 2016; Patterson, 2013) suggest that future research explore teachers as change agents of this work. Spillane (2006) defines leaders as “agents of change- persons whose acts affect other people more than other people’s acts affect them” (p. 10). Therefore, this narrative inquiry study sought to understand how teachers recognize their
preparedness as agents of change toward the disruption of heteronormative discourses through
the inclusion of LGBTQ-inclusive themes the elementary HSS curricula for the benefit of all
students who are affected by the explicit and implicit messages transmitted through practice.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Public education is an institution that relies on each state’s curricular frameworks through
which to design and implement local curricula in K-12 settings. Even though national curricular
reform has tended toward standardization of education since the turn of the 21st century, it
remains a decision of the individual state, not the federal government, as to what content areas
hold precedence (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This perpetuates the variances in state
laws and curricular policies that influence local curricula, which ultimately reflect our country’s
societal values as normalized. More specifically, dominant heteronormative ideologies continue
to influence the design of these curricular frameworks, which have historically omitted and
marginalized minority groups’ identities and experiences from textbooks (Apple, 1985) and
curricula altogether. Thus, privileged identities continue to dominate public education curricula
and the text resources through which to address historical content.

The hierarchical structure of education in the U.S. has resulted in variances in state laws
and curricular policies that both support and inhibit local educational practices. History and
social sciences (HSS), also referred to as “social studies,” is typically one of four primary
academic areas in elementary education alongside math, literacy, and science. The National
Curriculum Standards from the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) explains that,

> [t]he primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and
reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic
society in an interdependent world. (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994)
Though the social studies is meant to provide a civic education for all students in the public system, a 2007 report from the Center on Education Policy noted that 44% of 349 respondent U.S. school districts decreased instructional time for social studies, among other subjects, to devote more time for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics instruction (McMurrer, 2007). Moreover, this study found that that since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, there was a 32% decrease in instructional time for subjects outside of math and ELA. It is reasonable to suggest that since the report was published in 2007, there is a continued deemphasis on social studies content as standardized testing in ELA and math is still a national norm in public education.

The structure of state-level curricular policies provides a choice for stakeholders in local districts to decide what content is used to meet academic standards. Curricular frameworks are shaped by majority opinions, which are influenced by dominant ideologies reflected through public discourse. Historically, due to its minority position, LGBTQ identities and experiences have been omitted from textbooks and curricula altogether (Apple, 1985; Maguth & Taylor, 2015; Patterson, 2013; Smolkin & Young, 2011). The significance of the FAIR Education Act in California is evident through the addition of LGBTQ-inclusive HSS content in published textbooks, which signals a shift in publisher’s efforts to meet the needs of the nation’s largest consumers of textbooks (Steinmetz, 2017). This shift, however, raises the question as to whether including LGBTQ identities in HSS texts was an effort on behalf of the publishing companies to reflect a truly progressive society, or to seek profits in selling textbooks to California schools, which by the year 2020 are estimated to have the largest student population in the U.S. with 6.5 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum through textbooks reflects minimal progress away from the privileged
identities and publishers’ capitalist ventures that continue to dominate public education curricula through the text resources to address academic content, which ultimately contribute to the silence around LGBTQ identities. Thus, it is essential to understand how teachers who employ these texts recognize the limitations of these resources, as well as the degree to which they contribute to the pervasive silence around LGBTQ identities.

The rationale for this research is to gain an understanding of how elementary HSS teachers’ narratives reflect their preparedness to disrupt heteronormative discourse, and whether or not their preparedness undergirds their decision to include, evade, or omit LGBTQ-inclusive themes within the curriculum. Because local stakeholders are given the space through which to decide topics that are included, or excluded, it is imperative to understand the nature of teachers’ experiences with LGBTQ-inclusive policies, curricular frameworks, and instructional materials and how they are agents of change in this work.

**Relating the Discussion to Audiences**

There are multiple audiences through which this research study is significant and seeks to relate. Policy makers at the state and federal levels have a responsibility to understand the impacts of inclusive, and exclusive policies which affect both those who implement the policy in practice, and those who are on the receiving end of said policy. In most cases, district leaders and school leaders are required to enact policies, including curriculum frameworks. As such, it is their responsibility to understand the implications for creating environments through which teachers can access the resources needed to implement them. Moreover, the teachers themselves must not rely on school leaders to interpret policy for them, but to stay informed themselves in order to more appropriately follow, and question, the intended outcomes of these policies to which they must adhere and enact.
**Significance to Policy Makers.** Policy makers in states without legislative guidance on LGBTQ curricular inclusion are urged to utilize cross-curricular content, age-appropriate sex education, and gender studies as a support for LGBTQ inclusion at the local level (Marston, 2015). Such progressive policy reform reflects the social landscape of the nation under President Obama’s Administration (2008-2016) and civil rights issues for all citizens. Considering the policy shifts that have occurred during the first years of President Trump’s Administration, not limited to rescinding the rights of transgender individuals in educational settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), it is important to note how these legislative changes influence the shift in public opinion toward LGBTQ-inclusivity in schools, their policies, and the broader curriculum. As public opinion continues to reflect anti-LGBTQ ideologies as expressed through the mass media, it is less likely that minority viewpoints will be reflected in public discourse or curricular policies (Scheufele, 2008). Specifically, in states with LGBTQ-inclusive curricular policies such as California, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, it will be imperative to understand how public discourse impacts the implementation of local policies and practice. Conclusions and implications drawn from this research could have a greater impact on future policy decisions in education reform aimed at LGBTQ-inclusivity at both state and national levels. Such explicit policies could positively contribute to public discourse, and act as leverage to influence state education agencies (SEAs) and educator preparation programs to more adequately prepare teachers to enact LGBTQ-inclusive practices at the local level.

**Significance to Schools.** In California, the adoption of LGBTQ-inclusive HSS frameworks was a progressive step toward the potential deconstruction of heteronormative curricular structures within K-12 public education. Patterson (2013) explained that the impact on students from the FAIR Education Act at the local level “is yet to be studied...[and] less is
known about the influence of curricular material” (p. 193). Though this justice-oriented policy anticipates a positive outcome for a marginalized group, “without attendant transformation of the social structures that legitimize oppression”, the outcomes remain unclear (Schmidt, Chang, Carolan-Silva, Lockhart, & Anagnostopoulos, 2012, p. 1176). This reveals a potential assumption that enacting such educational policy will lead to positive outcomes at the local level. Even though policies are designed to influence local practice, policy and practice related to LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum in the HSS classroom have yet to be linked as correlative or causal. This study will prove as significant because it is both relevant and necessary to understand how policies influence teachers’ implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive themes, as well as the potential to deconstruct or legitimize oppressive social structures (i.e. heteronormativity) within existing school cultures.

**Significance to Teachers.** This research will also add to the existing literature on teachers as change agents in local curricular reform. Individual teachers must undergo a paradigm shift toward creating a classroom environment that fosters (disruptive) dialogue around heteronormative gender structures through historical content that may not have been previously addressed, nor understood. About half of the teachers in America have not received information on LGBTQ-related issues in preservice training (Smolkin & Young, 2011). This reveals potential harm that could be done toward the public’s view of the LGBTQ community through a marginalized or stereotyped representation of a specific group of people (Epstein, 2012). Marston (2015) said that teachers should see this as “an opportunity to enrich their school community: challenging the restrictive effects of prejudice and discrimination for all and supporting their pupils to thrive” (p. 166). It is therefore essential to understand how teachers
can work toward, and be supported through, the development of classroom environments that embrace LGBTQ-inclusivity through practices that seek to disrupt heteronormative constructs.

Research Problem and Research Questions

A problem is reflected through the paucity of research on elementary HSS teachers’ experiences with LGBTQ-inclusive curricula. The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to understand how teachers’ stories reflected the degree to which they give voice or contribute to the silence around LGBTQ-inclusive topics in HSS curricula, and how their professional preparedness undergirds these decisions. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers’ stories reflect their preparedness to disrupt heteronormative constructs through the inclusion of LGBTQ themes in their local curriculum?
2. How do teachers navigate the decision to voice or silence LGBTQ-inclusive themes in the HSS curriculum?
3. How do teachers recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas surrounding LGBTQ-inclusive themes?

Positionality Statement

This research study is focused on understanding how teachers express their preparedness to disrupt heteronormativity through voicing or silencing LGBTQ-inclusive themes within the elementary HSS curriculum. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) suggest that the first part of data collection be the researcher’s narrative beginnings which explicate the researcher’s own “relationship to, and interest in, the inquiry” (p. 25). Narrative inquiry “characteristically begins with the researcher’s autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). A research puzzle goes beyond the formulation of a
research question at the beginning of a qualitative study and seeks to understand the complexity of an ever-changing phenomena that continues to “change as the research progresses” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 73). This positionality statement frames my narrative beginnings where I will elaborate on my prior experiences in education as they pertain to this research study’s focus. Then, to avoid influencing the outcomes of this research study, I will explore how the intersection of my gender, sexual orientation, race, and ideological views influence potential biases and assumptions within my research and practice.

**Personal and Professional Experiences**

My experience as an elementary educator in grades K-6 over the last decade continues to influence my research and practice as a state-level policy maker. Institutionalized oppression in the forms of homophobia and heterosexism within existing educational practices has influenced and caused harm to many LGBTQ individuals in our society, including myself, and those in my former school communities. My new role as a state-level policy maker continues to shift how I see the lack of LGBTQ-inclusive education on a larger scale, particularly in a politically-progressive state, where I see this work is not a priority at the state or local levels.

As an elementary classroom educator who was responsible for all core content areas (literacy, math, social studies, and science), I sought multicultural literature as a vehicle to teach children about social studies through literacy. In my earliest years of teaching, I found well-reputed children’s literature on LGBTQ-inclusive topics that sought to start a dialogue around gender norms, family, and acceptance. Though I identified as part of the LGBTQ community, I was still inexperienced in approaching these topics as a classroom teacher. I knew the way to address these socially-relevant issues was to align to the state’s curricular frameworks in literacy and HSS, which provided the most appropriate space for this work.
Because most schools require permission to use texts outside of the prescribed curriculum at the elementary level, I asked to use these age-appropriate texts within my classroom instruction. On multiple occasions, I was denied permission by administrators for fear of causing controversy with stakeholders in the community. My counterargument to administration included our ethical responsibility as teachers to address the lives of all students in our school, yet the inherent power structures within institutionalized educational settings continued to silence marginalized groups in these situations. The intersection of my personal identity, beliefs, and professional limitations led me to question how curricular policies influence local teaching practices related to LGBTQ-inclusive topics such as this, and the harm that can be done through enacting an exclusionary curriculum. Adversely, I also question how LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum could unintentionally be harmful if approached through a deficit lens by stakeholders or enacted through teachers who may not be fully prepared to represent these individuals accurately and equitably in relation to other identities in the local curricula. Most LGBTQ-themed children’s literature widely portrays stereotypes of gay, lesbian, and transgender identities, while largely excluding bisexual and queer identities. B. J. Epstein (2012), a leading researcher in LGBTQ-themed children’s literature, argued that teachers risk an inaccurate portrayal of LGBTQ identities through such children’s literature that presents queer characters through caricaturized physical identities, which could unintentionally isolate the students they are trying to reach. Thus, it goes beyond just having access to appropriate resources, but teachers also need the professional learning that will provide the skills to use them appropriately. My concern is that policies within our educational system, and those in positions of power, do not yet promote or support such requirements.
It is through my personal and professional experiences as a member of the LGBTQ community that I have found myself advocating for curricular reform as a means for more inclusive school settings for LGBTQ teachers, students, and those with LGBTQ family members. Thomas (2012) explained that experience is “personal, tacit knowledge built out of information…accumulated both deliberately and fortuitously…in the minds of those who are steeped in a problem [or] a practice” (p. 37). Such experiences in public education shape “classroom practices that may make it harder for queer teachers to be out” in addition to the larger prejudices in the community supported by administrators who fear “gay issues [that] appear to be flashpoints for controversy” (Mayo Jr., 2007, p. 81). As a gay educator who has lived through such oppressive and exclusionary practices within public institutions as a student and as a teacher, I see how my position in the educational system as a member of the LGBTQ community drives me to educate colleagues and students alike to reveal the cultural heteronormative structures that dominate our educational spaces, and its related effects on the broader curricular structure in K-12 schools. Lorde (1984) spoke to this by explaining that “it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes…Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world” (par. 2). I feel that it is my responsibility to speak up for those who have not had a voice because I have been afforded a position that can influence curricular policy change while supporting educators and students in the process. Though it is important to also recognize that it is not my responsibility alone to educate those who are in a position of privilege. It is through a collective effort that identity can be better understood toward a disruption of societal norms.
Gender

I understand gender as a spectrum which is broader and more inclusive of identities outside of the male/female binary that exists within our predominantly heterosexual society. Through this understanding, my identity as a cisgender male presents me in a position of privilege. Additionally, as a male in elementary education, I have always worked predominantly with, and for, female teachers and administrators. In the past decade, I have not worked with more than one other male teacher on my grade-level team. This has influenced my relationships with students, families, and teachers within the school because of the gender roles that exist within our society. For instance, it has been assumed by multiple female administrators that because I am male, I should have students with behavioral issues because I could inherently handle it better than female counterparts. This is not my personal belief, but I have experienced this on more than one occasion in my professional work because of gender norms in our society at-large. Such “[g]ender-appropriate behaviors are socially modeled, learned, and reinforced through society’s power and status structures” (Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, & Zivnuska, 2011, p. 634). It further perpetuates the defining attributes of male responsibility through school settings (Schmidt, 2010). This is a relatively minor example, but due to the paucity of male elementary educators in the professional field at-large, we do become more visible to the wider community due to our gender presentation. The same could be said for racial minority populations within communities that lack diversity. Such visual differences add pressure within social spaces for those who identify as “other” to conform to norms and the roles within them. In many cases these visual differences cannot be ignored, but undisclosed sexual orientation can remain hidden and repressed through silence. This further adds to the complexities of all LGBTQ identities.
within educational spaces as they are not always seen, and therefore, not addressed by members of the school community.

**Sexual Orientation**

I am a married, gay, cisgender male who seeks to better understand how teachers feel prepared to approach LGBTQ issues within HSS classroom instruction. I lived and worked in Massachusetts for fifteen years, which is considered a socially progressive and liberal state, and was the first to legalize same-sex marriage in 2004. This law gave citizens the right to marry whom they choose based on a broader representation of sexual orientations outside of the heteronormative male/female partnership. Even with this law discussed so publicly, schools have been slow to reflect these changes at the elementary level toward a broader representation of family structures away from heterosexual norms (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015). Now that I am recently married, I am “out” in my current workplace, though in previous teaching positions it was suggested that I do not disclose my orientation to my students, or my colleagues to not raise any concerns in the community. Leonardo (2003) explained how schools enact forms of discrimination not only toward women, but “people and perspectives seen as unmasculine, emotional, and relational [who] also suffer from patriarchy” (p. 31). This stems from a historical view of male elementary teachers as predatory toward children and elementary school as a socially unacceptable place for teachers to discuss sexual orientation (Harbeck, 1992). The latter of these assumptions reflects heterosexism in education where LGBTQ individuals and topics are viewed as the “other.” Therefore, it is integral to consider the teacher’s position and identity as it relates to the topics being addressed in HSS classrooms.

Additionally, the suggestion to include LGBTQ topics within the curriculum may intersect with teachers who may or may not openly identify as LGBTQ within the school
community and could result in resistance or discomfort with addressing LGBTQ content in HSS classrooms. Mayo Jr. (2007) explained that even educators who openly identify as gay to their colleagues have purposely avoided teaching gay-themed topics and “often expend a significant amount of energy hoping to be perceived as heterosexual by their students” (p. 448). This further complicates teachers’ positions related to their role as educators, based on an historically perpetuated fear of being homosexual in educational settings (Harbeck, 1992).

In my own experience as a gay elementary educator I feared the conversation arising through my classroom instruction because of the political ramifications with administration and the community who held conservative and Christian ideologies. Furthermore, Weems (1999) explains that “openly gay male elementary teachers are considered suspect on multiple counts. Discourses on sexuality preclude the possibility of viewing openly gay men as “good” elementary teachers” (p. 33). Ironically, I did not fear the conversation with my students as I have come to know students’ openness, willingness to accept others, and empathy at an early age. It was in having these conversations with adults that complexities arose through misunderstandings and unwillingness to engage in further discussion. Ultimately as a minority member of the school community in this manner, I was silenced. I saw that the same thing was happening to students who were identifying as LGBT and/or Q because of policies that lack inclusion, which further raised the need to explore this issue at the local level. Thus, I should consider how sexual orientation and position within the local community may influence the manner through which teachers choose to give voice to LGBTQ identities and histories within elementary HSS classroom instruction.
Race

I identify as white and have worked in schools with minimal racial diversity amongst staff and students. In short, I understand that I receive the cultural benefits of presenting and identifying as a white male, and therefore, seek to understand the ways in which my own race may inhibit, or support, LGBTQ-inclusive work in education. It is important to understand that the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation is complex, and therefore cannot be addressed through a one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach. Nor can I speak for all experiences coming from the perspective of a gay, white male. The lack of research on the intersection of race and class with sexuality has led to “a universalizing of white middle-class LGBT[Q] youth experience and identity and contributes to the invisibility of white privilege among white LGBT[Q] youth and allies” (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003, p. 111). Therefore, it will be important to understand the degree to which LGBTQ topics are taught through separate lenses or presented through the complexities in which they exist in society. It is also relevant to consider how race and ethnicity influence teachers’ beliefs toward LGBTQ topics in HSS curriculum and the degree to which diversity is represented through the lessons that are presented to their respective students.

Political and Religious Views

This study will focus on policy reform that is considered socially-progressive and liberal because it addresses a social justice issue within U.S. society. I am a socially liberal Democrat with agnostic religious views, placing me in stark contrast to ideologies that are conservative or Christian. Because I view political and educational reform through a progressive lens, LGBTQ-inclusive work aligns with my beliefs as an individual, and as a U.S. citizen. Though it is also just as important to recognize that conservative political views and ideologies may conflict with
such progressive policy reform and its place in the elementary classroom. Understanding how political and religious views may conflict with teaching LGBTQ topics in the HSS classroom will be an important consideration in this research study. Furthermore, examining the oral and written discourse surrounding LGBTQ topics in elementary school settings may also reveal the complexities of personal and political ideologies and the manner through which they are revealed.

Conclusion

I believe that teachers must embrace all identities within the classroom environment and should work to equally represent them within the HSS curriculum through a multicultural approach. I am also aware that this may not be the viewpoint of all teachers and should proceed with that in my mind as an observer and researcher. It will also be important to understand that I have primarily experienced education from the teacher’s perspective and not from an administrator’s point-of-view as it relates to local policy reform. This should not cloud my judgment when viewing the demands put on teachers by administrators to meet local policy requirements, though it suggests a future opportunity for inquiry related to this topic.

Though I consider one aspect of my whole identity as “other”, I recognize that much of my identity is considered privileged in our society. Lorde (1984) explained that when we identify one aspect of our identities that is different, “we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practising” (par. 7). In my research and practice related to LGBTQ-inclusive education, I clearly express that I am not speaking on behalf of all LGBTQ individuals, but from a perspective of experiencing homophobic and heterosexist oppression within our society as a student, a teacher, and as a citizen. It is through my current, yet evolving, position as a scholar-
practitioner that I wish to better understand how teachers of all intersecting identities can be better understood and supported to appropriately give voice to LGBTQ identities within the elementary HSS curriculum for all students’ benefit.

**Theoretical Framework**

The following section of this chapter will include a description and discussion of Queer and Spirals of Silence Theories which served as the theoretical lens for this narrative inquiry study. Queer Theory (QT) was employed as a deconstructive strategy through which to see how elementary HSS teachers’ narratives shaped, and were shaped by, heteronormative discourses. Finally, it was through a contemporary development of Neumann’s (1974) Spiral of Silence Theory that the contributions of the mass media were suggested as an impact on majority opinion, which further suggested that minority viewpoints, including LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, were silenced as a result of public and political discourse. It was through these intersecting theoretical concepts that teachers’ narratives could be understood toward understanding their preparedness to disrupt heteronormativity through the inclusion of LGBTQ identities and histories in the elementary HSS curriculum.

**Queer Theory**

This research study used the acronym “LGBTQ” which was intended to represent groups of individuals who identified within one or more social constructs related to gender identity (i.e. transgender and queer/questioning) and sexual orientation (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer/questioning). This collective acronym has evolved since its inception during the gay rights movement in the 1970s, and some organizations have moved toward an expanded, more inclusive acronym. For instance, in 2014 the National Organization for Women (NOW) adopted the acronym “LGBTQIA” which has been used among other organizations to include both those
who identify as *intersex* (gender) or *asexual* (sexual orientation) (Weinberg, 2014). Miller (2015) went further to suggest a “millennial” inclusive acronym “LGBT*IGCQM” which introduced *agender/asexual, gender creative, and questioning* (p. 37). Notably, Miller’s (2015) acronym left out “queer” which was used here to represent “continuum for (a)gendered and (a)sexuality expressions, as well as political consciousness that calls for any form of self-expression” (p. 38). Thus, it is only the term “queer” that can be used both as a singular identifier, and as an identity that represents identities across the LGBTQ spectrum.

Though such labels, or markers, represent individual aspects of one’s identity, the use of a singular identifier omits the complexities of intersecting cultural, racial, and ethnic identities. The term “queer” can be used as a broader identifier that typically does not have a consistent set of characteristics (Sullivan, 2003), but may be used to “identify with and celebrate people of all gender identities and all the ways people love each other” (Human Rights Campaign, 2017). Adversely, Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016) referred to Sumara and Davis (1999) in their queer-infused research on teaching sexual minorities in elementary curricula through which they argued that “queer” does not represent LGBT identities but is a social “marker” that represents the cultural capital gained through behaving within heterosexual identities (p. 809). Sullivan (2003) explained the shift in use of “queer” as an individual or collective identity, toward the action of “queering” heteronormative structures in our culture is reflected in Michel Foucault’s (1998) “move from human being to human doing” (p. 50). Through Foucault’s work, queering is a purposeful “doing” in the form of critical reinterpretation of literary texts or other media through the taken-for-granted heteronormative gender and sexuality structures present within them. Though *queer* was historically used as a (derogatory) term related to identity, it was re-
appropriated in the 1990s through the development of “Queer Theory”, a radical and critical theory based in poststructuralist philosophy (Goss & McInerney, 2016).

Structuralism “understands truth as something hidden behind or within appearances, while poststructuralism sees multiple truths that can be discerned through an open dialogue with others” (Goss & McInerney, 2016, p. 288). Queer Theory is based in poststructuralist philosophy which argues, most notably by Foucault, that “there are no objective and universal truths, but that particular forms of knowledge and the ways of being that they engender, become ‘naturalised’, in culturally and historically specific ways” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 39). In poststructuralist theory, there is no self that exists outside of culture, but rather through relations within systems of power (Sullivan, 2003). Queer Theory was employed as “a deconstructive strategy, [which] aims to denaturalise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 81) so that the researcher and the participants could understand themselves within systems of cultural power of which they cannot be extricated. It was through a queer theoretical lens that binaries, such as hetero/homosexuality or male/female, could be explored and deconstructed to better understand the assumptions that undergird the power dynamics within them.

Deconstruction goes beyond textual inaccuracies and critical thinking and is more concerned with “the taken-for-granted construction and dissemination of truth and what may be said to be un-thought or unspoken within a given truth claim” (Goss & McInerney, 2016, p. 290). It is the construction of and contribution to cultural discourses that shape identities within systems of power. Foucault noted that in knowing our true selves, “the self constitutes itself in discourse with the assistance of another’s presence and speech” (Miller, 2015, p. 38). Discourse is comprised of both knowledge and power in Foucauldian methods. The power within
discourse lies in its connection to law or policies that influence public perceptions and behaviors, while knowledge is recognized as authoritative through its “appeal to either social or natural scientific methods, or increasingly media and advertising representations” (Drazenovich, 2015, p. 17). Thus, in deconstructing discourses and their contribution to social and cultural power dynamics, we begin to understand ourselves and the relation to others.

**Applicability of the theory.** The employment of Queer Theory in “queering” HSS teachers’ narratives through a poststructuralist lens began to reveal how heteronormative discourses shaped their work, and an emergent understanding of themselves within cultural systems of power. Bickmore (1999) argued that gender identity and sexuality are “to some degree inescapable in literature and social studies lessons, because the characters in human dramas virtually all have gender identities and intimate relationships” (p. 19). Furthermore, “gender and sexual identities are complicated by politics, religion, and stereotypes” (Drazenovich, 2015, p. 9). Though ultimately, McGlashan & Fitzpatrick (2017) remind us in their ethnographic study of LGBTQ youth activism as a means of challenging sexual and gender norms that “[p]edagogical practices that ignore gender and sexuality serve to silence alternative identities” (p. 486). If, then, gender identity and sexuality are ever-present in the curriculum, did teachers recognize this complicit contribution to heteronormative discourses? Did teachers see their curricular materials or pedagogies as an opportunity to queer, or deconstruct the concept of heterosexual, as “normal” to broaden the curriculum and ultimately, our collective understanding of gender and sexuality? It was through queering teachers’ narratives that these concepts were deconstructed and better understood. Furthermore, it was important to consider what was said explicitly, and what was not said in the context of this research study, and how both shaped
discourse and contributed to the cultural silence around gender and sexualities in schools, particularly at the elementary level.

**Silence**

Cahill and Theilheimer (1999) referred to gay and lesbian topics in the early childhood classroom and noted that children “learn about gayness from what their teachers do and do not do, from both the knowledge and ignorance a teacher demonstrates...[and] What teachers do not provide and say also gives a powerful message to children” (p. 43). It is through giving voice, being silent, or silencing anything outside of heterosexuality which, though a queer theoretical construct, is “considered abnormal, dysfunctional, and...deviant” (Logan, Watson, Hood, & Lasswell, 2016, p. 382) that teachers either disrupt or contribute to heteronormative discourse.

In justifying silence as a complex phenomenon with ethical implications, Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) noted that in modern Western educational settings, silence is “a paramount factor in many communicative situations in a classroom” because teachers and students primarily interact through silence, seen through nonverbal cues (p. 200). Eric Rofes, a U.S.-based LGBT activist and scholar explained that

> our silence about sex and sexuality is itself a loud and clear message for children, ‘As teachers, we all teach a great deal about sex, whether we acknowledge it or not. What we say and what we do not say, what is voice and what is silenced create knowledges for our students with tremendous ramifications’. (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010, p. 1672)

Though it was important to note that teachers’ actions and words contribute to children’s understanding of gender and sexuality, it was even more important to consider *why* teachers choose not to discuss these issues explicitly. It was through teachers’ narratives that these choices could be analyzed through a critical lens.

In the hermeneutic tradition of German philosopher, Martin Heidegger’s work, Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) argued that silence is “a complex, positive phenomenon” and that “in
In order to be silent, one must have something to say” (p. 193). Through this lens, silence signals a choice on behalf of the speaker. In order to begin to understand how teachers can engage with this work to deconstruct heteronormativity in practice, it was necessary to determine the reasons behind a teacher’s decision to voice or silence gender and sexuality. Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) Spiral of Silence Theory (SST) shed light on some of the reasons why individual opinions on this issue may have been silenced within the collective organizational environment (i.e. the school) as a result of the mass media’s influence on public opinion. The Spiral of Silence theory is a macro-level social phenomenon that suggested a fear of isolation from the majority opinion may silence teachers’ attempts to raise the issues of gender and sexual identities through LGBTQ-inclusivity in the curriculum.

**Spiral of Silence Theory**

Noelle-Neumann’s work as a political scientist focused on a precise data analysis of the German federal election of 1972 through which the Spiral of Silence Theory (SST) was developed which is regarded as “one of the most important additions to the field of communication science over the past decades” (Petersen, 2012, p. 267). Noelle-Neumann’s theory was primarily developed from the field of public opinion, which evolved from Locke’s (1650) philosophical conceptualization of this social phenomenon entitled, “Law of Opinion and Reputation.” The second theoretical foundation of the SST was social-psychological, based in Rousseau’s (1750) definition of public opinion (as noted previously) as “pressure to conform” (Noelle-Neumann, 1977, pp. 143-144). The SST theory is a seminal work that has influenced the development of theoretical models and research in the fields of psychology, communication, business management, and public opinion.
Noelle-Neumann’s SST is based on the assumptions that individuals are constantly aware of people’s opinions around them, and that they will adjust behaviors and/or opinions to reflect the majority for fear of being isolated in the minority. The spiral of silence is a dynamic process that occurs over time (Scheufele, 2008). It is also “an inherently dualistic framework…tied to the moral conflict between good and evil, and right and wrong” (Bodor, 2012, p. 273). It is the individual’s perception of the majority opinion that is deemed as “good” or “right” that influences s/he in expressing his/her own opinion. As Festinger (1957) noted, when individuals are faced with dissonance, in this case between majority opinion and their own, they will choose to change their behavior and/or their opinion to resolve the dissonance, while also having to decide whether to speak out, or to be silent. Köylüoğlu, Bedük, Duman, and Büyükbayraktar (2015) concluded through Festinger’s (1957) cognitive contradiction theory that “people may abandon speaking out in order to avoid the tension that may follow voicing a matter”, which inherently resolves the cognitive contradiction that occurs between the individual and another’s belief, information, or attitude (p. 538).

Scheufele (2008) summarized that

\[\text{as people with minority viewpoints fall silent over time, perceptions of the majority opinion gaining ground increase. This creates a mutually reinforcing spiral where the reluctance of the minority group to speak out leads to perceptual biases in favor of the majority group, which…further discourages the minority group from speaking out. (p. 176)}\]

Thus, it is an individually motivated choice based on socially constructed perceptions whether or not to voice a minority opinion.
Contemporary Scholars. Researchers and theorists from multiple disciplines have employed Noelle-Neumann’s SST in conjunction with other frameworks to develop new models of silence theories in recent decades. It appeared through the literature that the most prominent and contemporary model that applied to this study was from Bowen and Blackmon (2003) who explain that Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) spiral of silence theory “emphasizes the horizontal pressures that the threat of isolation and corresponding fear of isolation exert to keep people from being open and honest about their opinions” (p. 1). They argued further that there is also a concurrent vertical spiral of silence that begins from “the inability to fully express one’s personal identity within the workgroup because of a negative climate of opinion towards a particular aspect of one’s identity” (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003, p. 1393).
This contemporary development of the spiral of silence theory incorporated other seminal works, such as economist Albert Hirschman’s (1970) conceptualization of organizational voice from his seminal work *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* which is “the voluntary expression of people’s views to influence organizational actions” (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003, p. 1394). In that, if teachers felt they could express their views related to their own identity at work, it could influence change within the organization as a whole, and/or the individuals of which is it comprised. Additionally, Bowen and Blackmon (2003) referenced another contemporary seminal work in psychology, communication, and business with Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) organizational silence which is a collective-level phenomenon that refers to minimally speaking or acting when an organization faces serious problems. Organizational silence and Spiral of Silence theories are influenced by social psychologist Leon Festinger’s (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, which can be caused by organizational silence at the individual level. Cognitive dissonance is “an aversive state that arises when there is a discrepancy between one’
beliefs and one’s behavior”, which is usually resolved by changing one or the other (Morrison & Milliken, 2000, p. 720). These theoretical concepts continue to influence new research for both the individual- and collective-level phenomena related to silence and voice in public spaces.

**Applicability of the theory.** Bodor (2012) explained that the spiral of silence is “contingent upon a number of factors, including the degree to which an issue is morally loaded, the shifting tone of the mass media coverage of the controversial issue in question, and a resulting shift in the opinion climate” (p. 271). This theory aligned to this study of the implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula at the elementary level at a time where mass media coverage has shifted with the more conservative macro-political ideology of President Trump’s Administration. Historically, topics related to gender and sexuality outside of the heteronormative construct have been excluded and evaded within the general elementary curricula because of its perceived social inappropriateness. Under the socially-progressive Obama Administration, mass media covered the legislative victories for LGBTQ rights in the United States to the point that it was increasingly addressed in public school settings. Noelle-Neumann’s theory suggests that “a spiral of silence only holds sway over a society for a limited period of time” (Bodor, 2012, p. 271). Thus, it was only a brief period during the second term of the Obama Administration (2012-2016) that media coverage began to spiral toward LGBTQ inclusivity in schools, as reflected by the FAIR Education Act of 2012 in California.

Since 2016, LGBTQ-inclusivity has reverted to being silenced in the mass media, due to ideological differences between the two presidents’ administrations. In August 2017, on behalf of President Trump, the U.S. Department of Defense issued a memorandum that required the discharge of all transgender members of the military beginning in March 2018 (Philipps, 2017). Kreitzer, Hamilton, and Tolbert’s (2014) quantitative study of the degree to which the mere
signaling of policy adoption for LGBTQ rights at the state level influences the public’s opinion on minority rights argue that “populations not specifically targeted by a policy may also change their opinion” (p. 806). Their research specifically studied the passage of same-sex marriage laws in Iowa showing that “public opinion in a state can change to positive ways…even when the decision is unpopular” (Kreitzer, Hamilton, & Tolbert, 2014, p. 806). Arguably, the application of these findings to the reverse may also be true, in that, passing a law that is unpopular, and discriminatory in nature, may result in an aggregate shift in public opinion toward this policy change. This argument further supported the timeliness of a study that applies this theoretical concept, rooted in the assumption that mass media coverage of legislative changes influences popular opinion at the state and local levels.

Overall, it appeared that Bowen and Blackmon’s (2003) vertical development of Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) horizontal Spiral of Silence Theory provided the closest alignment in studying the individual-level social phenomenon of silence. It also provided a lens through which to see how a teacher’s identity reflected the ways in which they give voice, or silence, aspects of gender and sexuality in the curriculum. The application of these theories framed the impact of an individual’s choice to express aspects of their own, or others’, identities in the workplace related to LGBTQ-inclusive curricula through the intersection of public opinion, mass media, and a fear of isolation. Here, the theory was applied to the individual-level impact of voice and silence on the collective social group within the local context. Furthermore, it was necessary to understand the role of the mass media and the concurrent events that may influence a study as the process is dynamic (Scheufele, 2008). These elements were independent variables and could not be controlled in a studied environment.
Morrison and Milliken (2000) offered their organizational silence model, though it is used at the collective level in relation to serious organizational problems. The lack of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula is not publicly perceived as a serious issue by the majority within schools (i.e. the organization) because it is a minority position, thus, the organizational silence model was not the most effective theoretical frame for this study. This study sought to understand the individual level of silence related to LGBTQ-inclusive curricula within a broader “climate of opinion” (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003, p. 1396). In support of the argument for the use of SST, Bodor (2012) concluded that this “unwieldy” theory has yet to be fully conceptualized or operationalized as a macroscopic theory, as it has been applied as a microscopic theory (p. 284).

**Conclusion**

In the Foucauldian spirit, queering teachers’ narratives sought to break “the production of secrecy and silence that surrounds sexuality” (Wells, 2017, p. 269) in elementary HSS curricula. The development of horizontal and vertical SSTs suggested the causes of silence in local practice, and to what degree these undergirded teachers’ decisions to engage in this work. Furthermore, it was important to understand how teachers’ stories reflected their own preparedness to disrupt heteronormative discourse through LGBTQ-inclusive curricula through the telling, and retelling, of their own stories. It was through inquiring about teachers’ stories as evidence of their own experiences in the field that praxis was reached for transformative change (Latta & Kim, 2009).
Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

Public education as an institution perpetuates heteronormativity through the various polices that inform local practices. Federal, state, and local policies that explicitly serve to address the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) individuals are inconsistent, and in some cases, nonexistent. Thus, heteronormativity and the ignorance of its privilege is sustained in schools “through the omission of LGBTQ concerns from the curriculum, cocurriculum, policy…and professional development” rendering these individuals isolated and invisible (Gorski, Davis, & Reiter, 2013, p. 227). This has resulted in lagging progress toward elementary curricular inclusion of LGBTQ-inclusive topics. The literature calls for elementary history and social science (HSS) teachers to include LGBTQ individuals, diverse family structures, societal contributions, and histories about the civil rights movements through HSS curricula because it is one of the most appropriate content areas through which to do so (Ashcraft, 2006; Brant & Tyson, 2016; Flores, 2012; Smolkin & Young, 2011).

This review of the literature will explore three strands to build an argument to support the purposes for this research study: first, the institutionalized nature of public education; second, the impact of federal, state, and local education policies on LGBTQ-inclusive curricula; and third, LGBTQ inclusion through multicultural resources and pedagogies. These strands support the need to study elementary HSS teachers as change agents in disrupting heteronormativity through the inclusion of LGBTQ-identities amid the complexities of federal, state, and local policies that inform both curricula and practices. The outcomes of this study will contribute to the corpus of research related to LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and pedagogy.
Institutionalized Nature of Public Education

Education is an institution that is socially and politically influenced within a “matrix of power, difference, and social justice” from which schools cannot be abstracted (Giroux, 1994, p. 36). Today, the educational system in the United States has undergone sweeping changes toward the adaptation of the Common Core to standardize K-12 grade-level outcomes, driven by assessment data to measure accountability and progress. As of 2017, forty-two states and Washington D.C. have adopted the Common Core academic standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). Private companies, such as Pearson©, have profited from the development of these educational standards and policies at the federal and state levels, therein providing power to private capitalist ventures within a public system (Stanley, 2009).

This shift in education in the past two decades toward data-driven student achievement has encouraged sociological studies on “the effects…of systematic attempts at policy initiatives at the federal, state, and local levels” (Apple, 1996, p. 127). Such research in the fields of sociology and education have inquired about what is taught in our schools, what is not, and who has the power to decide. Bruner (1996) explains that “[i]nstitutions do the culture’s serious business” (p. 30). As such, education has been one of the driving forces behind the cultural reproduction of what are considered “privileged” identities and statuses within the capitalist economy of the United States: “white, thin, [cisgender] male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” (Lorde, 1984, par. 7). Thus, cultural and social privileges are (re)produced through policy decisions made within the educational institutions that are ostensibly designed to dismantle them.

The standardization of education through curricular policy and mass-produced texts in recent decades (Apple, 1985) have contributed to the divide between the privileged classes, and
those who are considered as “other”. Giroux (1983) explained that “schools operate within limits set by society, but they function in part to influence and shape those limits” (p. 260). It is a contradictory purpose when schools are constructed to serve populations in which they are located, yet there is a belief that education is intended to provide knowledge to promote upward class mobility out of the place in which the population is locally situated.

Wealthy, suburban communities that serve public and private educational institutions offer a breadth of courses for students in K-12 environments, while overpopulated, urban districts with lower socioeconomic statuses (SES) are provided a minimal course selection with little resources through which to provide an equitable education (Anyon, 1981). Anyon (1981) explained “the role of education in industrial societies is to reproduce an unequal system of social classes” (p. 118), further implying that classes are divided based on an implied cultural hierarchy and that education does not always provide equitable access within our industrialized society. Freire (1998) referred to the perpetuation of cultural illiteracy in poverty-stricken areas as a manifestation of the “culture of silence” which is employed by oppressive institutionalized forces to maintain control over marginalized groups toward maintaining the status quo, i.e. those who are privileged (p. 493). Thus, education as an institution continues to be "a stable base for monopolizing and administering resources and for creating and reproducing inequality" (Stanfield, 1985, p. 403). This ultimately disadvantages those groups who hold “other” identities in a system that privileges the financial and cultural capital of the wealthy, white, heterosexual groups.

A parallel can be drawn between Freire’s (1998) culture of silence and heteronormative narratives that omit LGBTQ identities from historical narratives in HSS texts. California’s FAIR Education Act has put pressure upon some publishing companies to redevelop textbook
narratives to explicitly include LGBTQ identities and histories. Steinmetz (2017) explained that publishing companies are hesitant to move away from a cheaper, American “consensus narrative” because profits may be impacted by such changes to generalized content (par. 12). Adversely, these same publishing companies may know that California is projected to have the largest student population by 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), signaling an opportunity to profit from the FAIR Education Act’s policy. Thus, a large-scale curricular policy change that intended to disrupt the heteronormative assumption that LGBTQ identities and histories could be “erased” though omission, may still be at the mercy of the private publishing companies that seek to profit from their minimal textual inclusion. Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan’s (2015) research on the integration of LGBTQ identities within the curriculum notes that while the number and quality of LGBT[Q]-inclusive books for K-8 readers continues to grow, there are still not many, and those that exist often fail to include diverse representations…Teachers, therefore, cannot count on inclusion to provide a window into the full range of LGBT[Q] lives. (p. 438)

Though textbooks that include LGBTQ individuals meet the policy requirements of the FAIR Education Act, problems arise through implementation of the content without further guidance for teachers in addressing these concepts more broadly through the enacted curriculum. It raises the question as to the way teachers are navigating LGBTQ-inclusive texts in their practice. Thus, it is necessary to study the implications of state-level policies that seek to disrupt heteronormative discourse through the teachers that enact the local curriculum.

**Cultural Dominance Through Curricular Omissions**

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (MDESE) website explains that the state’s curricular learning standards are not the curriculum itself but are the guide through which textbooks and lessons are decided upon at the local level in order to address them (MDESE, 2016, September 2). The curriculum and text resources being employed
in public schools reflect the variance in the extent to which state standards include “nontraditional material” (Olneck, 2000, p. 333). Nontraditional material in many cases involve texts that explore “marginalized groups such as people of color, people who identify as LGBT, and people with disabilities—all of whom have been deemed as deviating from the preferred societal norms of whiteness, heterosexuality, and able-bodiedness (McDonald, 2015, p. 318). Such omissions represent an attempt to further privilege certain groups of individuals in U.S. society while underrepresenting or omitting others within K-12 curricula and text resources.

Apple (1996) explained how this textual representation in schools, or lack thereof, is a result of “hegemonic and counter-hegemonic relations and social movements involving multiple power relations, including but not limited to race, class, gender/sexuality, and religion (p. 129). Without a critical examination of such text resources in our curriculum in K-12 schools, these inherent power relations through omission of nontraditional identities has been overlooked by many educators within the system who utilize them daily to educate their students.

It is understood through the use of instructional materials that represent privileged identities, i.e. traditional, and the normalization of the embedded cultural norms within them that “dominant relations are ongoingly reconstituted by the actions we take and the decisions we make” at the local level (Apple, 1985, p. 158). Even in schools that are comprised of a student population that is not predominantly white, the text resources created by the larger publishing companies utilized in daily instruction reflect characters that enact our culturally privileged ideals, thus furthering the text’s role in the “circuit of cultural production” (Apple, 1996, p. 129). In spite of published authors’ and illustrators’ efforts to create more (multi)culturally diverse texts in the U.S., they are largely left out of classrooms, leaving predominantly white, middle class, Christian representations for use within the curriculum (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014;
Epstein, 2012). Such multicultural omissions from the educational curriculum send implicit messages of who and what is valued in society. It has become clear historically “that the racialization, subjugation determined by societal needs, of various groups in the U.S. and its contemporary effects are unwelcomed topics for public discussion” (Carlton Parsons, Rhodes, & Brown, 2011, par. 1). Furthermore, Eisner (2002) explained that the curricular materials, as well as the educational space, require “a subtle critical analysis…to discern the kinds of social values that are being promulgated within the materials that students and teachers employ” (p. 88). It is within these educational spaces that cultural (hetero)norms are (re)produced because of the institutionalized relationship between text resources, curricular structures, and the pedagogies used to employ them.

**Where are the “BTQ” Identities in the Curriculum?**

It is a reasonable concern that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum resources may attend more to lesbian and gay topics and less to bisexual and transgender issues. In Epstein’s (2012) analysis of more than 20 published LGBTQ children’s books, she concluded that they “mainly feature only lesbian and gay characters…[which] suggests that monosexuals (i.e., people only attracted to one gender), whether heterosexual or homosexual, are more accepted than bisexuals or transgendered people” (p. 298). In another qualitative document analysis of multicultural themes in elementary curricula, Logan, Watson, Hood, and Lasswell (2016) argued for an “emphasis placed on transgender issues which have been historically ignored in children’s literature until the past five years” (p. 390). Here, the divide between cisgender and transgender issues, and sexual orientation binaries of hetero/homosexual and mono/bisexual reveal the complexities of individual identities within the LGBTQ community at-large.
Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen’s (2013) survey of 6,853 youths (409 transgender youths and 6,444 cisgender youths) between the ages of 13-21 explored the benefits of LGBT resources in the form of anti-bullying policies, LGBT-curriculum, Gay-Straight Alliances, and supportive educators and their impact on levels of victimization of transgender (T) youths in U.S. public schools. Though the research suggests that the “T” is omitted from most LGBT resources, the study concluded that LGBT-inclusive curriculum yielded comparably positive results for both LGB and T youths alike, suggesting that the mere inclusion of these themes helped transgender youths in schools (Greytak, et al., 2013). Furthermore, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) resulted in lower victimization in schools, in conjunction with LGBT-inclusive curriculum and supportive educators, while anti-bullying policies yielded no difference between LGB and T youths in lowering victimization. These findings suggest that a comprehensive approach to LGBT issues are important enough to include, and support Logan et al.’s (2016) suggestion that there should be a continued emphasis on transgender-specific topics in LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.

It should also be considered that transgender individuals have a variety of experiences based on male-to-female and female-to-male gender identities, further intersected by race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and geographic location (Greytak et al., 2013). Beyond the individual representation of transgender issues in curricular content, Jennings and Macgillivray (2011) found in their analysis of multicultural literature in higher education teacher preparation programs that “content addressing gender identity, transgenderism, and bisexuality stood out as being essential to the content but was consistently excluded” (p. 54). The complexity of the FAIR Education Act is elevated through the idea that such inclusive curricular policy puts all LGBTQ identities under the same (multi)cultural umbrella, though research shows how the text resources and representations of individuals within this group are further
marginalized and underrepresented within these curricular representations yet have the possibility to yield positive outcomes when put into practice.

**Effects of Institutional Oppression on Children’s Identity Formation**

The formation of children’s identities and prejudicial attitudes ultimately begin at a very young age. They are informed by both homophobic and heteronormative messages that are modeled and reproduced within primary educational settings (Renold, 2000; Ryan, 2016), religious, and health care institutions, which ultimately reflect the local cultures in which they are situated (Flores, 2012; Flores, 2014). Their “lives are situated within ecological systems that are made up of complex histories, processes, relationships, and institutions that shape their development” from which they cannot be separated (Noguera, 2011, p. 13). Thus, education plays a crucial role in the formation of the individual (Bruner, 1996) by maintaining the cultural status quo which privileges some, and disadvantages others. Students whose identities are not represented or reflected through stereotypes within the curricula can interpret that they do not belong among those who are represented.

Marginalized groups are affected by institutionalized oppression within educational settings. Though there has been progress made toward more inclusive educational and public spaces for LGBTQ individuals specifically, heterosexism and homophobia continue to be institutionally supported forms of oppression (Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Gorski, Davis, & Reiter, 2013). The exclusion and erasure of LGBTQ individuals from texts within education curricula imply that the issues affecting these people are not important enough to warrant mentioning (Smolkin & Young, 2011). A solution to give voice to marginalized identities is through the inclusion of non-traditional texts within the social studies curriculum which allows children “to realize that they are not alone in their experiences” (Brant & Tyson, 2015, p. 218).
Thus, including a broader representation of identities within curricular content can work to disrupt the cultural normalization of identity constructs, and more positively inform an individual’s identity development during their formative years about who they are in relation to the society from which they cannot be abstracted.

Heterosexist and transphobic forms of institutionalized oppression are especially damaging as students are forming their own gender and sexual identities within their elementary years because they have resulted in the exclusion and denigration of those who identify as LGBT and/or Q (Briscoe, 2005). The dominant cultural beliefs surrounding gender and sexual identities supported within local communities and in educational spaces can “impede the development of positive self-identity and create hostile learning environments” (Dessel, 2010, p. 558), further minimizing the equitable access to education for those who identify as LGBTQ. These oppressive learning environments engender fear of repercussions for both the teachers that seek to disrupt heteronormativity, but also the students who seek to identify outside of the heterosexual and cisgender norms. Therefore, to influence change toward a more inclusive and socially just educational spaces for LGBTQ youth, educators must “strive to identify ways that dehumanizing normative gender and sexuality expectations are enacted and supported through school policy, practice, and programming” (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003, p. 111). Ryan’s (2016) ethnographic study of the reification of heteronormative discourse through students’ interactions in 14 Midwestern primary classrooms urged educators to address silences of LGBTQ identities in the form of “ally work” because “students’ knowledge of (hetero)sexuality intersects with the daily curriculum and is learned through constant exposure to and negotiation of heteronormative discourses in schools” (pp. 86-87). Thus, educators working for social justice must position themselves locally to overcome pervasive social and cultural problems such as the omission of
LGBTQ narratives, histories, and social influences from K-12 curricula, so that educational spaces can overcome oppressive institutionalized forces and influence social and cultural progress.

**Conclusion**

The standardization of education in the U.S. through hierarchical structures of cultural and political power have put democratic education at risk (Stanley, 2009; Meier, 2009). Education continues to act as an institution that cannot be abstracted from cultural power struggles between policy and practice, and thus perpetuates societal inequalities through its local structures and resources (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1996; Bruner, 1996; Giroux, 1994; Stanfield, 1985). Though the practice of education “can provide a starting point for recognizing and challenging” institutionalized forms of oppression (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010, p. 1680). Curricular resources represent and reproduce these social inequalities because they are monopolized by capitalist ventures in the U.S. and employed by local educators who are left with little autonomy through which to teach outside of state and local curricular policies (Apple, 1985; Bruner, 1996; Giroux 1994; Stanley, 2009).

The omission of LGBTQ topics from these locally employed instructional resources and curricula negatively influence children’s understanding of identities outside of heterosexuality starting in early childhood education because education plays a crucial role in this process (Bruner, 1996; Flores, 2012; Flores, 2014; Noguera, 2011; Ryan, 2016). Homophobic cultural and institutional oppressions continue to influence the exclusion of LGBTQ individuals from curricular policy, content, and educational spaces which lead to exclusive, and in some cases, hostile learning environments for those students who identify as, or have family members who are LGBTQ (Briscoe, 2005; Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Dessel, 2010; Gorski et al., 2013;
Smolkin & Young, 2011). In order to overcome such external barriers in local educational practices, educators are encouraged to actively reflect upon practice, and closely analyze curricular resources and content for a wider representation of cultural groups through the use of non-traditional text resources (Brant & Tyson, 2015; Eisner, 2002; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Ryan, 2016).

This study sought to understand how teachers navigate local policies that related to LGBTQ-inclusivity, and to what degree the curriculum offers an opportunity to address these topics with their students. It is not clear through the research whether or not anti-bullying or inclusive curricular policies are enough on their own to support teachers in disrupting heteronormative discourse in the classroom. Furthermore, even in schools with inclusive policies, it is not clear how multicultural text resources and even their own identities impact teachers’ decisions to include or address LGBTQ identities within the curriculum. It is through exploring elementary HSS teachers’ narratives of experience that the intersection of local policy, resources, and an understanding of LGBTQ topics will contribute to an understanding of this complex educational issue.

**The Intersection of Policies and LGBTQ-inclusive Curriculum**

In a country that spends over a trillion dollars per year on education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, July 21), it might be surprising to learn that it is not a Constitutional right in the United States. The tenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives legislative power over educational policies to state governments, not the federal government (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Thus, federal policies are limited in their capability to ensure a safe and inclusive school environment at the local level, particularly for students who identify as LGBTQ. The multigovernmental system in the U.S. (Baumer & Van Horn, 2014) provides different levels
of policy oversight and accountability, leaving many decisions related to the delivery of equitable education to local school districts, which are primarily guided by state policies. These decisions made by local stakeholders include what curricular topics are taught to whom, and the resources that are used to do so. Because heteronormative discourses shape, and are shaped by public policies, LGBTQ-inclusive curricula are rarely mandated in the U.S. resulting in discriminatory, and sometimes harmful learning environments which perpetuate the marginalization of LGBTQ identities. The following section will address the complexities of federal, state, and local policies that contribute to the lack of progress toward more LGBTQ-inclusive practices within in the elementary HSS curriculum.

**Local Limitations of the Federal Title IX Policy**

Historically, LGBTQ topics have been omitted from the curricula, particularly at the elementary level. Kitchen and Bellini (2012) explained that “[a]s the rights of LGBTQ people become increasingly entrenched in law and educational policy, teachers and administrators have an obligation to address LGBTQ issues and homophobic bullying in schools with sensitivity and seriousness” (p. 448). Such omissions from local policies have fostered school environments where bullying and harassment toward LGBTQ individuals and those with LGBTQ family members exists all too often (Dessel, 2010). Thus, schools continue to be hostile environments for this group of people which worsen “the emotional and physical health risks that LGBT[Q] students face” (Meneses & Grimm, 2012, p. 147).

Steps have been taken on federal, state, and local policy levels toward the improvement of educational school climates toward LGBTQ individuals. In 2016, under the Obama Administration’s socially-progressive agenda including LGBTQ rights, the federal Title IX policy language was expanded to explicitly include LGBTQ individuals’ right to an education
free from harassment and discrimination. Title IX, initially signed in 1972, was one of the Education Amendments that “protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, April). Though this federal policy seeks to advance the safety and inclusivity of schools, the problem lies within its local enforcement. Reactive accountability measures are inconsistent and difficult to manage, resulting in minimal progress toward the creation of LGBTQ-inclusive educative spaces. This, coupled with the 48 states that lack LGBTQ-inclusive curricular policies, shows that there is more work to be done at the legislative and local levels.

It is evident that many local school districts adhere to federal and state policies to financially benefit from such transactions. Baumer and Van Horn (2014) explained the federal government’s control over state educational policies as “offering the ‘carrot’ of federal grants-in-aid in return for certain concessions” (p. 12). Educational institutions that receive federal funding under the Title IX policy “must operate in a nondiscriminatory manner” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, April, p. 1). Since its adoption in 1972, Title IX policy language has been expanded to explicitly include particular groups of people to ensure educational spaces that are free of discriminatory practices. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education issued a press release that explicitly included gender identity within policy guidelines for public schools that receive Title IX funds (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). This is enforced by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) reactively through the evaluation of complaints and proactively through compliance reviews, though these are difficult to manage on such a wide scale at the federal level.

The Title IX policy itself does not include preventative measures that protect students from bullying or harassment in schools, nor does it require LGBTQ individuals to be included in
public schools’ curricula. While schools are encouraged to update the language in their local nondiscrimination policies, “Title IX does not hold a school responsible for the behavior of students who harass; it holds a school accountable for failing to correct harassment once school officials have been notified” [emphasis added] (Cahill & Cianciotto, 2004, p. 5). Accountability is only measured when a formal complaint has been given to a local administrator or Title IX coordinator. This is further complicated in the classroom setting because “Title IX imposes no affirmative duty for teachers and staff to intervene or prevent [any harmful] behavior among students unless they have actual, direct knowledge” (Meneses & Grimm, 2012, p. 156).

Through a queer theoretical construct, Staley and Leonardi (2016) refer to Meyer (2008) who noted the endemic nature of “gendered harassment” that results from “undisturbed, heteronormativity [which] is oppressive…[and] promotes heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia, as well as bullying, harassment, and other aggressive policing behaviors” (p. 211). Gendered harassment is not overt in practice, though with knowledge of this institutionally oppressive construct, it should arguably be covered under Title IX’s purview at the local level.

Increasing the complexity of this policy’s local enforcement, the 2016 expansion to include gender identity was rescinded in February of 2017 under the Trump Administration, scaling back a progressive effort to protect LGBTQ individuals in school settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, February). This change reflects an ideological difference between the two presidential Administrations and would be worth exploring teachers’ understanding of what this change means related to their own practices in the classroom.

It is important to note that GLSEN’s study, released in 2016, found that more students and teachers reported having an anti-bullying policy, many with enumerated provisions for gender identity and sexual orientations in 2015 than the same study conducted in 2005 (Greytak
et al., 2016). Even with such evidence to suggest progress has been made, there is no causal link between the changes to Title IX and local antidiscrimination policies. These accountability measures at the local level raise ethical questions as to how LGBTQ students are truly protected under the language of Title IX on its own. Though, Title IX holds the local school district accountable for failing to correct reported cases of harassment, it suggests a need for more comprehensive policies that proactively create nondiscriminatory educational environments.

The problem that Title IX raises for LGBTQ students is that disclosing bullying or harassment to someone at school could lead to further discrimination based on revealing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to another individual at school. Additionally, many of these students who are minors may not have disclosed their true gender or sexual identities to their families, leaving them without support from home if they were to raise the issue (Meneses & Grimm, 2012). This, then, creates an ethical dilemma for teachers who are then unable to cross the ethical lines of nondisclosure if they are aware of such information. The resultant fear of such consequences causes students to remain silent, so they rarely report such harassment in schools (Meneses & Grimm, 2012). Therefore, if a teacher does not see direct gendered harassment or have direct knowledge, there is no intervention. If there is no intervention, these discriminatory behaviors continue, further damaging the silenced individual. These problems surrounding the fear of gender and/or sexual identity disclosure further the need for supportive structures in and out of schools for LGBTQ youth.

Federal policy like Title IX alone does not create nondiscriminatory environments but must be supported locally through the development of explicitly inclusive policies and practices. Page (2017) argues that the need for LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum goes beyond the overcoming the presence of bullying in schools, but that
One of the greatest traumas that gender- and sexual-minority students experience is... invisibility and silence. When queer students are not visible in the curriculum...[and] the school is silent about their experience, this creates feelings of disenfranchisement and rejection...[and] “stigmatizing messages” that these students are not valued. Students’ identities are erased and invalidated. (p. 678)

In many cases, LGBTQ students were more than twice as likely to be absent from school due to feeling unsafe (Greytak et al., 2016; Patterson, 2013). Since Title IX’s expansion to include gender identity in April of 2015, it could be posited GLSEN’s (2016) report that because of local LGBTQ-enumerated policies that reflect federal policy guidelines, teachers were more willing to report cases of harassment and bullying as well as addressing concerns in and out of class with all students (Greytak et al., 2016). While this finding supports the claim that positive outcomes have resulted locally from such inclusive secondary policies, it is also noted that seminal research studies in recent years continue to exclude elementary school environments. Therefore, a study of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and the policies that support, or detract from, teachers’ practices at the local elementary level would contribute to this gap in the research.

**Federal Education Acts Continue to Leave LGBTQ Identities Behind**

The standardization of education in the U.S. began with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002, which updated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The U.S. Department of Education’s website describes how NCLB's “prescriptive requirements became increasingly unworkable for schools and educators” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The NCLB act increased federal overreach into state education by measuring states’ accountability in reading and math proficiency through standardized testing. Ultimately, this one-size-fits-all accountability system set states up for failure when they were not able to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) and were punished through the withholding of federal funds (Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004). This law was officially
replaced with the signing of the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA) on December 10, 2015 by President Obama. This act reinstated the ESEA of 1965 and shifted power back to the states and away from federal oversight and accountability as it was measured under NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

That same month, the executive director of GLSEN, Dr. Eliza Byard, issued a press release stating her concerns and disappointment in the ESSA signed by President Barack Obama. Dr. Byard explained that the ESSA “does not explicitly include protections for LGBT[Q] students, nor does it include any elements of the Safe Schools Improvement Act [SSIA] and the Student Nondiscrimination Act [SNDA]” (GLSEN, Media Relations, 2015). These two acts were written as supplemental protections for individuals’ rights to an education free of harassment and bullying where the Title IX and ESSA policies left gaps. In addition, she explained that the ESSA limits the authority of the U.S. Department of Education, which has been a driving force in civil rights protections for LGBTQ students in schools. Both the SSIA and SNDA were initially introduced in the Senate in 2015 and only the SSIA was reintroduced to the House of Representatives in 2018, but either has yet to be voted on (Human Rights Campaign, 2017). It appears that the progressive efforts to protect LGBTQ individuals is not a shared legislative priority under President Trump’s Administration. These illustrate how chief-executive politics leads to “conflicting claims to authority within the administrative state…where local, state, and federal agencies frequently compete for power over policy” (Baumer & Van Horn, 2014, p. 98). In the end, it is the LGBTQ students, teachers, and those with LGBTQ family members who continue to suffer through such exclusionary policy language and practices in schools.
Federal policies alone have not been enough to ensure safe learning environments for LGBTQ students. School districts must create nondiscrimination policies that reflect recent changes to Title IX and explicitly include enumerated provisions for gender and sexual orientation protection. Local policies can positively influence a school climate when translated into practice, though it is not suggested that this will fix such a complex problem. Jacob (2013) explained in her research on ethics and legal issues in education that “[i]t is critically important for all school staff to receive training on LGBT[Q] youth issues and anti-bullying interventions” (p. 111). By providing such trainings, “school administration not only provides teachers with the structure and resources to teach this topic, they set a tone within the school that this is an important topic to address” (Bishop & Atlas, 2015, p. 778). Local policy informs teachers’ practice and proactive accountability could lead to inclusive school climates that federal policy alone cannot ensure through reactive accountability measures.

**Ideological Influences on Local Educational Policies**

There is a confluence of issues related to conflicting policies, practices, and ideologies that have resulted in minimal progress toward LGBTQ inclusion in educational spaces, particularly at the elementary level. Leonardo (2003) explained that to change at the local level, “[r]eform efforts…must labor to expose the systems responsible for the persistent problems of education” (p. 46). It appears through the research of existing policies that there are many gaps that do not fully protect LGBTQ individuals in schools and/or some public spaces. These policies are formed at the local and state levels through heteronormative ideologies within a predominantly heterosexist society. Thus, local schools are slow to develop and implement LGBTQ-inclusive policies and curricula, which result in the perpetual cultural (hetero)norm. Public schools tend to address issues that reflect dominant political influences, so then “it
appears that decisions regarding curricula are often based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual” (Bishop & Atlas, 2015, 769). It is necessary to consider how heteronormative discourse continues to shape, and is shaped by, educational policies and local practices. Furthermore, if explicit nondiscrimination policies alone do not lead to the disruption of heteronormative discourses, it is necessary to understand how teachers themselves take steps to disrupt these constructs for the benefit of all students’ understanding of gender and identity.

Heteronormative discourse has been supported through the colonial roots of American education which "emphasized religious and moral development as a primary goal...[so] both sexuality and homosexuality have been major threats to the traditional cultural ideology set forth in the schools" (Harbeck, 1992, p. 1). Ultimately, public education continues to be a state matter, and schools must adhere to state policies regardless of individual ideologies. Forty-nine out of fifty State Constitutions “guarantee some basic level of educational opportunity for students, though the language employed in these state constitutional educational clauses varies greatly” (Lee, 2014, p. 279). The ideologies and values vary between states and thus approach LGBTQ education very differently.

**No promo homo laws.** Eight states in the Union still enforce “No Promotion of Homosexuality” or No Promo Homo (NPH) laws that restrict educators’ ability to participate in any discourse surrounding LGBTQ issues in schools, which “undoubtedly incorporate and convey a social meaning that degrades and demeans LGBTQ lives and histories by forcing them to be silent” (Barrett & Bound, 2015, p. 279). These policies were put into place to uphold the power of dominant political and religious ideologies that fear LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum would “influence or recruit young students to become gay” (Flores, 2012, p.189). Even if there are heterosexual allies and students or teachers who identify LGBTQ in NPH schools, they have
no choice but to avoid such discussions within the curricula from fear of political and social repercussions until such policies are repealed at the state level. Stanley (2009) explained that “dominant curriculum discourses better serve the needs of some students as opposed to others, and our understanding of any discourse is shaped by the lens of ideology” (p. 48). From such state policies, we continue to see how political and personal ideologies influence the policy-making process through those in positions of power and how marginalized groups continue to be silenced through institutionalized oppression.

Beyond NPH policies, many state and local policies frequently omit LGBTQ-inclusive language from enumerated provisions and anti-bullying statutes which “are drafted to ensure protection to all students, including those not explicitly mentioned in the statute” (Meneses & Grimm, 2012, p. 164). This happens out of fear by some conservative Christian organizations, such as Focus on Family, that LGBTQ-inclusive policies and curricula will advance the “gay agenda” (Meneses & Grimm, 2012, p. 161). Activists and special-interest groups have worked to prohibit social progress for LGBTQ individuals based on their collective ideologies. For example, the NPH laws “were introduced and supported by anti-LGBT[Q] and conservative religious activists” (Cahill & Cianciotto, 2004, p. 8). Furthermore, Barrett and Bound (2015) concluded through a critical discourse analysis of these laws that the NPH policies are not neutral but act as “a vehicle for the reproduction of unequal power relations in schools and society…[which] primarily serve to constrain discourse and thus to maintain unequal power relations” (pp. 270, 278). This reveals how policy and the legislative process uphold power structures and reveal ideological positions of those in these upper echelons of government and society at-large. Meneses and Grimm (2012) explained in their argument that LGBT[Q] bullying is a public health issue that “[s]ome legislators have gone as far as to specifically prohibit the
recognition of sexual orientation and gender expression as protected in anti-bullying legislation because their inclusion is believed to be part of an insidious gay agenda” (p. 146). We see again how the “power of dominant groups may be integrated in[to] laws” (van Dijk, 2003, p. 355) through such anti-LGBTQ ideologies and discourses.

Overall, the research has revealed the difficulties in the change process toward LGBTQ inclusive policy at the local level. This is a result of inconsistent policy language between all levels of government. States and local districts can use the legal system to loosely interpret such language, and to then avoid following federal policies that require schools to accommodate LGBTQ individuals who have a right to an education free of discrimination. Stakeholders’ ideologies shape the local interpretation of curricular policies. When the majority opinion is in conflict with the explicit inclusion of gender and sexual identities, the progress toward inclusion is hindered and supports the pervasive silence around these individuals. As Gorski (2014) concluded, “[i]deology drives policy. If we want more equitable policy, we need more equitable ideology” (p. 2). Therefore, stakeholders must seek common ideological ground to develop and adopt policies that explicitly include and protect LGBTQ individuals. It is clear from the research that even when there are not explicit policies that exclude LGBTQ topics from local curricula, stakeholders can evade and omit these topics without individual accountability for doing so. Thus, it is necessary to understand how teachers can address gender and sexuality through inclusive practices while navigating the gaps between local and state policies, and any personal or professional risks for taking such socially-just actions.

**Safety in Numbers (of Policies)**

The literature surrounding LGBTQ topics in schools has grown exponentially since the turn of the 21st century. This reflects the political and social progress that the LGBTQ
community and their allies have made toward equal rights at the state and federal levels. Recent studies have shown that public school environments in the U.S. were positively impacted through policy and practice at the local level (Greytak et al., 2016; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Patterson, 2013). Explicit nondiscrimination policies and state frameworks that include LGBTQ topics can work in concert to ensure schools are taking steps to locally address the current issues. Cahill and Cianciotto (2004) explained that “[i]ncorporating LGBT[Q] content into curricula requires preparing educators [and students] with the vision and knowledge to both locate appropriate materials and effectively incorporate them in a school environment” (p. 12). When students knew where to find this information, in addition to inclusive LGBT[Q] curricula, students felt safer in schools (Greytak et al., 2016; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Patterson, 2013).

For the schools that are just embarking on these curricular changes, Vecellio (2012) vehemently implored educators to include LGBTQ topics where they most authentically fit. At the elementary level, this most closely aligns with the history and social science (HSS) frameworks (Ashcraft, 2006), as reflected in California’s FAIR Education Act of 2012 (California Department of Education, 2016). Implementation of such curricular policy changes must be carefully planned and executed because “a disregard for potential implementation difficulties can reduce the likelihood of achieving positive results” (Baumer & Van Horn, 2014, p. 148). Positive results of LGBTQ-inclusive policies would include the degree to which all stakeholders become more educated through an authentically integrated curriculum, so that LGBTQ students and those with LGBTQ family members feel like a true part of the educational community, not simply as the “other” within public education as it has been historically. Furthermore, it supports the deconstruction of heteronormativity through broadened
representations of gender and sexualities at an early stage of students’ educational experiences. The problem that results from these inclusive policies is the disregard of teachers’ perceived preparedness to enact LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and to what degree they understand the implications of their practice. This study sought to fill this gap by exploring teachers’ experiences with this work, and the challenges that arise from enacting similar curricular policies at the local level.

**Conclusion**

Education is not a Constitutional right at the federal level, which leaves educational policy decisions to each state’s government (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Thus, the K-12 public education curricula in each state differs based on those who hold the power to make such decisions. Public school curricula have traditionally been designed through a cultural assumption that all individuals are, or should be, heterosexual (Bishop & Atlas, 2015). This is both a reflection of heterosexual dominance in our society, as well as the Christian ideals through which our country was founded (Harbeck, 1992). Stanley (2009) described the “anti-democratic indoctrination and oppressive elements of mainstream curriculum are not hard to identify, and a politically neutral curriculum is not possible” (p. 46). The top-down, hierarchy of our societal and government structures are counterintuitive to the democracy we seek to sustain and ultimately puts it at risk (Meier, 2009). Thus, the educational system that should promote and teach democratic principles ultimately does harm to society at-large by perpetuating discourses that damage certain cultural groups.

Ultimately, federal policies impact the funding for state and local education practices (Baumer & Van Horn, 2014; Meier et al., 2004; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Because schools continue to be hostile learning environments for LGBTQ individuals, particularly at the
secondary level, educators are obligated to give attention to LGBTQ issues in schools and in curricula due to the intersection of federal, state, and local laws and educational policies (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Meneses & Grimm, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2015, April; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Some of these policies are reactionary in nature and have not been proven as a causal link to improved student academic performance or attitudes toward LGBTQ topics and/or individuals in schools but have correlated to an increased perception of safety for those who attend schools with enumerated policies that protect all identities (Cahill & Cianciotto, 2004; Greytak et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2013; Patterson, 2013). For policies to be effective toward LGBTQ-inclusive educational environments, administrators must lead teachers through a collective effort to make change by providing professional development, resources, and a clear vision that bullying will not be tolerated (Bishop & Atlas, 2015; Cahill & Cianciotto, 2004; Jacob, 2013). Though it is also important to consider that anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies did not yield a decrease in LGBT youths’ self-reported victimization in secondary settings (Gretytak et al., 2013), suggesting that policies alone are not enough to create learning environments free from discrimination or victimization.

The development and implementation of inclusive curricular reform efforts has been difficult due to conflicting ideologies at the state and local levels, resulting in exclusive policies like NPH that restrict educators’ abilities to enact inclusive LGBTQ education across nine states (Barrett & Bound, 2015; Flores, 2012; Harbeck, 1992; Stanley, 2009). Policies that protect the majority are written by and reflect those same dominant groups in positions of power, and thus must be rewritten by local stakeholders in the form of enumerated policies that protect teachers, students, and LGBTQ individuals within the community (Barrett & Bound, 2015; Gorski, 2014;
Meneses & Grimm, 2012; van Dijk, 2003). The lack of research on this topic supports the need to explore how local policies shape elementary HSS teachers’ practices toward creating more inclusive environments that are free of discrimination and harassment. In the absence of explicit LGBTQ-inclusive policies, the outcomes of this study could inform federal, state, and local policy makers as to the ways in which teachers need further supports to enact an inclusive curriculum that yields positive outcomes for all students.

**Teachers Enacting Change Through LGBTQ-Inclusive Resources and Pedagogies**

The oppressive heterosexist nature of public education as an institution, in conjunction with inconsistent policies at the federal, state, and local levels that explicitly include LGBTQ rights and individuals, have resulted in slow progress toward elementary curricular inclusion of these topics. Bishop and Atlas (2015) explained that “[s]ocietal acceptance toward homosexuality is a slow process and involves all members of society, including social institutions like schools…[who] have the ability to generate change in society and create positive experiences regarding LGBT[Q] individuals” (p. 780). Furthermore, “teachers have been shown to possess the power to improve school conditions for LGBTQ youth” (Gorski et al., 2013, p. 225). If, then, “[t]he change process [toward LGBTQ-inclusive education] ultimately begins with our nation’s teachers (Flores, 2014, p. 119), then it is important to consider the conditions through which some teachers are able and supported to make changes, and what barriers continue to impede these local change efforts.

California, New Jersey, and Massachusetts are states that have adopted policies that explicitly require the inclusion of LGBTQ identities as part of the HSS curricula in schools. Their commitment to expanding HSS content is important as other states have spent recent decades focused mainly on the standardization of literacy and math. McGuire (2007) argues that
HSS is a “disappearing curriculum” because it became a lower priority as an academic content area with the standardization of math in 1991 through the NCLB policies of 2015 which pressured students’ and teachers’ performance in literacy and math achievement tests (p. 621). Social studies instruction has been the first to be reduced in time-on-learning because it can be integrated within other subject areas like English Language Arts or health and wellness curricula, and in many states, it is not a standardized content-area exam through which student learning is measured at the state level. This has led to a culture in elementary schools where civics lessons must be integrated and prioritized to meet the reduced time on learning. This further hinders the progress for LGBTQ-inclusive HSS curricula in elementary schools today because there is already a significant amount of historical content for teachers to cover with less time through which to do so.

A 2010 survey of 328 HSS teachers in California reported that 89% used the HSS state frameworks to guide curricular planning for classroom instruction (Campbell, Heath, Ingrao, & Middleton, 2012). Most HSS teachers refer to the state’s frameworks to design and implement local curricula, but contradictory views toward changes to the content standards can result in dilemmas in practice (Sawyer & Laguardia, 2010). Though LGBTQ-inclusive frameworks are available, some curricula do not prioritize its inclusion by design. Flores (2012) argued that the inclusion of LGBTQ themes in multicultural education may yield tolerance, acceptance, and safe environments that promote learning and ultimately, higher achievement. Though the intent of the LGBTQ-inclusive curricular policy reform in California because of the FAIR Education Act of 2012 seeks to reduce suicides and bullying to an inclusive education, this has yet to be determined as a causal relationship (Flores, 2014). It is also yet to be understood how elementary HSS teachers’ practices are or will be shaped by local policies, ideologies, text
resources, and personal belief systems. This study will contribute to the research through exploring elementary HSS teachers’ experiences with LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, and the ways in which policy, curricular resources, and their own or others’ ideologies influence these decisions.

Massachusetts’ Curricular Policy Limitations on Local Practice

Massachusetts pioneered the development of curricular policies that explicitly include LGBTQ individuals, histories, and events within the history and social science (HSS) frameworks (MDESE, 2015, March). Like any curricular reform at the state-level, this has not been without implementation inconsistencies across schools and districts. Curricular topics recommended by the state can be omitted at the local level because the guidance states that the curriculum frameworks are not intended to represent the whole curriculum, but to provide a frame through which a local curriculum can be designed (MDESE, 2015, March). Though the exclusion of LGBTQ-inclusive content raises ethical concerns, it can be permitted at the local level based on stakeholders’ decisions related to curriculum. Thus, local ideologies and the limitations on federal and state oversight on local curricular policy allow for the exclusion of marginalized topics at the discretion of those who hold positions of power and influence. In many cases, this starts with superintendents, curriculum directors/coordinators, and principals, but can also include the teachers who provide direct instruction.

The Safe Schools Program in Massachusetts was founded in 1993 to raise awareness and support the development of anti-discriminatory policies and laws to protect LGBTQ individuals in school environments because of high suicide rates for LGBTQ youth (MDESE, 2015, March). Hostile school environments, particularly early-childhood and elementary schools, have been noted by researchers as a contributing factor that “reinforces and reproduces the homophobia and
heterosexism that pervade contemporary U.S. society and contributes to the oppression of LGBT[Q] individuals” (Duke & McCarthy, 2009, p. 386; Greytak et al., 2016). Therefore, Massachusetts policy makers and legislators felt it was necessary to raise awareness and advocate for safer school environments, particularly at the elementary level, long before other states considered similar proactive efforts to improve school environments.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) released in March of 2015 the Principles for Ensuring Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Students, which provides guidelines for educators to implement inclusive curriculum at the local level. The sixth principle in this document states that “[s]chools, through their curricula, shall encourage respect for the human and civil rights of all individuals, including LGBTQ individuals” (MDESE, 2015, March). Moreover, the new K-12 HSS curricular frameworks were adopted in June of 2018 which explicitly include LGBTQ-inclusive topics in two of the required pathways for high school history courses (MDESE, 2018, June). This shows a continued, yet incomplete commitment to creating inclusive pathways for LGBTQ-inclusive education. Barrett and Bound (2015) explained that “policy infrequently impacts practice as directly as intended, [so] it is important to note that it certainly has the potential to shape people’s decision-making and to constrain the options that they perceive as being available to them” (p. 279). If teachers were to utilize the resources provided to educators through the MDESE website, teachers would quickly realize that they alone do not provide enough guidance for teachers to implement LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum without finding additional support from professional development and outside text resources, which are not clear to the novice user.
In the MDESE’s HSS model curriculum unit for grade two entitled “Civic Rights: Equality for All” published in July 2015, there is no mention of sexual orientation or historical figures that may have identified as LGBT and/or Q. This is concerning as it was published after the *Principles for Ensuring Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for LGBTQ Students* in March of 2015. Moreover, even with the new HSS frameworks published in 2018, there is no guidance for LGBTQ-inclusive units or materials for K-8 courses in these model units. The grade-two model unit’s description denotes that students will learn about “equality, focusing on gender, class, and race from around the world” (MDESE, 2015, July). A noticeable omission from the state’s suggested model curriculum at the elementary level are LGBTQ topics of study in the HSS classroom including gender roles and/or diverse family structures outside of the heteronormative construct of male/female partnerships. LGBTQ-inclusive curricula should involve investigations of gender roles and stereotypes in our society supported using age-appropriate literature that presents a diverse view on family structures (Brant & Tyson, 2016).

The number of same-sex couples raising children in the U.S. nearly doubled from about 63,000 in 2000 to about 113,000 in 2010 per U.S. Census Data (Bishop & Atlas, 2015). In a study of 116 elementary school psychologists in New York State, which does not provide state-level guidance in LGBT-inclusive curriculum, only 23% responded that the school was informally incorporating LGBT families within the curriculum (Bishop & Atlas, 2015). Thus, the decision to include LGBTQ topics that reflect a growing and changing society continues to occur at individual and school levels, though with notable inconsistency.

The literature calls for elementary HSS teachers to include LGBTQ individuals, diverse family structures, societal contributions, and histories about the civil rights movements and should integrate HSS and literacy curriculum content standards to do so in the most appropriate
places (Ashcraft, 2006; Brant & Tyson, 2016; Flores, 2012; Smolkin & Young, 2011). This implicit conflict between the curricular policy presented by MDESE and the resources provided through which to enact such curriculum deepens the concerns related to progress for LGBTQ-inclusive curricula in a state considered to be a pioneer in LGBTQ curricular inclusion. This study sought to understand how teachers are informed by the policies and implementing guidance provided to them from state and local resources through which to address LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, and the ways in which they could be strengthened both in quality of content, and a more consistent use in the field.

**A Democratic and Multicultural Social Studies Education**

Public education is the foundation of our democracy through which our citizenry and common knowledge is developed (Meier et al., 2004). Dewey (1916) explained in his seminal work *Democracy and Education* that,

>a society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder. (p. 137)

History and social studies as an interdisciplinary content area provides the platform through which students can learn the concept of democracy so that they may “develop alternative perspectives, skills, solutions, and recommendations to improve society” (Stanley, 2009, p. 53). A multicultural curricular approach in HSS classrooms should include a diversified perspective on the issues being discussed to understand broader perspectives that are different from the learner (Demir & Yurdakul, 2015; Logan et al., 2016). Multicultural education as a reform movement aims to ensure all students are provided equal learning opportunities regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, social class, ethnicity, race and cultural background (Demir &
Yurdakul, 2015). Thus, a public, democratic education should equitably represent all multicultural identities in HSS curriculum content and resources.

One of the six National Association for Multicultural Education’s (NAME) goals include promoting “the development of culturally responsible and responsive curricula” (The National Association for Multicultural Education, 2016). More specifically, “a multicultural curriculum design should have the aims at raising democratic individuals who have reached the awareness and acceptance level of differences, can empathize, know human rights and respect them” (Demir & Yurdakul, 2015, p. 3654). A truly democratic education involves fostering thinking skills and active engagement, not a “glorified clerking, passing along a curriculum of received wisdom and predigested (and often false) bits of information” (Ayers, 2010, p. 5). Freire (1998) further notes this as a common practice of “digesting” curriculum through educational texts to serve the needs of the institution and society at-large (p. 482). Multiculturalism and democracy therefore suggest that curricular structures should reflect and employ such ideals through educational content, resources, and processes.

Multicultural education requires resources through which HSS concepts are taught reflect all identities outside of the privileged few, and the normalized majority. Under a legal purview, LGBTQ individuals as a group are considered a suspect class, or “a class of individuals that have been historically subject to discrimination” (Cornell University Law School, n.d.). Other intersecting identities including race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation within the LGBTQ community may also be a protected class under the Supreme Court’s purview, and thus should be considered a cultural group worthy of inclusion within multicultural education (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011). Thus, teaching toward tolerance and respect of all identities in the classroom should be supported using multicultural resources that attend to power structures and
intersecting identities within the LGBTQ population (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Logan et al., 2016).

To shift the cultural norms that are supported and produced through the educational institution, we must “begin by looking at where LGBT[Q] content most authentically appears in the curriculum as it stands” (Vecellio, 2012, p.174). In the standards-based curriculum which drives classroom instruction, educators have some flexibility as to where “[c]hildren from marginalized cultural groups [can] have opportunities to see themselves reflected in literature” as well as readers from all social and cultural groups (Tschida et al., 2014, p. 29). This flexibility is guided by each state’s curricular frameworks and provides an opportunity for teachers to employ texts within elementary HSS education to reflect society at large, which play an important role in children’s social and identity development.

Teachers must utilize a broad selection of multicultural literature in classroom instruction that reflects students’ lives, as well as seeing into others’ lives (Bishop, 1990; Logan et al., 2016). Textbooks that have been employed, particularly in HSS content areas, primarily represent majority students’ identities because the content has been “subject to the influences of the larger [capitalist] society” where the text is a commodity through which to increase financial capital (Apple, 1985). Because exclusionary practices raise ethical concerns in teaching, educators from all perspectives on this issue are presented with an opportunity to recognize deficit perspectives on the representations of oppressed groups in classroom materials instruction and to resist essentializing members within those groups (Dworin & Bomer, 2008, p.118).

Historically, the most common arguments against this multicultural work in the K-12 curriculum are that homosexual issues do not have place in schools, sexual orientation education is not age-appropriate and children’s innocence must be protected through its omission (Flores,
2012), conflict of religious beliefs that result in a perception of homosexuality as immoral (Harbeck, 1992; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Thein, 2013), the belief that LGBT individuals make poor parents, a lack of appropriate understanding in order to teach such topics, and a fear of legal and/or political ramifications (Flores, 2012; Harbeck, 1992; Smolkin & Young, 2011). These arguments have caused many LGBTQ books to be challenged, and even banned from school districts (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2015). Though it is within these arguments toward censorship that the advancement of a “hidden curriculum of intolerance and heteronormativity that, in effect, erases the existence of some of our students” rendering them invisible, and silenced (Page, 2017, p. 683).

LGBTQ-themed curricular omissions in K-12 schools result from, though not entirely, the “cultural taboos against youth sexuality” (Mayo, 2007, pp. 79-80), further supporting and revealing the heteronormative assumptions that guide decision-making in our schools (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Ryan, 2016) and in society. Thus, LGBTQ youth’s invisibility in K-12 schools “enables school leaders to neglect them” (Mayo, 2007, p. 88) leaving these topics as part of the null, evaded, and hidden curricula, which further pathologizes this marginalized group. It is unacceptable to continue the silence surrounding LGBTQ topics in schools knowing that millions of LGBTQ students and families across the U.S. have been excluded from K-12 educational spaces (Dessel, 2010; Smolkin & Young, 2011). They deserve to be acknowledged and validated as an equal part of our collective cultural identity through the school’s curricular policies, which ultimately reflect the larger institutionalized nature of education. Furthermore, all students should develop an understanding of gender and sexualities, which are “restricted to the small range of gendered and sexual behaviours that serve to affirm normative
(hetero)sexuality” (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010, p. 1675) in order to disrupt heteronormative discourses.

Knowing the potential power of utilizing multicultural text resources in the educational institution toward identity formation and the transference of cultural norms, it is essential to broaden the representation of characters and content in the explicit curriculum so that students may “leave school understandings that there are multiple ways to create family, to fall in love, and to express oneself in the world” (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2013, p. 226). It is through this level of understanding from multicultural education that children can accurately base their knowledge and beliefs related to all sexual and gender identities (Flores, 2012). Furthermore, an “inclusive multicultural curriculum reduces the invisibility of LGBT[Q] families and gay culture from mainstream curriculum” (Flores, 2014, p. 115). These curricular inclusions can potentially lead to impacts beyond the classroom if norms and stereotypes are challenged through multicultural texts.

Utilizing LGBTQ-inclusive texts and lessons are important as part of a multicultural approach to curriculum design to promote tolerance and acceptance, and to help reduce incidents of bullying (Greytak et al., 2016; Flores, 2012; Patterson, 2013; Smolkin & Young, 2011). Teachers should be discouraged from using texts that present negative ideas, bias, or hate speech (Demir & Yurdakul, 2015; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011), though this may be difficult to recognize through heterosexual and cisgender-privileged positions because some of these ideas are subtle or overlooked. Even though organizations such as the GLSEN and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) provide lesson plans that can be used in a variety of educational settings, local educators and administrators are hesitant and/or resistant to utilize them as they
are outside of the locally-prescribed curriculum. In many cases, this results from conflicting ideologies and values related to LGBTQ topics in schools altogether.

Adversely, teachers who may not have been provided training on such resources could have the best intentions, yet send implicit message to students, further marginalizing LGBTQ individuals. These implicit messages are sent to elementary children many times in the form of stereotypes, which promote prejudicial attitudes according to social psychological theory (Flores, 2012). This furthers the case to include multicultural education in teacher preparation programs to better prepare teachers to approach the use of such appropriate text materials in HSS classroom instruction (Flores, 2014; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Smolkin & Young, 2011).

**Pre-service Education for Teachers**

Pre-service teacher education programs and in-service professional development seldom address LGBTQ issues (Gorski et al., 2013; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). Brant and Tyson’s (2016) qualitative study of 47 pre-service teachers found that pre- and in-service HSS teachers agree the curriculum should be inclusive of sexuality and gender issues, yet they “voice a number of concerns regarding the potential implications for doing so” (p. 217). These same teachers felt that their educator preparation programs did not adequately prepare them to do so, which lead to a decreased perception of self-efficacy when implementing LGBTQ-inclusive texts and lessons (Brant & Tyson, 2016). Kedley (2015) concluded in her research on queering ELA in-service teachers as a “text” to be understood, that discomfort can result from raised awareness of heteronormative privilege, which was not raised during pre-service education. She suggests that in-service teachers not allow this discomfort to silence further action, but to use it as a platform to take professional risks to disrupt heteronormativity in the classroom.
Gorski, Davis, and Reiter (2013) found in their study of 41 multicultural education course syllabi and 80 survey responses from faculty who teach these courses that in the rare cases that LGBTQ concerns were actually addressed, it was in a decontextualized way that masked heteronormativity. Further complicating teachers’ preparedness, Jennings and Macgillivray’s (2011) line-by-line analysis of 12 multicultural education textbooks for pre-service teachers found that all but three texts addressed LGBTQ identities in a single chapter, or less, further marginalizing and stereotyping LGBTQ individuals altogether. Moreover, LGBTQ individuals were frequently portrayed through a “victim narrative”, and deemphasized LGBTQ individuals throughout history suggesting that instructors who use these texts should be aware of the implicit messages from the resources in practice (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011, p. 58). Thus, teacher preparation programs should commit to the inclusion of LGBTQ topics, outside of a singular text or learning experience so that teachers can be better equipped to address LGBTQ-inclusive topics during in-service practice.

In a qualitative case study of pre-service early childhood educators on addressing LGBTQ topics, Kintner-Duffey, Vardell, Lower, and Cassidy (2012) found in their data that these students were “complex beings who may hold contradictory beliefs” (p. 221). The students in this study outwardly portrayed open-mindedness in class, while holding internal prejudicial beliefs that conflicted with their actions (Kintner-Duffey et al., 2012). Similarly, Gay and Kirkland’s (2003) article presented examples from teaching pre-service education courses that students frequently silenced themselves, others, and the significance of engaging in dialogue around “beliefs, biases, and behaviors about racial and cultural diversity in education” (p. 183). It appears from these studies that pre-service learning environments can engage educators in
initial stages of self-reflective work, but one pre-service course is not enough to uncover deeply held belief systems about gender and identity at-large.

Historically, this gap in teachers’ preparation programs reflects sexuality as a larger taboo issue in educational curriculum, particularly at the elementary level, resulting in silence (Kintner-Duffey et al., 2012; Mayo, 2007). Thus, even when teachers wish to be inclusive of sexual orientation as a curricular topic, they continue to evade and omit such LGBTQ-inclusive topics for fear of social reactions to such discussions, political backlash, and disapproving parents in the school community (Flores, 2012; Kintner-Duffey et al., 2012). Furthermore, religious views were found to cause pre-service teachers to be uncomfortable when addressing LGBTQ topics in educational settings, particularly conservative, Christians (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Kintner-Duffey et al., 2012). Through the literature, it is evident that ideologies, belief systems, and ethics influence teachers’ decisions to voice or silence topics related to gender and sexuality in a local educational setting. This study sought to understand how teachers’ stories of their teaching experiences reveal the intersection of ideologies, belief systems, and/or ethics and the ways in which they influence decision-making related to addressing gender and sexuality within the elementary HSS curricula.

**Teachers’ Belief Systems**

Policy reform, supports, and teachers’ belief systems intersect in a complex way that ultimately determines how pedagogical reform occurs locally (Frykholm, 2004; Smith & Southerland, 2007). When policy reform and teachers’ beliefs are in conflict, resistance and failure to sustain reform result over time (Kyriakides, 1997; Whitson, 2008). These complexities arise from the internal and external barriers that teachers experience through the implementation process of policy reform. Frykholm (2004) found that teachers’ perceptions of local policy
reform influenced levels of discomfort with change. Teachers’ self-efficacy determined their tolerance for discomfort, which ultimately impacted the fidelity of implementation through the reform process. Furthermore, Staley and Leonardi (2016) found in their qualitative study of 16 pre-service literacy teachers around gender and sexual diversity curricula that it is important to support pre-service teachers in leaning into “tolerance for discomfort, uncertainty, and ambiguity” while recognizing that “emotional discomfort should not be perceived as wholly negative…[but as] generative” (p. 225).

Teachers’ beliefs about history, knowledge schema, socialization within their discipline, moral values, and perception of how students learn all influence how teachers approach the content area (Sawyer & Laguardia, 2010). Reforming such deeply-engrained beliefs and behaviors within a discipline cannot be easily changed, particularly with LGBTQ issues that have been absent from curricular policy throughout the history of public education. Demir and Yurdakul (2015) encouraged the curricular reform process to be flexible as “empathy development and change in attitudes can take a long time” (p. 3653). These facets of teachers’ belief systems related to educational practice further complicate the intersection of beliefs and ethics when faced with professional dilemmas. Without the proper training or experience, it is reasonable to conclude that “many ethical dilemmas stem from lack of confidence in educational abilities and a sense of failure to act properly” (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011, p. 654). Ethical conflicts, or dilemmas, cannot be avoided in teaching, but teachers “can find various way [sic] of handling them depending on their awareness and ability to discriminate between alternatives and reasons justifying their actions” (Colnerud, 1997, p. 629). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that without education, preparation, or resources through which to do so, teachers are limited in
resolving practical dilemmas related to addressing sexuality and gender constructs in the context of their work.

No matter what a teacher believes personally, s/he “has a moral and legal obligation to respect every student and prevent harassment and bullying” (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012, p. 457). Because pre-service education is minimal for teachers on LGBTQ issues in schools, teachers often claim they are not prepared to address these topics with students, parents, or in the curriculum and even when they do, it may only address these complex issues on the surface (Smith, 2015). These beliefs result in teachers negotiating levels of risk to address LGBTQ topics in local curriculum with students and their parents, though there is a lack of empirical data to support the risk of potentially losing their professional position because of such action (Smith, 2015). Research suggests that teachers’ belief systems be explored through the collective analysis of primary policy documents to create shared interpretations, address misconceptions, and develop best practices to increase the chance of more consistent and accurate outcomes of local policy reform (Eisenbach, 2012; Frykholm, 2004; Smith & Southerland, 2007; Whitson, 2008).

Eisenbach (2012) suggests even more work should be done by teachers who are provided with a scripted curriculum through reform efforts, as this implementation reveals personal ideologies that drive pedagogical practices, which may ultimately conflict with the curriculum itself. When faced with curricular reform, teachers must challenge their own assumptions, perceptions, and beliefs about pedagogy and assessment as well as providing buy-in for effective implementation and outcomes. Principals and other school leaders should also recognize and support teachers’ emotions throughout the change process because teachers who feel
unsupported and overwhelmed become resistant to new content and pedagogies, further hindering the change process (Gibson & Brooks, 2012).

Heterosexual teachers who commit to “ally work” (Ryan, 2016) through the “ally identity” in schools emulate how they are positioned to minimize “the risk of being sanctioned specifically because of their sexual or gender identities” (Smith, 2015). Smith’s (2015) narrative analysis of seven white, heterosexual, females who self-identified as “ally” teachers for LGBTQ youth revealed “an underlying belief that teachers have the means an opportunity to provide care for these students that will make them feel safe and more comfortable in school”, though she raised the question as to whether or not being an LGBTQ ally is enough to disrupt institutional heteronormativity (p. 239). The concern is that through such work, teachers may unintentionally hold a deficit view of LGBTQ youth who are solely portrayed as a victimized population of students that need to be saved (Smith, 2015). Jennings and Macgillivray (2011) called this the “victim narrative”, which is heavily portrayed in multicultural texts that are LGBTQ-inclusive (p. 58). Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand a broader, more positive representation of LGBTQ youth’s issues and histories so that classroom environments reflect identities accurately in the community and within the content beyond a basic level of safety and toward the deconstruction of heteronormative structures in schools.

**LGBTQ-Inclusive Pedagogies**

A qualitative phenomenological study of 19 primary teachers’ experience with the concept of diverse sexualities found that young children in elementary school contexts contribute to an environment where teachers’ “pedagogical responses to diverse sexualities is a complex and often emotionally charged topic” (van Leen & Ryan, 2016, p. 721). Children do ask questions about and contribute to homophobic discourse in elementary settings, which prove to
be problematic for teachers that are unprepared to attend to these issues. Contributing to the complexity of these disruptive pedagogies, Schieble (2012) found in her critical discourse analysis of three early-childhood education educators and the course instructor that making space for all voices to be heard causes “pedagogical conundrums” that require both pre- and in-service teachers to question their beliefs and pedagogical approaches (pp. 220-221).

Inequities in education have been perpetuated due to unavoidable dilemmas that arise from external barriers such as institutionalized oppression and conflicting policies in teaching practice. HSS teachers must consciously address institutionalized oppression in the form of a pedagogy for social justice. Franklin (2014) suggested “that it is the teachers who should do the institutional transforming to promote learning through careful implementation of curriculum and pedagogy through a critical lens” (p. 75). This furthers the need for pedagogies that allow elementary HSS educators to teach for social justice without having to succumb to the constraints of political and social influences. Paris (2012) suggested the use of a culturally relevant pedagogy to “make teaching and learning relevant and responsive to the languages, literacies, and cultural practices of students across categories of difference and (in)equality” (p. 94).

As the fulcrum of progressive change in LGBTQ education, elementary HSS educators must continue to mediate between such external influences on the communities to promote equitable access to a multicultural curriculum that is LGBTQ-inclusive. Adding LGBTQ curriculum is not enough on its own to combat homophobia unless such ally work also addresses heterosexuality as a socially-constructed privilege (Schieble, 2012). Teachers must accept the responsibility of creating socially-just pedagogies, while influencing change to motivate others to join toward the pursuit of socially-just educative spaces within local school communities.
Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model of nested environmental structures explains that “[a]ctive engagement in, or even mere exposure to what others are doing often inspires the person to undertake similar activities on [their] own” (p. 6). Elementary HSS educators are therefore provided an opportunity to implement change on a large scale by not simply teaching historical content with accuracy, but modeling what LGBTQ inclusivity looks like through civic engagement. Sawyer and Laguardia (2010) concluded that applying historical knowledge to address the disequilibrium between the past and present “may inspire students, showing them courage under oppression and agency in the face of tyranny” (p. 2018). The changing political landscape in our country toward conservative ideologies and away from a progressive legislative agenda, may be the perfect time to learn from relevant examples in history. This knowledge can support civic engagement toward socially-just causes such as LGBTQ-inclusive policies in public education that seek to include, not exclude, marginalized populations.

**Conclusion**

Curriculum and pedagogy are inextricably linked (Whitson, 2008), yet there is only an implication that pedagogy should reform with curricular policy changes (Cuban, 2012; Desimone, 2013; MDESE, 2015, March). Large-scale curricular policy changes at the state level are guided by curricular frameworks, though these frameworks do not dictate pedagogy through which to achieve the content standards (Cuban, 2012; Desimone, 2013; MDESE, 2015, March). Without clear guidance, resources, or communication from policy makers or administrators, such local reform efforts have failed (O’Neil, 2007; Meier et al., 2004; Smith & Southerland, 2007). These leadership failures have increased the rift between curricular policy mandates and teachers’ perceptions of such changes, diminishing the outcomes of reform efforts and trust within the profession (Kyriakides, 1997; Leader & Osborne, 2008).
Early-childhood and elementary educational settings continue to be contributing factors to homophobic and heterosexist attitudes, though HSS curricula in California and Massachusetts continue to be the most accessible and appropriate place for LGBTQ-inclusive curricular topics (Ashcraft, 2006; Brant & Tyson, 2016; Duke & McCarthy, 2009; Flores, 2012; Greytak et al., 2016; MDESE, March, 2015; Smolkin & Young, 2011; Vecellio, 2012). Multicultural educational approaches to curriculum in public education, in addition to multicultural resources used within that curriculum, represent the most appropriate vehicle for equitably representing all identities in truly democratic elementary HSS classrooms (Ayers, 2010; Meier et al., 2004; Demir & Yurdakul, 2015). LGBTQ individuals are considered a cultural group as a result of their complex, intersecting identities and thus should be represented through accurate text resources that reflect students in the classroom, as well as into the lives of those that are different (Bishop, 1990; Dworin & Bomer, 2008; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Tschida et al., 2014).

Teachers must be supported in this work to avoid essentializing identities through stereotyped representations, negative, or biased texts toward multicultural resources that promotes tolerance and acceptance of others, which can lead to reduced bullying in schools and teachers’ resistance in addressing these topics (Demir & Yurdakul, 2015; Greytak et al., 2016; Flores, 2012; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Patterson, 2013; Smolkin & Young, 2011). Beyond text resources, teachers’ practices must be supported through professional development and training because LGBTQ-inclusive topics are rarely included in teacher preparation (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Smolkin & Young, 2011). As California embarks on curricular policy change toward the explicit inclusion of LGBTQ topics, districts must consider curricular policies, structures, resources, and practices and their potential impacts on student outcomes.
Elementary HSS teachers must develop socially-just pedagogies (Shieble, 2012; Paris, 2012) to properly address LGBTQ curriculum and the power struggles between heterosexuality and homosexuality as cultural constructs. For this to be effective in practice, teacher preparation programs must include a curriculum that fosters safe spaces and opportunities to critically reflect on positionality and pedagogical practices related to the interruption of heteronormativity (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011), faculty that are prepared to mediate personal conflicts in the pre-service classroom as well as providing opportunities to know and learn from LGBTQ families compared to heterosexual family structures (Kintner-Duffey et al., 2012), and multicultural text resources that give greater attention to LGBTQ concepts, terminology, histories, and examples of empowered individuals who can act as historical role models (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011). This study sought to explore how teachers address the complexities of LGBTQ-inclusive practices through their narrated experiences with the intention of understanding how they feel prepared to do this work, and what other supports are needed for them to truly disrupt heteronormativity in practice.

**Summation**

This literature review explored the ways in which educational policies intersect with institutionalized systems and practices that perpetuate heteronormative discourses that arguably can be disrupted through teachers’ preparation and the development of LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogies. However, there is minimal research in elementary HSS that qualitatively explores how teachers’ narratives of their own experiences with disrupting heteronormative discourses reflect the degree to which they were prepared to do so. The research on pre-service education presents teachers as underprepared and sometimes unwilling to actively engage in identity work necessary to contribute to more inclusive learning environments. This is a result of a lack of
resources through which to teach multicultural topics, the marginalized presentation of LGBTQ individuals within the majority of those that are available, and the instructors’ inexperience with the complexity of LGBTQ identities as a whole.

Federal policies provide financial incentives for public education agencies to comply with nondiscrimination rules yet have little proactive accountability for those individuals who are at risk. Research conducted at the secondary level has proven only minimal causal links between LGBTQ students’ perception of safe learning environments or improved academic performance and policies in place to effect such changes. State curricular policies provide loopholes for educators to omit, evade, or marginalize LGBTQ identities, ultimately complicating a clear path for teachers toward LGBTQ-inclusion at the elementary level. It is unclear whether curricular policy reform efforts at the state-level will result in positive school climates for LGBTQ individuals. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the new text resources being developed by publishing companies to meet the needs of policy reform will truly disrupt the consensus heteronormative narrative that has dominated HSS education in the US. One link between these gaps in the literature is understanding how teachers feel prepared to enact policies, implement curricular resources, and apply learnings from pre-service education in order to develop more LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogies. Furthermore, the research suggests that it is through a collective, shared understanding of policies and multicultural curricular resources that teachers can actively reflect upon and understand their role in the disruption of cultural norms before engaging in LGBTQ-inclusive practices.

The literature supports the argument for a study that qualitatively explores elementary HSS teachers’ preparedness to disrupt heteronormative discourses. This study sought to understand how teachers’ narratives reveal the factors that complicate and support local LGBTQ-
inclusive pedagogies. It is through understanding these internal and external barriers and pathways, and how teachers make meaning from their own experiences, that future research could suggest ways to increase the quality and quantity of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula.

Ultimately, the research argues that disrupting heteronormative discourses in elementary education could break down the social and cultural barriers that negatively impact LGBTQ individuals, and those who have LGBTQ friends, and family members.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to understand how teachers’ stories reflect the degree to which they give voice or contribute to the silence around LGBTQ-inclusive topics in HSS curricula, and how their professional preparedness undergirded those decisions. Though there is a paucity of research on bringing LGBTQ topics into elementary HSS, the existing research indicates “teachers are grossly unprepared to bring LGBTQ topics, events, and people into the social studies” (Maguth & Taylor, 2014, pp. 24-25). The following sections of this chapter will outline the research design and rationale for the use of a narrative inquiry methodology. Furthermore, participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis processes will be described. These methods were designed to maximize the credibility and applicability of the outcomes, while maintaining an ethical approach that honored the integrity of the participants and their stories in this study.

A Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Research Puzzle

Merriam (2009) explained that qualitative researchers “are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Narrative inquiry as a qualitative method provided a theoretical lens on the stories that shape individuals’ lives through which they find meaning related to life experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) were the first to use the term narrative inquiry in the field of education, rooted in Deweyan philosophy that life is education, and education is lived experience (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 22). Thus, it was a narrative inquiry methodology that supported the use of teachers’ narratives related to
experiences with LGBTQ topics in education that shed light on this study’s “research puzzle” (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 29).

A research puzzle goes beyond the formulation of a research question at the beginning of a qualitative study and seeks to understand the complexity of an ever-changing phenomena that continues to “change as the research progresses” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 73). The research puzzle of this study was shaped by the complexities of teachers’ experiences with LGBTQ-inclusive themes within the curricula of their situated contexts. This resulted in multiple questions that guided the initial line of inquiry, though I anticipated that the narratives would continuously shape the direction of the research puzzle as the data was collected and analyzed. The research questions that guided the initial inquiry of this study were as follows:

1. How do teachers’ stories reflect their preparedness to disrupt heteronormative constructs through the inclusion of LGBTQ themes in their local curriculum?
2. How do teachers navigate the decision to voice or silence LGBTQ-inclusive themes in the HSS curriculum?
3. How do teachers recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas surrounding LGBTQ-inclusive themes?

The first and primary research question sought to address the lack of teachers’ preparedness to engage in this work as it was reviewed in the literature. The second research question sought to answer how decision-making processes reveal the degree to which teachers feel prepared to address LGBTQ-inclusive curricula. Furthermore, the third question sought to understand how personal ethics undergird these decisions, because ethical dilemmas can result from a lack of preparedness, and cannot be avoided in education (Colnerud, 1997; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).
Critical Paradigm

Dewey (1938) considered education, life, and experience as “one and the same” (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 220). Experience is personal and social, and both are ever present because individuals cannot be extracted from their related social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Because Dewey’s theoretical underpinnings shape a broad theoretical boundary for inquiry, it is necessary to frame this methodology within an educational context. Xu and Connelly (2010) argued that school-based inquiry is “mostly unconcerned with abstract [theoretical] boundaries” though “narrative inquiry boundaries with post positivism, Marxism, critical theory and post structuralism” (pp. 350-351). More directly, a Foucauldian, poststructuralist approach to narrative “is understood through the structures and forces of discourse, power and history” (Tamboukou, 2012, p. 88). Because such boundaries should be taken into consideration when framing the line of inquiry and aligning it within a theoretical framework, it was important to recognize these theoretical underpinnings of this study’s narrative inquiry approach.

This study was framed through Queer Theory, which is both critical and poststructuralist. An inquiry shaped through a critical paradigm accounts for the “social, political, economic, ethnic, and gender antecedents” that situate the inquiry which “acts to erode ignorance and misapprehensions…to[ward] transformation” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). Participants’ narratives were analyzed through a critical “queer” lens to understand how heteronormative social constructs influence teachers’ enactment of HSS curriculum within a given context. This context was viewed through Clandinin and Connelly’s (2006) “commonplaces of narrative inquiry”: temporality (time), sociality (social interactions), and place (p. 226). These commonplaces of narrative inquiry created a metaphorical three-dimensional space that helped to
frame the line of inquiry along a spectrum within each. The temporal space recognizes the past, present, and future contexts of the studied experiences, while sociality recognizes the balance between the individual in relation to the social space, and finally, the situated place in which the experience occurs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Employing a narrative inquiry methodology suggested a delicate balance between the participants and researcher who “lived” in these shared commonplaces of narrative inquiry as each interpreted experience as evidenced through their stories (Xu & Connelly, 2010).

Similar to a critical paradigm, Creswell’s (2009) “advocacy worldview” seeks to give voice to a marginalized group with a goal of reform or change (p. 9). The assumption that undergirded this study was that in making a conversational space to interact, understand, and “queer” teachers’ experiences, that “understanding [subtle and overt manifestations of oppression would lead] to more control of their lives through collective action” (Merriam, 2009, p. 36). It was through the dialectical approach of this methodology that change was “facilitated as reconstructions [we]re formed and individuals [we]re stimulated to act on them” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115) in an effort to disrupt oppressive power structures in the local contexts in which they were situated.

Participants

Narrative inquiry places a strong emphasis on the people who are involved in the study, as they are seen “as embodiments of lived stories…that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). I submitted a completed Application for Approval for Use of Human Participants in Research form to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northeastern University to obtain approval to conduct this research. Upon the time that
this application, and the recruitment, interview, and consent documents were approved by the institution, I began the process of recruitment for participation in this study.

**Population and Sampling**

It was important for me to consider who would participate, and how many participants were necessary to “yield in-depth information with which to achieve the study’s aim” (Wells, 2011, p. 19). Wells (2011) further explained that many “widely cited” narrative studies have an \( n \) size of one participant, though generally five is accepted for most complex types of narrative analyses (p. 20). For this study, I aimed for a sampling of 2-4 participants, and ultimately received signed consent documents from three participants. Small research populations or samples in qualitative methods minimizes the generalizability of the outcomes, which suggested that non-probabilistic, or purposeful sampling was the most appropriate choice (Merriam, 2009).

Participants were recruited through snowball or network sampling, “the most common form of purposeful sampling” (Merriam, 2009, p. 79). Here, participants who were selected based on the initial criteria could recommend others who also fit said criteria. Purposeful sampling required the use of criteria for choosing participants. Initially, I had proposed three criteria: (1) the participant was an elementary (K-6) teacher who (2) explicitly taught HSS at least 20% of their assigned course load, and (3) had been in their school for at least two years to increase the likelihood that the individual knows both the local curriculum and the school culture. These criteria were included with a formal email invitation to individuals unknown to the researcher seen in Appendix A. In an effort to avoid what Creswell (2009) calls “backyard research” with familiar participants, recruitment encouraged the participation of individuals that were unfamiliar to me in order to avoid compromising the interpretation of the data. Through an initially successful snowball sampling approach, the email was sent to nearly one-thousand
recipients through email and social media platforms. Unfortunately, after twelve weeks of outreach and follow-up, there was only one respondent. This respondent met the criteria, and when the consent documents were received, the individual did not wish to participate. The lack of participants caused me to reconsider the formal email approach for recruitment, as well as the criteria in hopes of obtaining participants for the study.

The changes to recruitment required me to reapply to Northeastern University’s IRB with a memorandum outlining my request, which included the following revised criteria for participation: (1) the participant was a K-8 classroom teacher who integrated social studies themes within their local curriculum and aligned to the HSS standards; and (2) the participant has been in their school for at least two years to increase the likelihood that the individual knows both the local curriculum and the school culture. Once approved, these criteria were part of an approved flyer and recruitment email sent to contacts in the field of education (see Appendices A, B, & C). The decision to create a flyer helped in the recruitment efforts by expediting and expanding the information through social media networks. Ultimately, I received requests from seven individuals, three of whom met the criteria and consented to participate.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers require the collection of multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2009). Narrative inquiry in the social sciences, particularly education, is a methodological shift that evoked seeing stories as data and an acceptance of multiple realities through the individual perspective and away from universal understandings, and thus, should be treated with care by the researcher (Huber et al., 2013). It is important to understand that a narrative inquiry study within a school-based context will be “both phenomena and method” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, 354). Narrative inquiry as a research methodology is an outgrowth of other conceptualizations of
studying phenomena through the written and spoken word such as narrative unity, narratology, narrative analysis, and literary narrative (Clandinin et al., 2007). Narrative inquiry is centered on thinking within stories, rather than just about stories (Clandinin, Cave, & Berendonk, 2017).

My primary aim was not to discover the narrator’s accuracy of the spoken word, but to understand the meaning attached to those words and events, and how it implicated (inter)actions of or around the individual (Chase, 2011). It is an ongoing concern for researchers who employ narrative inquiry because “the distinction between fact and fiction is muddled” within participants’ stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 179). In comparison to its closest counterpart, narrative research, narrative inquiry seeks the “smaller stories” through a variety of documents outside of interviews and conversations to shed light on the participant’s experiences through putting pieces together, or the micro lens on the line of inquiry through a close relationship between researcher and participant(s) (Chase, 2011). Though closely related to an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology, a narrative research analysis focuses on participants’ experiences and seeks to extrapolate a story across multiple interviewees’ experiences from more of an observational distance from the line of inquiry. For the purposes of this qualitative study, the data was collected in the form of various field texts gathered in conjunction with participants’ stories, or narratives, through which I sought to create a semi-structured interview space to inquire more deeply about those stories, and field texts at a given time and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Field Texts as Data

Field texts, rich with detail, “need to be routinely and rigorously kept…to fill the spaces created by memory accounts of events” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 95). The intentional planning of field texts as data further complement both the teachers’ narratives, and other field
texts within the data set. Furthermore, the researcher’s and participants’ field texts must be consistently grounded within the boundless three-dimensional inquiry space of temporal, spatial, and personal/social (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study’s field texts included (1) a detailed researcher’s journal, (2) participants’ journal maintained during the study, (3) transcriptions of six semi-structured interviews, and (4) visual images and curriculum documents related to the participant’s local HSS curriculum. Other source documents from participants were optional. Visual images and curriculum documents were not imported to MAXQDA for coding analysis but were used to build context with participants’ spoken and written words.

**Researcher and participant journals.** Journals are a methodical choice as a field text and “are a powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experience[s]” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 102). It was through these journals that experiences were captured, in detail, by the individual which could be revisited later as part of the collective narrative. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) suggested that the narrative inquiry researchers need to be attentive to the relationship with the field texts, and “to write journal entries that portray the relational circumstances of the situation represented” (p. 95). My researcher’s journal was divided into two sections: (1) to capture chronological field notes throughout the study to capture the co-construction of lived experiences, and (2) to capture reflective memos which act as a more distant observation of feelings on those same experiences. In this way, I intended to strike a balance between living *within* the narrative space and living *outside* of it when possible.

It was also important to recognize that through a narrative inquiry design, audience is always present in the journal, which “interpretively shapes” the field text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 102). The choices that are made in qualitative research say as much about the actual field texts, and participants’ narratives themselves, which require a conscious effort to record
seemingly innocuous choices throughout the duration of the study. These choices “also say much about what is not said and not noticed” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 93). Thus, it is through a detailed researcher’s journal that choices were explicitly documented as field notes because they pertain to each aspect of the data collection and analysis processes. These choices then become data that compliment other field texts within and outside of the journal itself.

In the same way that my journal could capture the lived experience of the study, it was important for the participants to keep their own journal between interviews as a means of grounding their experiences in Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and locality. My only request to participants was to write freely about their experiences that relate to the study in an effort to deepen the narrative in the context in which it is situated. Schön (1983) argued that professional practice (i.e. teaching) is repetitive, which “becomes increasingly tacit and spontaneous” resulting in missed opportunities to change behaviors on the spot (p. 61). Through Schön’s (1983) view of reflection-in-action, the participant’s reflective journal sought to “surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice” (p. 61). Narratives structured through a journal “involve an intentional reflexive process of teachers interrogating their own teaching and learning” which seek to “reveal a growing awareness of this in-between space as the necessary terrain of teaching and learning” (Latta & Kim, 2010, p. 140). The use of a participant journal was supported by the critical frame of this study which sought participants’ active engagement to ultimately support a transformative change in practice.

**Interviews.** Each participant was asked to attend two in-person interviews with an optional third interview as a follow-up via email or phone call to discuss my initial findings. This third interview, which Creswell (2009) calls “member checking” (p. 191) sought to
determine the accuracy of the findings before completion of the analysis. Upon agreement to the informed consent process (see Appendix D), participants allowed these interviews to be recorded, from which I had five of the six total audio files transcribed through a third party (www.Rev.com) for analysis. The transcription of these interviews became a field text, which is widely used in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and other qualitative methodologies (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). I took observational notes in my journal before, during, and after the interviews to capture details of the experience, which Creswell (2009) recommended in case of equipment failure or if the recorder stops working. To further prevent this, a back-up digital recorder was on-hand in case the first stops working but did not become necessary in any of the interviews. Furthermore, this study was not intended to take place in a certain location, so participants chose an interview setting that was most appropriate for them.

The most appropriate and consistent way to engage with participants’ narratives was through semi-structured interviews, which many narrative inquirers employ (Endo et al., 2008; Herrin, 2017; McGannon & Smith, 2014; Sweeney, 2013; Xu & Connelly, 2010). Merriam (2009) explained that semi-structured interviews are guided by a protocol that is comprised of both structured questions that the researcher may want to ask all participants, and other more open-ended questions that are in no predetermined order. An interview protocol (see Appendix E) was designed to include: (1) a heading to record the context of the interview; (2) instructions for the interviewer to follow for consistency across participants’ interviews; (3) a purposefully designed set of questions, sub-questions, and probes that guide the line of inquiry; and (4) a final thank-you for participation with next steps for the participant (Creswell, 2009). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) went further to suggest that even semi-structured interviews can feel inauthentic to the relationships between the interviewer and the participants, which can become more
conversational, but I did not go as far as what Merriam (2009) described as an unstructured interview which lacks specific questions or outcomes for the inquiry.

**Visual images.** The appeal of a narrative inquiry approach to data collection is the suggestion that beyond field notes, reflective journals, and structured interviews, visual images can also be “socially situated narrative texts that demand interpretation” (Chase, 2011, p. 426). Some recent narrative inquiry studies in the field of teacher education have also used visual images (Chase, 2011; Herrin, 2017). Visual images can elicit “a memory around which we construct stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2009, p. 114). Photographs could be provided by the participant because its choice inherently suggests what is important to them. Visual images, or photos, can also be used in the form of “photo elicitation” by the researcher within the interview experience to prompt participants for verbal data (Merriam, 2009, p. 146). I invited the inclusion of photographs or visuals from texts to engage the participant in narrative experiences within their professional practices, but did not require their use within the context of the individual researcher-participant experience. Furthermore, these field texts could be triangulated to strengthen the validity of this qualitative study (Creswell, 2009).

**Procedures**

Qualitative research requires careful planning of procedures throughout a study to ensure the validity, or accuracy, of the data and the study’s findings. Creswell (2009) called this “qualitative validity” which is based on the researcher’s employment of methods and procedures to check for accuracy before, during, and after the data is collected and analyzed within a given study (p. 190). Quality qualitative research also should consider qualitative reliability, which ensures that the chosen methods and procedures for the study are consistent across multiple researchers and projects (Creswell, 2009). The following section will describe the plan for data
collection and analysis using Creswell’s (2009) six stages which began with organizing and preparing raw data using online storage, followed by coding texts through the use of MAXQDA software, and finally, the interpretation and presentation of the findings from the data collected in this study.

**Data Organization and Storage**

This first stage began with the data collection, as previously described. The raw data from this study was found in the field texts collected for analysis. These included, but were not limited to, interview transcriptions from Rev.com, researcher’s field notes from the journal, participants’ journal entries, visual images, and curriculum documents. Raw data was scanned into a computer, cataloged, and saved to my online cloud storage which is password protected. Hard copies were locked in a filing cabinet for the duration of the study and will be destroyed at the completion of the project. This information was provided to the participants in the informed consent documents. Furthermore, I had an external hard drive, also password protected, that stored these documents as a backup. All documents were named according to the chosen/assigned pseudonyms, whichever was agreed-upon by the participants in this study to maintain privacy of the collected data.

**Data Analysis**

The second stage of data analysis process involved reading through the raw data once it was collected (Creswell, 2009). At that time, I sought high-level, general meaning and notes were taken in my journal to document these early findings. This stage occurred concurrently as the data was collected from other participants’ field texts. Once stored on the appropriate drives, field texts were transferred to the online data analysis program, MAXQDA, which “helps researchers systematically evaluate and interpret qualitative texts” (Creswell, 2009, p. 188). This
program was known to me from prior use, supporting its choice as a means of facilitating the analysis process throughout the duration of the study.

Similar to other qualitative methodologies, the analysis process continued with the coding of stories as data, which was primary to determine emergent themes from individuals’ process of making meaning through experiences. Creswell (2009) defines coding as “the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (p. 186). Because the practice of hand coding is time consuming and can make it difficult to manage codes across a myriad of field texts, the use of MAXQDA software facilitated the analysis process in a more efficient way. Appendix F provides screenshots of the MAXQDA coding software to show how codes can be organized by colors within and across multiple documents and further organized into sub-codes during the analysis process. Furthermore, to strengthen the validity of the choice of codes, it benefitted me to consider what Creswell (2009) calls intercoder agreement that checked the use of codes with a peer to confirm the interpretation is reasonable.

There is no one method to uncovering themes from the data, though inductive analysis is the most common approach in qualitative studies. Narrative inquiry studies in the field have employed a cross-case analysis (Atkinson, 2009), three-level coding including open, axial, and selective (Endo et al., 2008), dialogic narrative analysis (Sweeney, 2013), concept coding analysis (Herrin, 2017), and reflexive analysis which involves both inductive and deductive methods (Latta & Kim, 2010). Creswell (2009) explained that the “traditional approach in the social sciences is to allow the codes emerge during the data analysis” (p. 187). Codes that are developed through an inductive analysis of the data should be based in the literature, and could also be surprising, unusual, interesting to the reader, or ones that address a theoretical
perspective (Creswell, 2009). Using an inductive coding approach, the chosen codes for this study were stored in the MAXQDA software, but were also written in my journal for further transparency and reference (see Table 1).

The fourth and fifth stages in Creswell’s (2009) suggested method for qualitative data analysis was to “generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis” (p. 189). These emergent themes, typically five to seven in qualitative studies, become the major findings of the study that are supported through thick descriptions of participants’ narratives, corroborated by field texts (Creswell, 2009) that are set within the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2009). Through a narrative inquiry approach, these overarching and interconnected themes are woven through participants’ narratives into a story line that presents the findings for the audience and can deepen the complexity of the analysis (Creswell, 2009). The narrative presentation can weave in visual images as well as theoretical models as applicable to the findings of the study.

The final of six stages in data analysis involved the interpretive meaning of the data. This presentation can vary across qualitative methods, though it is most likely through an advocacy or critical approach to be presented as further questions that are gleaned from the findings in comparison to the literature or “action agendas for reform or change” (Creswell, 2009, pp. 189-190).

**Conclusion**

The six in-person interviews for this study were conducted over a six-week period at a location of each participant’s choice and were audio recorded using the Rev Voice Recorder application (i.e. “Rev app”) on my iPhone. In the two weeks between each participant’s first and second interviews, they were asked to keep a reflection journal, in a format of their choice,
related to our initial discussions about gender and sexuality in their respective curricula. Five of the six interview recordings were transcribed through the Rev app, and one was transcribed by me in an effort to save on cost. All interview transcripts and reflection journals were imported and analyzed through the MAXQDA coding software for Macintosh Operating Software (OS). After an initial analysis of all interview and reflection journal data, participants’ profiles were shared with them individually via email and any additional clarifying questions with the option for telephone, email, or Skype/Google Hangout discussion to confirm my interpretation of the data within one week’s time. In all, the analysis occurred concurrently as the data was collected, and thoroughly reanalyzed upon completion of the collection phase.

Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research

It is through Chase’s (2011) description of the various ways to approach narrative inquiry, and the nature of qualitative methods, that it is clear there is no one way to approach this methodology in practice. This allows for the flexibility in the design of the study yet can be challenged within the field of discipline if the analysis is not performed in a way that yields credible or valid themes across a body of work. Furthermore, the sampling size of narrative studies limits the generalizability of the outcomes (Chase, 2011; Clandinin et al., 2017; Endo et al, 2008; Herrin, 2017), but the researcher is tasked with cogently arguing the viability of their interpretation of the narrative data (Chase, 2011). Because of these parameters in a field that is still developing (Chase, 2011; Huber et al., 2013), it is integral for the researcher to approach a line of inquiry with an understanding that transparency of data collection and analytic methods, while balancing an approach that can lead into and from within the studied inquiry to present findings that are clear and credible to the audience. The goal of the narrative inquirer is to
“create texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

The following section outlines the ethical considerations, credibility, transferability, transparency, and limitations of my study which sought to frame a valid and reliable qualitative study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are “central in narrative inquiries” and Clandinin et al.’s (2007) seventh of eight elements through which to design and implement a study (p. 30). The review of ethical considerations began with approval from the IRB, but it was only the beginning of the process. Participants of a study could not be recruited until such permission was granted to conduct the study, leaving me unable to approach potential participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher tows an ethical line when making decisions along the ethical boundaries of qualitative research, and thus, I was conscious of even the smallest choices which were recorded in my journal.

Ethics is nearly intrinsic to a critical paradigm because the inquiry is approached by the researcher with a “moral tilt” as “implied by the intent to erode ignorance and misapprehensions” within the context of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). Thus, it was essential that I was transparent in my own personal values and beliefs before, during, and after the research process so as to add credibility to the data, as well as with the research participants. My connection to the inquiry and beliefs were outlined in the Positionality Statement in the first chapter and was recaptured in narrative form in my journal as part of the narrative beginnings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).
The nature of ethics in narrative inquiry, as it is in qualitative research, lies in the transparency of the data collection and analysis so that the reader understands the nature of both the researcher’s and the participants’ experiences through personal narratives. Xu & Connelly (2010) explain that “[n]arrative inquirers need to be aware of the complicated relationships that develop among themselves and their research situations” (p. 365) as they refer to the proverb that the more one learns, the less one knows. In narrative inquiry, the narratives are the collected data, but also become the presentation of newly formed understandings of individual experiences and further lines of inquiry. The balance of time spent in the life space must be managed through reflective memos and field notes to ensure that I maintained clarity of the line of inquiry, as well as to not blur the lines of this close relationship through such a methodology (Xu & Connelly, 2010). It was this potential closeness between researcher and participant that lead to purposeful sampling of individuals previously unknown to me to avoid “backyard research” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). My position as a policy maker for a state education agency had potential to blur the lines in trying to understand teachers’ practice around a moral issue if there is a mistrust of me or the institution in which I worked on behalf of the participant. The participants did not voice a conflict of interest in this way, nor did they voice any biases against my professional position, though I kept detailed memos and reflections about how such potential gave me pause throughout the data collection and analysis.

In presenting the findings of a narrative inquiry study, Huber et al. (2013) remind the researcher that the reader will experience “thinking narratively” and can become “entangled” in the story, further suggesting that interpretation of the story is on-going and continually shapes experiences (p. 230). I worked carefully to present the findings using larger portions of participants’ narratives in comparison to IPA or narrative analysis methodologies, which can
pose ethical considerations. Participants may not be willing to voice certain experiences knowing they could “feel vulnerable or exposed by narrative work” (Chase, 2011, 425). In cases like Herrin (2017) who re-storied the narrator’s events into chronological order, it may have caused the reader to interpret the story differently than the speaker intended. The meaning produced by the reader “does not stem from the capacity of language to create, stabilize, or express it, but rather from the abilities and resources of the reader to coconstruct it” (Atkinson, 2009, p. 94). This lends itself to the issues that can arise between researcher, participant(s), and the audience if not carefully planned before, during, and after the study’s conclusion.

Merriam (2009) explained that ethical dilemmas arise from qualitative studies which “are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings” (p. 230). In relation to this study’s topic, I carefully considered how the discovery of information could lead to an ethical dilemma. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted in their narrative inquiry approach that “being witness to [an] event might influence us” (p. 173). Ultimately, the validity and reliability of this study depends on the researcher’s ethics, so it was imperative to make decisions “in as ethically a manner as possible” to protect the participants from harm and maintain their privacy (Merriam, 2009, p. 230) through the use of pseudonyms in the collection of data and dissemination of findings.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The close personal interactions of qualitative research produce “special and often sticky problems of confidentiality and anonymity” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). Particularly in narrative inquiry, when stories and field texts provide in-depth information about a participant, it is necessary to consider how the participants’ identities can be protected. As qualitative researchers, we cannot guarantee anonymity in a meaningful way when others witness the
research, especially on site at a school (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). There was also the possibility that participants could change their mind from the beginning of the study to the end, which furthered the need for me to be aware of the shifting and changing nature of narrative inquiry which seeks to deeply engage participants in their own lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative study is dependent upon the validity strategies employed by the researcher (Creswell, 2009). The use of multiple validity strategies “enhance the researcher’s ability to assess the accuracy of the findings” and to convince the audience of that accuracy (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Thus, I intentionally used the following validity strategies with the collected data to strengthen the accuracy of the findings:

- The researcher’s *narrative beginnings* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) were written in my journal to help clarify any bias at the beginning of the study for the audience, in addition to the Positionality Statement in chapter one that sought to be transparent in my position to the inquiry being studied (Creswell, 2009, p. 192).

- Data *triangulation* was used to converge multiple field texts and perspectives to “build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Additionally, it was important for me to *present any discrepant information* across the data to increase the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2009).

- After the first two initial interviews with participants, the third meeting served the purpose of *member checking* which allows the participants to review the emergent themes and have a final discussion to comment on these findings before the analysis is finished (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Another name for member checking is *respondent validation*.
wherein Maxwell (2005) is quoted in Merriam (2009) saying it is “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do” (p. 217).

- The use of rich, thick narratives and descriptions provided an in-depth perspective on a particular finding, or theme, to strengthen the findings across field texts or multiple participants (Creswell, 2009, pp. 191-192).

**Member checking.** A critical juncture in the data analysis process came after the initial analysis and before the cross-case analysis for emergent themes in Creswell’s (2009) fourth and fifth stages. The third interview, which was conducted through email, consisted of the member checking, or respondent validation (Merriam, 2009) process which provided me an opportunity to confirm my initial findings with participants in the form of member profiles. These profiles were my first attempt at co-constructing the participants’ narratives with a balance of raw data, and thick descriptions through which a profile of each participant emerged. This part of the process provided each participant with a significantly long narrative to review in an effort to be sure that the findings were accurate, and not misinterpreted. Each participant provided a written agreement that the ways in which the stories were constructed accurately represented their words. Unexpectedly, because this was through email, it provided the researcher with additional data to consider before beginning the cross-case analysis regarding the transformative process of reflecting on one’s own words through the co-construction of individual narratives. Thus, the member checking part of the process became critical in bringing the data together with confirmation from each participant before moving into deeper analysis of the data.
Transferability

Narrative inquiry can be employed through multiple approaches across fields of discipline as its nature is complex, and still developing. Chase (2011) explained how narrative inquiry is pragmatic in applied psychological therapy where the what of the story is the focus of supporting the transformation of the participant. A constructivist approach focuses on how stories are constructed. And “reflexive interplay” seeks to understand how narratives shape and are shaped by one’s environment (Chase, 2011, p. 422). It is through a reflexive interplay that the narrative reality can shed light on what is or is not said, by or to whom, because of the time, place, and those who comprise the space (Chase, 2011). In narrative inquiry, these details matter in setting the context around the participants’ words. Furthermore, the flexibility in the use of field texts from participants also helped to corroborate their stories.

Dependability of the findings within a narrative inquiry study are grounded in the use of rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2009). Kohler Reissman (1993) calls this analysis criterion coherence where the interpretation of the data is as “thick as possible” relating to global, local, and themal levels (p. 67). Global coherence is the narrator’s goal for speaking, local coherence is what the narrator seeks to effect in the narrative, and themal coherence is the repetitive use of chunks of interview texts that address particular themes (Kohler Reissman, 1993). It is through (re)telling the participants’ narratives with multiple levels of coherence that the context and purpose are rich enough for the audience to be convinced of the presented findings.

Internal Audit

The nature of quality qualitative studies required the use of an internal audit, which is a detailed account of the data collection and analysis process that seeks to convince the audience of the methods used to draw conclusions from the data (Merriam, 2009). In most cases, these
items will be found as appendices (see Appendix F). For the purposes of transparency, the following paper trail will lead the reader through the data collection and analysis process which led me to the study’s conclusions: (1) research questions; (2) literature review; (3) collection of field texts including, but not limited to, researcher’s notes/reflections, interview transcriptions and protocols, visual images, and policy documents; (4) annotated transcripts with codes; (5) table of themes; (6) draft reports; and (7) final report.

**Self-reflexivity and Transparency**

It was important for me to consider that the role of narrative inquirer works both within the space with participants, but also with within themselves (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, as stories were interpreted within a given time and space, it was important to recognize where the researcher’s and participants’ narratives begin to show as part of a larger narrative, which may also yield internal biases held at a given time, and its role in the ways the data are presented to the reader. Merriam (2009) suggested the importance of self-reflexivity as quality qualitative method which supports the reader in understanding how the researcher “might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data” (p. 219). One section of my journal was intended to capture this on-going process throughout the study to capture assumptions, biases, and perspectives that increase transparency to strengthen credibility of the findings.

I believed that teachers must embrace all identities within the classroom environment and should work to equally represent them within the HSS curriculum through a multicultural approach. I was aware that this may not be the viewpoint of all teachers and proceeded with that in mind while researching. It was also important for me to understand primary experiences in education that occurred from the teacher’s perspective in contexts separate from those that will
participate in this study. This did not cloud my judgment when viewing the different ways teachers address identities within the local curriculum.

Though I considered one aspect of my whole identity as “other”, I recognized that most of my identity is considered privileged in Western society. Lorde (1984) explained that when individuals identify one aspect of their identities that is different, “we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practising” (par. 7). In my own research and practice related to LGBTQ-inclusive education, I clearly expressed that I do not speak on behalf of all LGBTQ individuals, but from a perspective of experiencing homophobic and heterosexist oppression within society as a student, a teacher, and as a citizen. It is through my current, yet evolving, position as a scholar-practitioner that I sought to better understand how teachers of all intersecting identities can be better understood and supported to appropriately give voice to LGBTQ identities within the HSS curriculum for all students’ benefit.

**Limitations**

Narrative inquiry is not just a methodology, but a process through which the researcher must live from beginning to the end of the study. The fluid parameters are both promising in flexibility of design, yet difficult in presenting credible co-constructed narratives in the field of research. This methodology provided a space through which teachers’ experiences shared through narrative data shed light on how they make meaning around lines of inquiry. In this case, I sought transformative change through co-constructing stories about identities by drawing on past experiences and to craft new stories that validate work in the field. Thus, the intentions of this study were to impact the participants’ future practice and contribute to the corpus of
research, while understanding that a small sampling and qualitative methods in general limit the
generalizability of this study’s findings (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Transferability is difficult in qualitative studies in social sciences because “human
behavior is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one
person experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). Though the same results would not yield from one
qualitative study to the next because the participants are unique variables, that does not imply the
methods of a narrative inquiry study are not valid. What is important is that given the data
collected, “the results make sense- they are consistent and dependable” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221).

The use of visual images or policy documents outside of the reliance on interview
transcripts can be problematic in that they were not designed for research purposes (Merriam, 2009). The absence of documents, or understanding their inherent limitations in unrepresentative
samples, can also be telling in narrative inquiry. As such, it was necessary to document within
my journal to build credibility around the use of these documents for research.
Chapter Four: Study Findings

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to understand how teachers’ stories reflected the degree to which they give voice or contribute to the silence around LGBTQ-inclusive topics in HSS curricula, and how their professional preparedness undergirded these decisions. The following chapter reports the findings from research collected through two in-person interviews, a third interview via email, and a collection of artifacts with three participants using the pseudonyms “Eppie,” “Carmen,” and “Penelope.” Each of the three participants met the criteria for study as classroom K-8 teachers who integrate themes of identity and HSS content standards within their local curriculum and have been in their schools at least two years. Their narratives, in addition to collected artifacts in the form of reflection journals, photos, and curriculum materials revealed the complicated nature of explicitly addressing gender and sexuality with students under the age of fourteen in school settings and the ethical dilemmas of practice that arise from LGBTQ curricular inclusion.

This chapter begins with a presentation of the four themes that emerged from an analysis of participants’ narratives and their respective artifacts. I used MAXQDA software to code 483 total segments across the collected data through which 16 codes and sub codes emerged through an inductive, cross-case analysis (see Table 1). Ultimately, these coded segments were organized into the following four themes: (1) awareness of self-identities; (2) awareness of students’ identities; (3) proactive disruption of identity labels through the (in)formal curriculum; and (4) mediating conflicting messages from external sources. Each theme will be presented through the field texts collected throughout this study. This chapter concludes with a summation of general insights about the data and the analysis process.
Table 1

Summary of Coded Segments and Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes &amp; Sub-codes</th>
<th># of Coded Segments</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>First Theme: Awareness of Self-Identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identity Label</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Second Theme: Awareness of Students’ Identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Value</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Third Theme: Proactive Disruption of Identity Labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Through the (In)formal curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question(ing)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Fourth Theme: Mediating Conflicting Messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>from External Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice/Silence</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Emergent Themes**

The following sections expand upon the field texts collected throughout this study. The six interviews were intentionally designed to elicit stories from participants related to LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, their own preparedness to address gender and sexuality in the HSS curriculum, and the dilemmas that arise in practice. It is important to note that many of the following stories, organized by themes, reveal the complexities of the various identity markers individuals carry, including, but not limited to, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, ability status, age, sexual orientation, and religion/spirituality. In seeking to understand the experiences with LGBTQ topics, it became clear to me through the following stories that an individual can carry a marginalized identity marker more dominantly over others. Because the individuals in this study all identified as heterosexual cisgender females, many of
the stories revolved around identities that were not LGBTQ, though they provide an important insight to the ways in which LGBTQ-inclusive themes are, or are not, broached in the local HSS curriculum.

First Theme: Awareness of Self-Identities

Individuals hold a variety of intersecting identities which are shaped by societal norms, and ultimately, by the individuals themselves. Through their stories, the participants shared how their own identities and life experiences influence their teaching practice. These identities included age, ability status, gender, sexuality, language, political-affiliation, ethnicity, religion, and race. Additionally, the participants shared their cultural roles, which also take on identities such as teacher/student, parent/child, wife/husband, friend/adversary, and citizen. It is through the intersection of these identities that the participants connected themselves to their students, the curriculum, and ultimately their goals toward more inclusive teaching practices. The following sections highlight each participant in their own words as to who they are, and how they see themselves at a given point in time. In doing so, it revealed that one must see others in relation to oneself as a means of understanding how identity influences, and is influenced by, those around us.

Carmen: ‘The Mentor, The Advocate’. “As phony as it sounds, I always feel like a lot of teachers will teach to the mind. I feel like I teach more to the soul, you know what I mean?” Carmen, a pseudonym provided by me, identifies with she/her/hers pronouns. She describes her most important identities as being a teacher and a mother of three children. Carmen has spent the earliest years of her five-year teaching career in the second of two elementary schools in the same urban school district on the southeast coast of Massachusetts. Baycity Public Schools (pseudonym) had a student population of nearly 13,000 students taught across 19 elementary
schools, 3 middle schools, and 3 high schools according to 2017-18 public data. Students’ racial demographics in Baycity included White, (41.3%), Hispanic (39.4%), African American (12.4%), Multi-racial/ non-Hispanic (5.4%), Asian (1%), Native American (0.4%), and Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander (0.1%).

Carmen is white, middle class, and monolingual, speaking only English as her primary language. She holds three professional teaching certifications in Elementary Education (grades 1-6), Special Education, and English as a Second Language (ESL). Her teaching experience has been focused on “teaching language acquisition, syntax, semantics to kids that speak other languages at home, other than English” through Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) programs, inclusive classroom settings, and most recently, K-2 ESL instruction in small groups. She describes her school as having 60-70% students that are non-native English-speaking students, or English Language Learners (ELLs). This is the same district in which she was a student herself, carrying pride in her hometown identity that she hopes will motivate her students to stay engaged in the city in which they live as they continue through their education.

In talking with Carmen, it became clear that she was inherently reflective about her practice and her students and knew how to leverage her personal skills and interests to enhance her professional practice. She values culture and identity, and building relationships with and among her students, which is at the forefront of her work. Most of our conversations were spent talking about Carmen’s students and colleagues, and she spent little time talking about herself. It was not her natural focus of conversation. This initially caused me to be disappointed, but the longer we talked, the more Carmen engaged with this inquiry process about her teaching and more subtly shared details of her own life. It was through this process that I saw Carmen as the
“Advocate,” putting other voices ahead of her own to support what they needed to feel valued and succeed.

Carmen’s formal pre-service education started with a four-year degree from a local state university in sociology, culminating in a fifth-year master’s in education (a program track that no longer exists) as she saw a change in what she wanted in her career. This change came as a result of her interest in studying people through “learning about different cultures, just people in general from different areas.” Carmen had the foresight to know before she entered the profession that she was “a little bit too emotional to go into social work” and that only seeing or hearing what students told her during the school day was the threshold of what she could professionally handle due to her empathic nature. Though she did note that her lifelong value of people, over material possessions, laid the foundation for her professional identity and approach to working with children.

When asked about her preparedness to teach, as a result of her formal pre-service education, Carmen noted that,

*I don’t think it prepared me that well to teach. I feel like teaching is something that you really have to experience it first-hand, be in the trenches to do. I think reading theories are nice, and you know, seeing what other people do, and reading about what people have studied and how they work, but until you get your students in front of you, you have no idea. I mean, I think I learned more from my mentors at school, and veteran teachers, watching how they did things. I think that made me into a better teacher. I think that prepared me more than the actual college courses that I took...*

It was clear in talking with Carmen that observing the needs of her colleagues, her students, and herself as a teacher was a prime source of data used to take action in supporting her community as a teacher and a mentor. It was less about drawing on the theories learned in her formal education, and more about learning from the relationships with her mentors. Mentoring was an important part of her own preparation as an in-service teacher. Her value of the community and
skills in building relationships set her up to be a mentor for all of those with whom she interacts at school in hopes that they will also be invested in the Baycity community and its students.

Carmen’s role as mentor and teacher is shown through her willingness to model questioning as a learning skill. More specifically, she sees teaching as an opportunity to strengthen students’ critical thinking skills, rather than to tell them how the world does, or should work:

> I don't think it's my job to tell them what to think, but instead to show them how to think. You know what I mean?...[Questioning makes them think more. I feel like if they think I think something, they just want to be like me because I'm the adult. I don't like to plant any seed, because then I just feel like they take on my opinion or what they think my opinion might be and I want to know what they really think...It is hard [not to impose my own ideas], especially with all the politics going on around. And they have questions and you're like, "Ugh," you know? I wish I could just be like, "This is how I feel," but I don't.

Carmen’s professional practice is shaped by her value of relationships and empathy for her students, many of which are in culturally disadvantaged positions. For her, the role of teacher is not about telling students how they should or should not think. Carmen seeks to help them develop their own voice, and a broader understanding of the world around them, so they can grow up and serve the community in which they will live. I had assumed incorrectly that Carmen enjoyed teaching ESL in her newer role, but she admitted that she feels less efficacious working in smaller groups, rather than whole-class, now that her district has asked her to use her ESL license which is difficult for teachers in her district to obtain:

> I just don't feel like I'm most effective in a small group setting like that, but I see kids just for short periods of time and then they leave. I just like being in the classroom with them all the time. I feel like I get more out of it...I feel like they need me there. I know that I'm a good [Sheltered English Immersion] teacher and just teaching them the aspects of language, it's just a small component that they need, and I feel like I'm more effective and I would be more impactful in their lives if I could teach them everything...

This does not detract from the work Carmen does with her students now, but she is reflective enough to know that she wants to be back in the classroom with a whole group. At this time, the
constraints of her district’s staffing require her to stay in this role at her school as no other classroom positions have opened up. She is still looking for opportunities but hopes that she can stay in her current school to maintain the relationships she has built with her students in recent years.

In looking to the past on her own elementary experiences, Carmen did not remember any formative experiences or “standout teachers,” labeling herself as an “average student” who “went with the flow.” Her demeanor during our conversations exemplified the same steady approach in talking with her about many things, and it was clear that she herself had the potential to become one of those standout teachers in her future that she did not remember having. When asked about what legacy she would want to leave at the end of her teaching career, which she admitted is too far away to think about, Carmen spoke to these values:

_I would hope that my students would describe me as someone who just made some kind of an impact on them. Not really academically, but more socially...Just someone that they felt like they could talk to or be honest with or go to for anything...I hope that’s what they get from me is how to actually form relationships with other people. That’s what I hope that they take away, because I feel like that’s what I try to create in my classroom with each of the kids, how they treat each other in my room and how I treat them, and they treat me. I hope that they learn how to form relationships like that and really always think for themselves and question things and feel like they can be open and honest with people. So that’s what I hope that they say, and I just hope my colleagues...say that they could have learned something from me in that same area. My principal said the other day, actually in a meeting, that the best teachers are not teachers with the best lessons. They’re the teachers who are able to form relationships with kids. And I was like, “Good, he sees the value in that.” I hope that’s what my colleagues see that I did for the school and I hope that my students can say that that’s what they got from me._

Carmen spent much of our time together talking about her identity as a teacher, a mother, and a mentor to new teachers. The ways in which Carmen shared her experiences were frank and succinct which provided clear answers to the questions posed, but at times, left some things unsaid or lacking detail from a researcher’s perspective. There was a noticeable distance with Carmen through the researcher-participant relationship. It did not feel like mistrust on either
end, but the distance felt intentional. I began to hypothesize that Carmen is always aware of, and prefers, some distance in new relationships which creates an implied social boundary. It was through her stories, and experiencing the researcher-participant relationship, that Carmen was seen as the mentor to all of those who need her guidance in each respective relationship.

**Penelope: ‘The Sage’**. “Well, somebody’s got to do it. If not me, who? If not now, when?” Penelope, a pseudonym chosen by the participant, identifies with she/her/hers pronouns. She identifies as a mother of two, a teacher, and a lifelong reader. Born in Wisconsin, eventually moving to New England because of her father’s work, Penelope finished her secondary-level education in the town in which she has worked over the last 30 years. Now living in a nearby community, Penelope has taught as a reading specialist for grades 6-8. Her middle school is one of two in the Princeton Public Schools (pseudonym) which serves approximately 550 of the district’s 4000 students. Princeton Public School district is located in Rhode Island’s Washington County and has an additional five elementary schools and one high school. The student racial demographics for the district are white (87%), Hispanic (6%), Multiracial (3%), Asian (2%), African American (1%), and Native American (1%).

Penelope is a teacher at her core. On the first day of school for the last 30 years, she invites her students to ask her anything. They have one chance for a no-holds-barred question and answer session. She reflected on how one of the most frequent, and admittedly boring questions she gets, is “Why did you become a teacher?” Her grandfather was an educator, and her earliest memories are playing school with her two younger sisters where she was the teacher who “got to boss them around.” In looking back on those early memories, Penelope shared that in her high school years she had teachers who paved the way for her to see that reading and education were “the foundation for anything and everything else that you want to do with the rest
of your life.” In her case, it was to teach reading and share that message with as many students as she could. In all, it was two of Penelope’s high school teachers that had a formative effect on her own primary identity as a teacher:

One was my seventh grade English teacher who was at this very school. We are good friends now, but she's since retired, but her enthusiasm and passion for literature and reading and discussion and the whole openness of the way she taught was really inspiring to me. I always felt comfortable in her class. I always enjoyed going to her class and sharing new ideas. No other teacher has ever done this before. Like teaching poetry with song lyrics and this was in the '70s, this was radical. Then in high school, my German teacher when I was a senior in high school also very passionate teacher, very energetic. Cared more about, I think, her students as people than about getting through the curriculum. That I saw as something very special because especially these days where everything is test scores and Common Core standards...people who make the decisions for education seem to forget that we’re dealing with people: that they're children. That's pretty obvious in the classes that I have now, today, because when I first started here, there were three full-time reading specialists. Last year there were two. Now there's me...That tells me a lot of where the priorities lie with those making decisions and they directly impact students, but yet those people are never in the classroom...I have mixed feelings about [being isolated]...I think I feel isolated in that sense, but then I also feel that I’ve been doing this for a really long time and I know what I want to do.

Penelope’s has seen herself as a teacher since her childhood when she played school with her younger sisters and remains at the forefront of how she presents herself. She continues to value her work as a teacher, and knows it is an important role in shaping the students of her community. Though as time went on, and the traditional role of the teacher changed around her, Penelope’s stories began to show self-doubt about her place as a career-educator in an ever-changing educational system where her values began to contrast with the system in which she works.

In terms of content, Penelope focused our conversations on how she has spent the majority of her career teaching the Holocaust as a unit of study with her students not only because it’s part of the state’s Grade Span Expectations (GSEs) for 6-8 History and Social Studies, but because she is the daughter of a post-World War II German immigrant born in 1937
near Frankfurt. Penelope is the granddaughter of a German mathematics teacher who spent is
career in Lippstadt, Germany. Her belief that reading is fundamental, and that learning is a
lifelong process, is described through her own journey to understand her German roots and how
it has shaped her family, her teaching, and her own identity from an early age:

[When I was growing up, I always like knew that my dad was from Germany, but it
didn’t mean anything to me. I didn’t have any connection…until I reached about eighth
grade, and read “The Diary of Anne Frank,” and learned about the history…So, what
made it important to me was knowing that history and finding out more about my father’s
childhood that he never would talk about. And I understand why he didn’t talk about it,
and I also understand that he was still very young when the war was over. But I grew up
Catholic, and he grew up Catholic, and I kind of felt that my grandfather was a teacher,
so I think up until 1945 he was relatively kind of protected from the Nazis in the sense of
persecution, but certainly not protected in the sense of the effects of that devastating
war…But then to learn the I guess process of the Nazi’s coming to power, and
insidiousness of the propaganda, and all of that really made me start to question a lot.
How much did people really believe? How much did Germans really know? Did my
grandparents know? I will never know that now. They’re no longer with us, I can’t ask
them. So, I don’t know what they were aware of…And wondering where the whole
ideology, the Nazi ideology came from, is it inherently a German thing? Or a Western
European thing? Or a Caucasian/White thing? It didn’t make sense to me and it still
doesn’t, which is why I still have a lot of questions. So, I continue to teach it, and I
continue to ask questions of the students, and expect no answers. Because I expect them
to leave here with more questions than they walk in with. And if they walk out with more
questions then I think that I’ve done my job.

Being German post-WWII was an identity in the U.S. that formatively shaped Penelope’s views
of herself, and the world around her. She remembers through her reflection journal being called
“Nazi” and “Kraut.” This identity came with a cultural weight in her formative years, and not
having answers from those who directly experienced it led Penelope on a path to better
understand identity through her teaching. It was part of what would become a lifelong quest to
better understand identity in herself and others.

As part of the member-checking process after the interviews had concluded, Penelope
was presented with her identity as “The Sage”, one of Carl Jung’s archetypes of an individual
who holds value in knowledge through reading, questioning, and self-reflection as part of a
lifelong journey to understand. When presented with this identity, Penelope humbly replied through a written reflection that she does not see herself that way, particularly in light of the tragic shooting at a Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that coincided with this study:

...As I was reading, it felt like I was reading about someone else. Someone else’s words and thoughts, from someone who is wise and reflective (both of which I do not feel I am). To have the word “sage” connected with my name leaves me speechless, because to me, a sage is someone with wisdom that comes from experience and life. A sage is someone with answers and sound advice. I have neither. I have more questions than answers...Throughout this process, what I have learned is, the more I learn, the less I really know.

It was the last line of her reflection that truly demonstrated why I saw Penelope as the sage.

When faced with dilemmas in her practice, whether it is related to current events, or to her students in front of her, she takes the time to pause and reflect on the ways in which she can create spaces to talk with her students. She is also able to do this as she grapples with her own inner dilemmas as it relates to her own and others’ identities in the spaces around her, which furthers the case for her strength and wisdom for prioritizing this identity work.

Throughout our conversations, we moved through the time continuum: looking back on the past, discussing situations in the present, and finally looking ahead to what we hope would become of this important work. When asked about the legacy she hopes to leave her students and community at the end of her teaching career, which she noted cannot come soon enough after so many years, Penelope emulated her inherently reflective nature:

I would hope that what I would kind of leave behind, if you will, my legacy or whatever is that I approached things with an open mind. I would hope that that comes across, and that I was always learning, and I know I need to learn more...And that keeps me up at night. My brain doesn’t shut off. And so, I do think about it a lot...“What can I do differently?” I’m not reaching this kid, or that kid. How can I do that? How can I get to them? How can I spark anything? And for whatever reason, whether they’re that far behind academically, whether it’s their socio-economic, whether it’s their race, or religion. Their gender, their gender identity, their family life, their lack of a family. Whatever it may be, how do I get to them as a person...And get them to see that a lot of
that other stuff is only temporary in their lives? Because if that’s one thing that I’ve learned, it’s that the only constant in our life is change.

Penelope’s wish is to help students see that our current context is only temporary, though she understands that knowledge comes with life experience, especially when it comes to identity formation, which is an evolving state of mind and being for most adolescents. It is her hope that she can return the positive experiences she was given by the two teachers who inspired her so many years ago. It was not until Penelope experienced hardships that she was able to see that even in the worst times, it was only temporary and could speak to that experience. In turn, drawing on her own experience made her more empathetic to challenges in her students’ lives, which she has seen many times over the years. So rather than ignore the hardships that will come with life, Penelope wants to let all of her students know there are people who understand and that you can talk to in school while you work through this temporary part of life.

Eppie: ‘The Maverick, The Disruptor’. “One could say that identity begins where we call home…Life in [Small]town may not have been idyllic. But it was home.” Eppie, a pseudonym chosen by the participant, identifies with she/her/hers pronouns. Eppie is as a mother of two, a wife, a teacher, a sister, a Texan, and “an American of the Mexican variety.” Raised in Smalltown (pseudonym), Texas, just outside of Houson, Eppie attended school at a time where she says she benefitted from the racial integration of schools after the landmark Supreme Court ruling of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, and the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s. In looking back, she knew that Smalltown was still an oppressive place to be for “a little brown girl.” When asked to talk about where she grew up, Eppie shared how geography and culture shaped her primary identities as a middle-class, Mexican American, woman of color:
I grew up in [Small]town, Texas, outside Houston. It sits within the industrial complex like it's a corridor along the Texas coast of plants like Exxon has plants that make polyeth, they make anything that deals with gasoline. My dad worked for Exxon, my uncle worked for Exxon, my grandfather retired from Exxon. Exxon family. So, I'm a working-class kid. I even went to work for Exxon for a period of time right out of college. Being Hispanic, it will-, like my father really didn't give any kind of consideration of what my future was gonna be, because I was just gonna get married and have children and that's what I'm good for. Okay, but that didn't really happen [laughs] because the 70s happened. It was a beautiful time in our culture where we were hearing women have rights. There was something called Title IX. We had already had the Civil Rights thing, and my school was fully integrated, so I went through school like a middle-class kid who was Hispanic...My parents, they grew up in Texas. They're middle class. We listened to Elvis, not so much Rancheras, but more like Elvis, all those cultural things. When I went to high school, I was fully integrated in my school...

Eppie is a Special Education teacher for grades 6-8 and has been for nearly two decades. Her middle school is one of two in the Princeton Public Schools (pseudonym) which serves approximately 550 of the district’s 4000 students. Princeton Public School district is located in Rhode Island’s Washington County and has an additional five elementary schools and one high school. The student racial demographics for the district are white (87%), Hispanic (6%), Multiracial (3%), Asian (2%), African American (1%), and Native American (1%). The demographics of her current school in no way reflect her earliest years as an elementary resource teacher in Texas, where she described an abusive environment which built collegiality among non-unionized teachers, and deference to administrators who held power over staffing and licensure decisions. Upon moving to New England, Eppie expressed how much she valued the security provided to teachers through the teachers’ union, which she did not have in her first years in Texas:

I guess part of what it is, is I kind of have a buoyancy in my idealism, like, “This ain’t gonna get me down.” I taught that in a class one time in Houston, Texas: “I can do this.” My first teaching year was through the alternative certification program. It takes somebody completely green. Your first year is your student teaching. I got observed like 16 times. I had a mentor. It was in an inner-city school in Houston, Aldeen, Texas. All our population was black. It was black history all year long. The children were fantastic, and I loved it. I really miss it. But at the same time, it was also like trial-by-
fire [laughs]...Everybody had to line up on the last day of school right outside the principal’s office to get their contract signed for the next year. It didn’t matter if you had 20 years’ experience or one-year experience, everybody had to wait and see if she would sign your contract. If she didn’t sign your contract, you had to get a job someplace else. If she could, she could institute the process of getting your license taken away. If you had a really crappy year, you could be dead in the profession. It was totally not unionized and not fair, but everybody did it...We were all in that abusive boat together, but there was a lot of-, everybody was congenial. We did a good job. We didn't know it. I didn't know any better until I came up here.

Eppie valued her new career path as it allowed her to find a work-home balance with a young family. Like any cross-country move with a young family, transition to the culture takes time.

At her school, Eppie spoke to the challenges of her role as the position’s function has changed in her tenure there. Some years, she was part of an inclusion model where she would go into classrooms to support students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), whereas now she is self-contained, and students come to her for direct instruction. In either case, her self-described inclination to disrupt injustices, particularly as the only woman of color in her school who is also marginalized as a Special Educator among some of her content-based colleagues, has shaped her reputation to some degree:

I was always challenging [my former administrator]...I was not popular with this person for that. I guess I could say I’ve kind of been a little bit of a “maverick”. I’m not afraid to kick somebody who’s wrong in the shins [laughs] and then get mad when they kick me back, but it is what it is...I think I’m like that as a professional in the building, because I’m just like that by nature. I’m annoying. If something’s wrong and I notice it, I’m like, “Wait a minute!” I don’t know why I’m like that. I think I’m like that because...I have to think. I don’t think I’ve ever been asked that question. I think like Dr. King, I just see that we have a commitment to make the peaceful community. But when people are not being valued, when our voices aren’t being heard, we’re at risk of not performing our jobs to our best of ability. People like me, I try to avoid the obstacles and make it happen no matter what. The whole idea about inclusion, when it first started, I got put into a classroom where a teacher clearly did not want me, did not value me. And I had to sit in the classroom and listen to her lessons and not say a thing and help the little person sitting next to me. That’s all I was expected to do. That was very insulting to me...I realized in my relationships, I had to work harder in making sure that I, as a Special Ed teacher didn’t “stink” like Special Ed. Some people are perfectly comfortable sitting on the heat register, but I get bored. I’m not a good person when I’m bored. I think I’m more action-oriented.
Eppie’s stories revealed that being a “Special Ed” teacher comes with its own challenges in the profession. There are additional certifications to maintain, and functionally, it is substantially separate from the majority of classroom teachers who work in teams which can result in an isolating professional experience. Even in a co-teaching model, the Special Educator is not always seen as an equal, and the relationship is based on how much the general education teacher wants to share the responsibility of teaching the whole-class. As Eppie explained, the role looks different between her own colleagues in the same school, but this does not detract from advocating for her students with verve. When she discussed her newest endeavor into teaching adults through a professional opportunity this past summer, she talked about the stigma that Special Educators carry with them amongst their colleagues:

*I didn't realize I could love teaching adults. I was fearful of teaching adults, because one: I didn't come to this profession the same way they did. They all have education degrees and master's degree, and I don't. You know? I'm Special Ed. What can a special educator know? Well, there are polyglots among us. There's lots of people that know lots of stuff, just because other Special Ed teachers don't choose to be an activist for their passions...Yeah, [we do carry a stigma] because we're the underdogs.*

Eppie talked about being valued in her work for her experience, her education, and her beliefs. She makes no apologies for who she is because her values are formed through a lens of social justice and Kingian nonviolence. She defends her students’ value as individuals, and their personal successes when they should be recognized.

Eppie’s stories suggested that there were times in her life where because of her own identity, particularly as a Hispanic woman, she was not valued among her while, male peers. Having had these such experiences, it has contributed to the ways in which she navigates conversations with leadership, her colleagues, and her students. Eppie, “a transplanted Texan
with happy roots here” talked about how she learned to “code-switch” with colleagues as a woman of color in a predominantly male working environment:

I was in the closet growing up. I was in the closet as a liberal... Cannot be out-and-proud in Texas, because a lot of my peers went to Texas A&M. There was a track. The more conservative kids went to Texas A&M. The more liberal kids went to the University of Texas in Austin, which remains a bastion except for the political side of cool ingenuity, creativity, great stuff... [Being in the closet] means when I worked at Exxon, I went to the University of Texas. One fellow thought he could insult me by calling me a Communist. I had to say, “One, I work for one of the biggest corporations in the world,” [laughs]. That's kind of the opposite of being a Communist... Secondly, I moved into a gay neighborhood as a young person, because it was great fun. I loved it. Cheap rent. It was wonderful. One of my colleagues at Exxon found out. I was getting things in my [mail] box, things in my box like, "Come to our church," I needed to be 'saved'. That put my sexuality in question, because I lived over 'there'. Just so much ignorance... I guess really what it is, is I can't go and be a person other than myself. I worked in a plant where, at Exxon, I wore a tool belt and a tool hat, being short-like, I'm only five feet tall-I was never equal to the guys working out there, but it made me smarter because I couldn't ask them for help because they would just make true their assumption that I can't do the job I'm doing with them. It just made me smarter. I'd lower my voice a little bit when I spoke with them, so I was making sure I wasn't irritating them with a high voice [imitates high-pitched voice, with a southern twang]... I'd code-switch, yeah. That kind of stuff, I grew up thinking that was the normal way to be, but it really isn't. It really isn't, because you don't ever have a sense that you're enough when you know you're code-switching, because this person doesn't really think you have this much, I don't even know how to put that into [pause]... No, [I don't code switch with students] because I think I'm more comfortable with them. I code-switch with adults, because I find their judgments might be more punitive or accusative...

Eppie’s experiences at Exxon were formative. Having to navigate gender roles as a woman of color, with liberal views in a conservative town, Eppie knew from an early age that these things were not normal, but they were required for her survival at a particular time and place. She understood what it felt like to have to hide part of her identity in her culture, even though it went against her core beliefs that she should be treated equal.

Eppie’s stories about her experiences in school as a student, and now as a teacher, showed the burdens put upon her by an oppressive culture for being a Hispanic woman in a predominantly white community. Moreover, it is the intersection of her many identities that
complicates her work for social justice though it does not detract from her goals. In reflecting on an early experience of being singled-out for her race, Eppie shared an anecdote about a former classmate who is now a world-renowned architect who similarly described how Smalltown’s repressive nature actually made them who they are today. Moreover, being singled out for an aspect of her identity made her see the privilege others have who are different from her:

When I was in second grade, Charles and I were playing together at the lunch room and we had taken our spoons, and the spoons were a metal, a metal that was very malleable, so we bent them up. We were playing ‘baby buggies’ with our peas. And we were just playing. I loved playing with Charles, he was wonderful. And he was this blonde, blonde, blonde, blonde, blonde kid. And I’m this brown, brown, brown, brown, brown kid. And we’re together, having a good time, and we don’t know it, but we had pissed off the second-grade teacher...I didn’t know it until we got back to the classroom and everybody’s going to recess except [Eppie] and Charles. And we got swatted on the back of our calves with rulers, for defacing school property...Yeah [it was corporal punishment]...And how oppressive [school in Smalltown] was. It was oppressive. And you know what? I think, thinking I’m getting enriched, even though it’s oppressive. Like, to me, looking back on that situation when we were in second grade, I could see her being totally insulted that here was this little Mexican kid sitting next to this very, very white privilege kid, and having a really good time playing. And somehow, that just not fitting right for her... I think [it still resonates with me and] it means I have to be more perfect than perfect [laughs]...You never lose that. ‘Cause like any mistake I make, if I lose my temper, if I have a bad day, you know, that’s what’s going to be remembered. That brown teacher was a bitch [laughs]... I think that men have the privilege not to worry if they stick out or not...And if you’re a white man, you definitely don’t have to, but if you’re a black man, you do. If you’re a gay man, you might probably have to a lot [even if you’re white].

Eppie had good humor when she told these very personal stories about her life. I was privileged to hear them. Eppie also exhibited an exuberant passion for her work when she talked about her students. When asked to look ahead to retirement, which is not too close with her children still attending college, Eppie shared that she hopes her legacy with her colleagues and her students would be

that she was a maverick for social change [laughs]. Yeah [everyone would see it], ‘cause they’ve had their toes stepped on [laughs], and maybe an elbow, that said “Whoa, move over to the side, this is what needs to be first!”...That, I know, the other thing is that maybe they would say that she had a big heart. And that, she passionately loved
teaching. So, that would be the truth...You just have to trust that...whatever fair is going to come out. Because Dr. King said, the universe is on the side of justice. That’s where my hope comes from...I think it’s like my purpose, the intention of who you are, and what you’re doing. It’s all there. You just have to be willing to commit to the path. And that’s it. I’m on that path. I’m committed to that path. So, come on. Come on!

**Conclusion.** Individuals carry various intersecting identities. Telling stories provided individuals with an opportunity to share their experiences and the ways in which they collectively shaped their identities. As a researcher, listening to stories and asking questions about participants’ narratives provided an opportunity to help the participants reflect on what details they are overlooking about themselves and those around them. The most surprising commonality among each of the participant’s data was one that I had not anticipated before the study began. Each of these teachers are positioned as minorities among their more highly-valued content-based colleagues. In short, it’s a privilege being a content-area classroom teacher. Though it was not the primary identity that each person carried, it was clear that understanding the position of the “underdog” among the majority added to the importance of recognizing one’s own identity in a given context. Carmen described feeling less efficacious when her role changed from a classroom teacher, to a small-group teacher. Penelope is the only remaining reading specialist in her school and described her class as a “dumping ground” for her colleagues who did not know where else to place these students within the school schedule. And Eppie wanted to avoid the “stink” of being a Special Education teacher so as to not impact relationships with her colleagues in trying to do her best work. It stood to reason that if these teachers carry such stigmas in public school settings, so did the students of which each classroom is comprised. It became clear through the participants’ stories of experiences with identity in their respective roles that understanding how their professional role in the school impacts their students was an important component of building relationships, and a more inclusive curriculum.
Second Theme: Awareness of students’ identities

The teachers in this study were aware that students perceive themselves in certain ways because of the messages received from the world around them. Each of the participants recognized that the students they serve come to their classrooms with a cultural stigma put upon them because of their specific learning needs. This has implications for adolescent development. The participants were well-aware of how their own marginalized identities informed the ways in which they see their students. Carmen’s students are labeled as “ELLs”, carrying a connotation that they may be academically or culturally lacking due to their limited English proficiency. Penelope teaches middle school students who have a range of reading (dis)abilities, ultimately affecting their behavior and self-image, creating a cast of “misfits.” And Eppie has a self-contained classroom where she works with students who have experienced severe traumas and a range of ability statuses which can isolate them from their peers. It was through their stories that each participant shared the ways in which they see and learn from their students’ identities.

Carmen. In the first interview with Carmen, she admittedly took pause when I asked about her own identity and moreover, how her students might identify themselves if directly asked. She suspected that if she did ask her students, who are between the ages of 7-11, they would be very literal: “[laughing] If I asked them to describe themselves, they would literally describe themselves. It would be like, ‘I have tan skin, brown eyes,’ you know?” It was through her pause that I recognized this question resonated with Carmen. Just before the end of the interview nearly forty minutes later, Carmen noted that she wanted to explore this concept in the form of what I suggested would be “an experiment” with her former students, as she authentically encountered them around the school to then record these interactions in her reflection journal.
In all, Carmen did not naturally elaborate on open-ended questions, which was difficult as a researcher wanting to elicit stories about this work through extended interviews. Her reflection journal was no different, in that, at first glance before the second interview the quantity appeared underwhelming. I was pleasantly surprised that the quality of this entry surpassed my preconceived notions of what a powerful reflection would look like. It concluded with Carmen’s realization about her students: when directly asked, all of her former students responded with their gender identity (i.e. boy or girl). This led Carmen to consider why that might be, further realizing,

*when kids are only self-identifying by gender they are internalizing all stereotypes for that gender. Therefore[,] thinking they must possess those “qualities” or like certain things to fit the mold. A lot of what I observed was done subconsciously because when I brought it to their attention, they would deny it or not realize they were doing it.*

Carmen’s realization that gender is internalized at such a young age lead her to observe her students’ interactions in general, questioning why children behave in particular ways without being explicitly taught. When Carmen was asked to expand on her journal entries, she explained how she was seeing her students’ behaviors in relation to gender roles:

...I was seeing the boy, he was like, “Oh, well let the girl go first. Let the girls go first.” And I was thinking in my head, “Why? I wonder why he thinks that? Does he think they’re a weaker sex because he’s letting them go first? Or, that’s probably what he’s taught and I know he’s being polite.” And I’m thinking... ”[H]ow does she take that?”... And it just got me thinking more about how they are viewing things through gender, which I hadn’t really thought about before. I mean, I have, but not like at that level, you know? Like in elementary school. I was like, “Wow, okay.” So, it’s a little different. Then I just noticed more and more things, you know? Like just color. It’s like, “Oh, the girls want the pink or purple ones, we don’t want those.” And I’m like, “What if another boy did really want them? Now he’s not going to take one.”...Now, he’s like internalizing that pink and purple is only for the girls and he’s not taking one, you know? Or, “Green is a boy color.” And I’m like, well I thought green was pretty neutral, but now I’m learning no, they think that that’s a ‘boy’ color and they don’t want anything to do with it. And so, I’m like “Well, that stinks,” ‘cause if someone did want it, now they’re not going to do it...[R]arely do you have anybody break the mold, even if they want to...because they’re going to be judged or you know, they’re going to look like the
oddball...I guess they just want to fit in, especially at that age. Well, at any age, honestly [laughs].

It was through being asked to consciously reflect on gender that Carmen continued her own path of inquiry with her students, and even her implicit contributions to her children’s understanding of gender. Shortly after these observations were made with her students, Carmen’s seven-year-old daughter asked her why her room was pink, and not her favorite color blue, to which Carmen replied that she did not have an answer for her other than “we found out you were a girl. So, we painted it pink.” I asked Carmen what she now sees as her responsibility to mediate gender roles with her students at this new level of awareness:

Well, I’m sure [this problem] is bigger than me, but I feel like we should touch upon it. I mean, the way the world is going, everybody is-I feel like we’re trying to be more free to be whoever we want to be and not be so constricted to our gender or sexuality, whatever it is. I think that they need to think a little more out of the box...

Carmen’s realization about the ways in which gender is enacted at a young age was new to her. To this time, she had not addressed identity explicitly in this way until she was asked during our first interview how she sees identity in herself, and with her students. It was in these candid stories where she displayed her inner dialogue that the act of reflecting led to a change in her thinking about, and acting upon, gender enculturation in young children, including her own.

In speaking more broadly about gender, and how it may impact her students’ lives, Carmen discussed how her school is primarily comprised of female teachers in a large, urban K-5 elementary school. This is not unlike the teaching profession writ-large which is primarily comprised of white, middle class, straight females. Only one fifth grade teacher and the principal are male. I more pointedly asked about the ways in which students perceive male teachers differently, Carmen noted that students act no different in having a male teacher:

A lot of our students don’t have male figures in their lives and I thought they would be a little more hesitant, but that’s not the case. He’s probably the most lenient in the
school...[The students] don’t act like it’s any different honestly...They come from one parent families, a lot of them...the dad would still be in the other country, and the mom will come here and they live with relatives, and so the dad can save enough money to move here as well.

Carmen went on to note that her students come in with painful stories about these disconnected family structures, and that her sociology and pre-service teaching preparation did not fully prepare her to mediate these situations. It was her own lived experiences in growing up in the same community with a single mother that allowed her to relate to and have conversations with her students about these difficulties.

**Penelope.** Penelope pays close attention to the students in her classes and in her school community at-large. In doing so, she reflects on her own experiences in adolescence in an effort to compare her identity experiences to what her students might be going through. In short, she was quick to note in a candid way that the period in her life where she struggled most with identity was adolescence, and that she “wouldn’t even wish that on my worst enemy to be 13 again [laughs].” Penelope is on a quest for understanding about how to address identity in a culturally relevant way, which is rooted in self-reflective practice:

> And when I think about my own education, and growing up, I mean I think I had one male teacher before high school...I didn’t really have a whole lot of connection to black people, or Asian people, or Hispanic or Latino people. Everyone looked like me. And believed what I believed, or at least behaved in that way, certainly on the outside. In terms of being Christian, and politically speaking, their parents would be of the belief that my parents were. You know they probably all voted the same way and had the same kind of expectations for their children. And so, to try and understand other cultures, and we have quite a few here, I’m not going to say quite a few, very few, but there are some English Language Learners. And to try and understand their culture, and the way their culture values, or does not value education, is a big deal. And I’m still trying to wrap my head around some of that... I’m afraid that I might be doing something wrong. Or doing something harmful. And not knowing it or meaning to. And I question that all the time. And I’ve read a lot about you know white privilege, and it’s so hard because I can’t say that I understand what it is to be a brown person, or a black person, or a Jewish person, or a gay person, or an Asian person. Because I’m not one. I just hope that what I’m able to get across is that no matter what or who you are, it’s all okay, and that we should all be okay with it.
It was clear through talking with Penelope that she is deeply reflective, and cautious not to offend her students of identities different from herself as part of the teacher-student relationship. Penelope has taught for three decades in the same school and has watched her community change in different ways, fueling her need to better understand how to talk about it in a culturally relevant way. More recently she spoke to the ever-present economic divide that has become clear with her students whose families are transient. Many of these students are coming to school temporarily with little skill in speaking or reading grade-level English equivalent to their age. Notably, Penelope discussed how she does not feel prepared to manage the complex linguistic, cultural, and lexical needs in this age group. This has become yet another focus of her work to make sure this is a conversation in her classes, truly speaking to her goals as a teacher.

Penelope recognizes the silence in her school community around marginalized identities. She connected this pervasive silence to her father’s silence around his own identity. Penelope’s father has never talked about his own German roots, and having lost her grandparents, she will never truly know answers to many of her questions. When talking about the silence around her own German heritage, Penelope believes that it could be attributed to harboring shame for being German after such a dark historical period:

Yes [it was shame]. No hesitation. And I’ll tell you why. Throughout my childhood the term “Nazi” and the term “German” were interchangeable. People didn't distinguish between the two. There was really not a recognition that if you were a German you were not necessarily a Nazi. If you were German you were Nazi, that was it...And it was a bad thing. Of course, “Nazi,” I knew was a bad thing, but to be a German, I then questioned, “Why is that a bad thing?” And I think that as part of my identity, and I have to look at all of my students as part of their identities. “What about you makes whatever you are ‘bad’?” If you're a person of color, if you're Hispanic, or Latino, or however you identify yourself, why is any part of any of you bad? And so, it’s, I guess my goal to try and get kids to come around to that and realize that there really is nothing bad about who you are. And that we need to recognize that within each other, and accept that, and be tolerant of everyone and who they are, and what they come to the table with, I guess. In terms of their ethnicity, their religion, their language, their sexuality, whatever it may
be. And I think that a lot of people don't understand that much of who we are we don't have control over. And I think that some people think that we do or should.

It was through recognizing the shame that kept her family silent about being German that Penelope relates to her students who carry something shameful about themselves. Similar to Carmen, Penelope asks herself and her students why a particular identity carries a negative connotation. Penelope expressed a keen awareness of her students who appeared to experience this difficulty with their own identities in her role as teacher and used questioning as a means of helping her students understand acceptance of ourselves and each other in our differences. When Penelope had time to reflect on her past students, she explained that on multiple occasions, some of her seventh grade girls would be out of school for extended periods of time without discussion:

All of a sudden they’re absent from school for huge chunks of time, and I find out they've been hospitalized. They were cutting, they were self-harming. And then to see them again at eighth grade and they've changed. They've either come out, or they're comfortable or accepting of who they are. Or they're going through transition, you know I had an Alexa become Alex...I'm not sure how physically she transitioned, but certainly identified as an Alex. And I guess my whole thing is that, just seeing these kids in such pain that they would harm themselves, and that nobody talks about it in school. You know why is so-and-so is not here today? Well, you know...in the hospital. And that's the end of it, and nothing about when they come back. There's no discussion, and how they came from point A to B, or none of that, and I find that a little disturbing on some level. Maybe there's a lot that goes on that I don't know, I'm a classroom teacher. I'm not the guy who is the counselor or the psychologist, and so maybe there's a lot that I don't know. And I hope that that's true for the sake of the kids.

Penelope was “disturbed” that even when she knew one of her students had transitioned their gender, nobody talked about it, at least not to her. She rationalized this based on her role in the school, recognizing there may be ethical boundaries for what information can be shared with whom. Even in the case when gender identity was visibly altered with one of her students, there was still no conversation in her school leaving Penelope at a loss for how to address this conversation that was silent in her school community.
Our conversations involved talking about her students over the years that may or may not have identified as LGBTQ. She shared a story from the first week of school that influenced her to participate in this study. With anticipation, I asked Penelope to refer back to the index card activity during the first week when students get to ask any one question to Penelope and she openly answers it aloud in front of the class. In doing so, she noted that her classes this year are the largest groups she has ever had, comprised of more than 25 students in each. I eagerly pointed to the card sitting in front of her, face down, and asked her to tell me the story:

This young man[‘s card], seventh grader says, “Are you LGBTQ supportive?” I was blown away by that question because I’ve never had that question before…I’m wondering what motivated him to ask it. What would make him think that I wasn’t? So that again has me questioning myself and second-guessing was there a reason he would think that I’m not? Or what experiences he has come in with that other people have not been supportive…I respond to them on the spot. I asked this out loud, I said, “The next question is: Are you LGBTQ supportive? Yes. Yes I am.” I move on and go to the next question.

It was in her story that I saw an opportunity to go deeper with her reaction. Penelope thought that most seventh-grade students knew what “LGBTQ” meant and did not feel she needed to elaborate. I asked if parents called about it, and Penelope noted that many of her remedial reading students come from single-parent homes or no parents at all, and she has always had a very difficult time communicating with parents in general, so she was not surprised she heard nothing from this particular instance.

Penelope did what she promised to her students: she answered the question. I asked how she might follow-up with this student as she was thinking about how and when to do this. Students put their name on the card, and so she plans to use it as an entry point for a conversation at the “right time” with that particular students. Penelope noted that she wants to ask the student what she can do to be better supportive of him in class, and if he’s had some unresolved experiences that he needs help with. Quickly, she noted that she would not ask him if he were
gay, knowing it could put him at risk. Interestingly, Penelope further shared that she knew this student from a previous year as part of a leadership team where she advised students on extracurricular efforts to support school initiatives:

*He stayed after school one afternoon with a member of the student leadership team. They made posters...raising money for Leukemia...he came in to help with the poster and the first question was, “Can I make a rainbow?”*

“Absolutely you can make a rainbow. I have all these markers here. Make whatever you want.”

“It’s okay that I make a rainbow?”

“Yup. It’s okay.” So that was a little bit of a heads-up. I wasn’t really surprised that this question came from him, but I was surprised that the question [on the index card] was even asked and that...he knew that I was going to answer them publicly.

I tried to reassure Penelope in her doubt that she was approaching this the right way, that the student asked permission and she granted it for him to be himself. Furthermore, all students knew the rules for sharing their burning questions during that first week, and the student took an opportunity to have the teacher proclaim her support for LGBTQ students, of which he may or may not be. Regardless, Penelope admitted that if that question were asked in the first decades of her teaching career, she would not have felt comfortable or prepared to answer it and would have “beat herself up for it.” I affirmed that she has come a long way since her first years of teaching through her openness to ask and address this question, but Penelope truly wanted more information on how she can be more inclusive in her formal curriculum to do right by her students.

**Eppie.** Eppie herself feels like an “underdog” as a Special Educator, a woman of color, and a Texan-transplant in New England. It is through her own identities that Eppie carries a social responsibility to be a leader for her students, especially those who are black and brown. Eppie is the only racial minority teacher in her school community and shared how her identity impacts the ways in which she guides her students:
Being the only minority in my school, I feel like children and teachers look to me like a leader, like, “What are we supposed to think, [Mrs. Eppie]? We saw something happen we don’t understand.” Or, some things happen to me, and... They’re looking to me to see how I respond. That’s the common act of bravery at times in my career where I represent all the Hispanic people in the world in that situation. And that’s my identity. And I worry that if the children who are brown or black see this happen to me, they worry that could happen to them and how that could impact their futures.

It is through this lens of social responsibility that Eppie works to replace her students’ fears with knowledge.

Identity is complex. Eppie carries her racial and gender identities at the forefront of her own identity. As a Special Educator, Eppie talked about how her students come to her as early as sixth grade with a variety of needs to access learning compared to their peers. She noted that “they’re ashamed. This shame, they carry with them until they’re old like me [laughs].” It is through her experience, and her ability to laugh at the difficult things that Eppie is able to keep engaging in this work with her students. She sees beyond her students’ disabilities and works to help people, including her colleagues, see beyond deficits and toward a more complete person.

*We can’t be ashamed all our lives of who we are. We have to build that. Identity goes in that. I might be a person who can’t read so well, but man, you never want to meet me on a basketball court. There’s places where you can feel proud and that’s where the resilience comes in... And sometimes we’re able to convince people that I’m not my disability. I am more.*

Eppie’s focus is on classroom climate and making sure that it is always a safe place for her students. I noted how welcoming her classroom environment felt when I first entered, quickly spotting the Human Rights Campaign sticker in clear view when all enter the room which implies “LGBTQ identities are welcome here.” Eppie spoke to the role that her own gender plays in meeting her students’ learning needs. In her view, she is more successful with the boys, rather than the girls “for some reason.” On the surface, she attributes this to her love for certain sports, and using physical activities to keep her students engaged in their learning.
When I probed as to why she thinks she has a disconnect with the girls in some way, Eppie noted,

*I love the girls and I do real well with the girls, but the boys I’m talking in particular, the boys have been abused, have diagnoses that are really severe...They don’t trust. It’s a severe pathology. They come from homes that were very, very disruptive...For some reason, they settle [with me]. The young ladies who have similar backgrounds, they hate my guts because I’m too motherly. They’re mad at the mother that didn’t mother them.*

Eppie sees her maternal identity as counterproductive with her female students, or “young ladies” who (sub)consciously disconnect from her teaching style. This acute awareness of her own maternal approach to teaching gives Eppie pause in how she supports female students who have experienced trauma in their own lives. Additionally, Eppie’s use of the term “young ladies” presents an opportunity to address what that term means, and how it shapes the way in which Eppie sees her female students who have experienced traumas in their own lives.

It is through gender expression and gender identity that Eppie takes signals to mediate relationships with her students. One of her male students in particular was practicing a dance move called a “death drop” that he displayed during one of their dance breaks in class. Culturally, this difficult dance move has become famous through drag culture which is associated, in most cases, with gay males who express their gender as female through a cultural art form known as “drag.” Eppie talked about seeing her student do this move in front of others:

...*only guys can do this one, where they fall back...I don’t know the name of it, but it’s like an amazing dance move and I saw him trying and you know, he’s not “out.” I mean, but we always know. There’s a little gut-check, the “gaydar,” and you know what? Those are the people that, as soon as I know...I’m putting the protection in. I watch them, make sure that they’re [OK] and you know what the truth is.*

Like Eppie, people might assume a student identifies as gay when a male’s gender expression appears effeminate. Culturally, people refer to this as “gaydar” or a gay-radar that “detects” gayness through behavior. It is in this recognition that Eppie seeks to protect these students
knowing that they may need an “eye” to make sure they’re not bullied in school or ostracized for being who they truly are. Eppie went on to say that 10-15 years ago, she would put more energy into keeping an eye on such students, but today, she feels there are more students who are openly expressing themselves, putting her more at ease about how her colleagues and student peers interact with students who may identify as, or be perceived as LGBTQ. Admittedly, this protection is rooted in her fear about students who hold marginalized identities and recognizes that she does not want to impose her own fear onto these students, which is unfair to them, but to “make that more evident in [her] mind” that these students will find their way. It is as much a learning process for her as an adult, as it is for her students in their adolescence.

**Conclusion.** The process of hearing the participants’ stories shed light on the ways our own identities influence how individuals see others’ identities. Penelope, Carmen, and Eppie all teach students who come to them with stigmas associated with labels placed on them by society and the cultural norms therein. Carmen teaches students whose primary language is not English, but it was through asking about their gender identity that she replaced an assumption with new knowledge. Carmen assumed her young elementary students, when asked, would first identify with their ethnicity, coming from immigrant families. This was not the case as they all lead with their gender. Penelope found that in recognizing her family’s shame from their German heritage she was able to ask her students about how they see themselves and reaffirm that they do not have to feel shame about any part of who they are. Eppie knows that her students are socially and academically behind their age-group peers due to their ability statuses, yet she works tirelessly to create a safe space to honor students’ strengths to see themselves in a positive light. In this way, identity work is at the forefront for Penelope, Carmen, and Eppie as they themselves carried a marginalized identity of their own in some way which, to varying degrees, drove them
to work with students as a career path. As a result, they each want to help their students
overcome the stigmas that come with their imposed identity labels toward seeing themselves as
accepted, and whole persons in the society in which they live.

**Third Theme: Proactive disruption of identity labels through the (in)formal curriculum**

Each participant in this study shared anecdotes of the ways in which they address and
include identity in the curriculum. There was no formal curriculum to follow in each of the
respective participant’s classrooms. They had wide latitude to include resources, so long as they
are addressing the specific learning needs of the students in which they teach through the
appropriate grade-level, content-based curricular frameworks or expectations. It was through
these stories that each participant showed how they proactively disrupt the silence around certain
identity labels, and the cultural assumptions that lie within them. Most notably, it was through
the informal curriculum that each participant took steps to address identity.

**Carmen.** In addition to the many responsibilities of elementary classroom teachers,
Carmen was responsible for teaching all four major content areas to her students across a variety
of learning and linguistic needs: literacy (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), mathematics,
science, and history/social studies. When asked about the local social studies curriculum,
without hesitation, Carmen talked about its place in her school:

*We don’t have [a formal social studies curriculum] in our district. [The Administration] seem[s] to think that social studies is touched at through our reading series...I don’t agree so I would do my own kind of thing when I taught in the classroom. But yeah, they don’t place a heavy importance on [social studies], because it’s not something that’s tested unfortunately, like an MCAS, when they get to the higher grades. So, therefore that goes to the back burner, and we push more math, and a little bit of science...Community is a piece of social studies. It’s an important piece. It’s all about being with our community, and how it branches off, and how we treat other people, how we view other people, that is all part of social studies, even though it’s not really labeled...I mean, you can [bring other resources in] if you want to, but to be honest with you, the scheduling, there is no time for social studies. I just did that because I’m kind of like a ‘badass’ and do what I want sometimes.*
It became clear that with social studies as a non-tested subject area, Carmen’s choice to make time for social studies and to weave the content throughout her formal and informal curriculum made her a “badass.” Her value of the content area set her apart from her colleagues, and the administration. Carmen went on to share that the reduction of social studies in Baycity is one symptom of the pressure put upon teachers to spend time on learning with tested subjects, which in most states, are English Language Arts, mathematics, and science. Social studies topics are woven throughout the literacy textbook, but not explicitly taught during the school day unless Carmen makes the concerted effort to make connections and find resources through which to do so, at the expense of time on learning in other content areas.

It was also through the informal curriculum that Carmen enacted “living” social studies in her practice by creating regular space for social interactions among all students where individual cultures and traditions are opportunities for learning. She attributed her strong relationships with students to her “non-judgmental” nature and her willingness to provide space for students to talk with her, and each other, before formal learning times:

*They are really open with me and I think it’s because I’m so open with them, and I’m so non-judgmental. You know? Whenever they tell me anything, I don’t judge them, or judge their families. I mean, if it’s something bad, obviously I’m a mandated reporter, but they’re very open and I think it’s because I’m so open with them. They know my kids’ names, they know my dog’s name. One of my dogs recently died, and I had to let them know. I just didn’t hide it from them, "My dog passed away," and then they were all sad. They feel like I’m on their level, you know what I mean? I’m not somebody to be feared, I’m not kind of like a friend. They know that there’s a line and I am the teacher, but they treat me like they would treat like an aunt, or an uncle…*

Carmen values relationships with her students. She works to create safe spaces for them to explore their knowledge of the world around them, and to challenge some of the assumptions that shape children’s beliefs, and ultimately, their behaviors towards others. With her students, very little is off limits for discussions. Carmen shared an anecdote about an exchange with her
students which displayed how she approaches discussions with her students about identity. In her style of helping students to think critically, she questioned the meaning of students’ words to challenge her second graders to think about what they truly meant:

I mean, if it’s happening in the world around us and it’s something that’s [relevant], I would definitely talk about it…I wouldn’t talk about anything like sexual with them, but sexual orientation, yeah. We talk about if people were gay, lesbian, we talk about how we love everybody, and everybody is allowed to love whoever they want…I think maybe one time there was like, someone was calling somebody else “gay”, and I was like, “Why is it a bad thing? Why would you call him that to be mean?” And we just talked about it. It kind of stemmed off to, “He called her black. He said she was black.”…I was like, “Those things aren’t bad.” So, we had to have that conversation. Like, “Why are you using them like they’re bad? It’s okay to say that she’s black. Her skin is black, that’s okay. It’s not bad. You shouldn’t be upset.” If you called me white, I’m not upset. That’s the color of my skin. It’s okay, it’s just describing if you’re saying it in a negative way, that’s negative, or you think it’s negative, that’s something that you need to think about…Why are you calling somebody gay to be mean? It’s not a mean thing. That’s not something you call somebody to be mean.” We had to have a discussion about that… They’re kind of mind blown, like, “Oh, I don’t know why.”

Well, “Do you think it’s bad to be black? Is that why you said that or you thought that?” And they have to really think about it and they’re, “Oh, I don’t know.”…And I’ve had a kid say, “Yeah, it’s bad.” And I’m like, “Why do you think that way?” So, kind of get them to think on their own, ‘cause I’m not telling them which way to go, but think about it you know? Think about some of the stories you read, and why you might think that way. You hear that somewhere? Did you see it somewhere?…And it’s not like what I would like to teach, but we’ve also got to talk about it. We’ve gotta say something, you can’t just let it slide ‘cause then they just go on thinking that’s okay.

It was in this way that conversations about race, gender, and sexuality have come into Carmen’s elementary classroom. Notably, Carmen said it was not what she wanted to teach but is morally driven to do so. These conversations are not an explicit part of her lesson planning or her curriculum, but when these issues come up, she is compelled to address them in the ways in which she knows how to avoid calcifying assumptions about others’ identities. In turn, it helps her to better understand how students come to develop their own belief systems, and how as a teacher who will only be in their lives for a relatively short amount of time, she can help them use questioning and critical thinking skills to approach the world through open-mindedness.
At the end of our first interview I asked Carmen if she wanted to take the next step toward explicitly including race, gender, and sexuality into her formal curriculum. The 2018 Massachusetts HSS frameworks call for the inclusion of LGBTQ civil rights in different parts of K-12 curriculum, which may or may not intersect with Carmen’s formal curriculum. This information was news to Carmen, and in asking her if she or her colleagues would be prepared to do this work, she noted that,

*I don’t know that I’m prepared. I think if I had something to go off of sure. I don’t have any problem with teaching the kids anything like that. But, as a whole, I don’t think that everybody would be as comfortable as me…They didn’t even want to talk to their kids about intruders with guns…*

It became clear that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum is not the only thing that cause discomfort among teachers engaging in this work with their students. Carmen went on to note that between administrators’ views, the possibility of parent complaints, and no resources to ground the conversations, most teachers would not engage in this work beyond the conversations that Carmen shared with me from her experiences.

Early in our second meeting, responding to one of Carmen’s stories, I shared that as a student in K-12 public schools I never once met a character in a text that was gay, like me. In sharing a part of myself, I struck a chord with Carmen. At the end of our second interview, when I asked if there was anything else on her mind, Carmen returned to this conversation:

*I’m just pretty mind-blown about that whole literature thing, because I never really thought about how the characters in books, like kids identify with. It makes me want to look at my own library and be like, “I need to make it more diverse.” That really stuck with me...Are they always the same type of character? I never really thought about kids identifying with characters so much, especially at school. Like in our textbooks, now I want to go look at the stories and see what do the characters look like? Who are they?*

Sharing our stories led to a new way for Carmen to think about the materials she is using to teach her students. Interestingly, knowing her students’ ethnic and racial diversity, Carmen had not
engaged in this type of curriculum review before suggesting an area for her own growth in addressing identity through the formal, and informal, curriculum.

**Penelope.** There have been numerous times when Penelope has seen or heard of students struggling with their identities over the years. She shared how creating a space for discussions around texts with relatable characters can help students reflect on their own understanding of the world around them, without imposing a right-or-wrong view of students’ identities. Penelope has no formal curriculum to follow as she builds it herself through the state literacy and social studies standards. Penelope brings identity into her formal curriculum each year through one of her favorite texts, “The Misfits” by James Howe. Her class reads this in a whole-group setting because some students are still not able to access this text independently. This particular story is about a group of students whose identities make them fall “outside” of the popular crowd in middle school, only to later proudly call themselves “misfits.” One of those character’s stories is Penelope’s favorite:

*I’m a reading specialist, so in terms of content, I’m pretty free, if you will, to choose the material that I teach as long as I get the skills in. I have to teach reading comprehension, vocabulary, critical thinking, decision-making and things like that. So, a lot of the books that I’ve chosen to use in the classrooms are designed around that. For example, this one is my favorite [points to book on table with yellow Post-it sticking out] for seventh grade: “The Misfits” by James Howe. I just opened to the page the other day and my favorite is when the character Joey kind of has to spell it out finally for his friends and says, “Yes, I am gay.” They said, “Well, I thought you said you might be, but how do you know you don’t like girls?” He says, “I don’t have to think about it. It’s just who I am. I don’t have to think about it.” That right there I think a lot of the kids get it. I’ve also experienced with a lot of students, their transition, or their discomfort and their “coming out.” That’s usually not until eighth grade...I don’t think that there’s been a whole lot of [pause] let’s say, ‘non-acceptance’ by other students. They seem to go with it pretty well, but I can only speak to what I see and hear. As soon as the teacher comes around, there’s a lot of things we never see and hear.

Notably Penelope is not naïve to the fact that students may be more willing to quietly accept Joey’s being gay in a group setting, but it is outside of the formal classroom times that name
calling and “non-acceptance” become more prevalent among students. She knows that her presence as a teacher may impact this conversation, and it is her hope that it will carry into those informal times among students where adults are absent.

Penelope uses this book each year in conjunction with GLSEN’s national “No Name Calling Week” each January. She says that each year students note this is their favorite story, and in some cases, students have taken on the proud identity as a “misfit” in feeling that it is acceptable to be who you are in school outside of the socially popular cliques. I asked how students’ reactions have changed, if at all, when the character, Joe, comes out in the story:

Many years ago when I first did it, it was like, [gasp] almost a shock. "Oh my gosh! They said the word [whispers] gay." That kind of reaction. Now, not so much any reaction except some giggling and not necessarily at that, but I use the audio and the characters each have their own voice. Some of it is funny. Some of what they ... their conversations and banter with one another in the book, is funny. It's okay, I said, “It's

Figure 3. Excerpt from "The Misfits"
okay to laugh, but it’s got to be appropriate laughter. It’s when it’s funny, not when you’re uncomfortable. If you’re uncomfortable, then we’re going to talk about that.

Penelope does talk about this with her students. She proudly shared the bulletin board that her students created last year for “No Name Calling Week,” using “The Misfits” as an anchor text to drive the discussion.

![Figure 4. Penelope’s “No Name Calling Week” Board](image)

It was clear that there were other content-based opportunities to directly teach about LGBTQ identities in Penelope’s standards-aligned Holocaust unit. I asked her if, as part of this unit, she had ever explicitly addressed homosexuality through discussions of the “Pink Triangle” which was the symbol physically imposed on individuals to identify them as “homosexuals,” who like many other marginalized groups, were sent to concentration camps across Europe. She noted that she addressed homosexuality,

> [o]nly on the periphery. Only in saying that the Nazis identified the Jews and they made them wear a star. They identified the gypsies and made them wear this, they identified the Poles and made them wear this. The final solution or the ethnic cleansing was to, the goal was for the perfect Aryan race. That included ridding the world of the ‘undesirables’ including handicap, homosexuals, that’s pretty much it where it would end.

It is understandable that this may not be the most desirable place to talk about homosexuality in a positive light. I also recognized that Penelope’s closeness to the Holocaust history may further complicate the depth to which she wants to engage the propagandized hatred of that time period,
in a protective way. I asked Penelope about how her elementary colleagues might be prepared to address gender and sexuality in historical contexts and Penelope said that teachers

would be in a really tough position because we’re in a pretty conservative community and you’re going to expose their babies (emphasized) to things that are not talked about in their homes. That’s I think a huge hurdle. A huge- a brick wall actually. Forget the hurdle. We’re dealing- like I said, back to the ignorance, dealing with ignorance and dealing with, "My child's too young to hear that.” Guess what? If your child is not hearing it now, it’s too late in some instances. It's too late by the time they're now gay-bashing someone else on the school bus or they themselves are being singled out or teased or they are so suppressed that they are fearful of being themselves which is what I saw with many girls throughout the years who have been hospitalized at Butler and so forth because they didn't feel that it was safe to be who they are. It wasn’t safe for them to come out to their parents or to the community. It wasn’t safe for them to say, "I'm not sure who I am, I'm going to be this." Or, "I think I'm that." I think that they struggle a lot. Adolescents struggle as it is with identity.

Penelope is well-aware that students in middle school struggle with their identities and noted that she would never want to relive that period of her own life for those reasons. She also sees that there is a tension between parents and their children, parents and the administration, and her own role as teacher seeking to break down the barriers of gay identities to create a safe learning space without repercussions for doing so. Penelope recognizes the challenges of engaging with identity in the curriculum, but she continues to do so where she has relevant resources and cohesive places to bring the lessons together. Outside of that, she suggests it might be more difficult for elementary teachers to do so, particularly with the “conservative” and “ignorant” community in which she feels she teaches.

Her approach to informing the students she teaches is to integrate texts that have relatable characters or authors. In one such case, as LGBTQ identities can be another politically-fueled conversation, Penelope found herself on the receiving end of a parent complaint for using a poem by a lesbian author in one of her classes:

...[W]hen it comes to the topic of LGBTQ, I am in a community where it can be very sensitive. I’ve had complaints before brought to my superintendent because I’ve used
poetry written by a lesbian teenager and they didn’t want their children exposed to “that.” Now, this was 8th grade. I didn’t think that there was anything wrong with that. Luckily, my administrator in the building supported what I did, but we do have some parents that are resistant to that and, you know, want to keep their child basically sheltered from those things...I’m going to be really blunt and very honest. I think that it’s homophobia...I think there are a lot of people that believe that it’s a choice, that their child could “catch it”. It might rub off. I deal with a lot of ignorance and this is from very smart, educated people, but it’s a lot of ignorance in my opinion...It does [strike me] because it also speaks to identity...who we are and what makes us who we are I think is a big part of middle school. Period. Not one curriculum or another, it’s just part of everyday interaction as well as perhaps getting it into the social studies curriculum in some way and connecting with history.

This was an example of something that happened some years back, and today, she noted that it might be less likely for a similar complaint to occur. Still, Penelope shared her concerns about homophobic views in her community at-large and how to navigate this tension through the integration of grade-appropriate texts. It is this belief that members of her community are homophobic and ignorant which drives her to explicitly address LGBTQ identities in her curriculum, with the hope that it will dismantle some of the miseducation around who these individuals are during a difficult time in the identity formation.

**Eppie.** There is no formal curriculum for Eppie to follow with her Special Education students. Now that she is in a self-contained classroom, she has the freedom to choose the texts she will use to support her students’ learning needs. Plainly, Eppie said,

*Now that I have my own reading group, I can pick what I want to read and nobody's gonna question me because I'm doing it in my classroom...I just have to make sure that I'm teaching how to write an argument. I have to follow the standards. I'm in charge of the curriculum for this group of folks. I can do it the way I want. [laughs]...I know that my resource class it supposed to be skills-based, but I still am responsible for other stuff...When I had sixth graders a couple years back, we read “The Twits” [by Roald Dahl]...I love The Twits, but I was also realizing that [my students]...can't really walk around carrying “The Twits,” because they're in the middle school. Everybody knows Twits is an elementary school book. So, in here, the books never left the room. [I need to have] that kind of awareness of what they can have and what they can't.*
When designing her curriculum, Eppie is well-aware of the stigma put upon her students who are academically behind her peers. This awareness is at the forefront of their developmental needs, as well as making sure that she does what she can to keep them engaged. At heart, Eppie is protective of her students and so she builds her curriculum in a way that teaches them about stories of people who overcome adversity and have made a difference in the world.

![Figure 5. Eppie's Classroom (right side)](image)

It is evident for anyone who enters Eppie’s classroom that she values famous individuals who have a story. Her classroom walls are adorned with large black-and-white photographs of famous individuals from history. She has built a curriculum around biographies to engage her students in learning about people through the “peaceful community” of Dr. King. Her preference for teaching about famous individuals from history through biography study was subtly revealed in one of her reflection entries. Eppie was reflecting on her family and her elementary school experience, and just as she had implied in her interviews with me, there were some experiences in her own abilities as a student that helped her to relate to her role as a Special Education teacher today:
My grandfather worked for the school district as a glazier. Mr. Legler, our elementary principal, knew my dad when he was a student in high school. It was Mrs. Clark in the library at Travis Elementary who supervised me as a young reader. I was sent there because Mr. Legler asked me why I misbehaved in Mrs Pettis’s reading class. I said because I can’t read what I want to read. He allowed me to hang out in the library about three periods a week by myself. I read every biography book in the 920 section of the Dewey Decimal System. My favorite being the story of the life of a writer whose father was an idealistic educator/abolitionist. It was then I learned about New England. Louisa May Alcott. My second favorite was the autobiography of Helen Keller.

Her time in the library as a student who “misbehaved” in reading class had a formative impact on what content was engaging and important to her as a young reader. The libraries, and biographies, were her safe place in school when the classroom was not. Coincidentally, while we were interviewing in September 2018, there was an article from NPR discussing the Texas Board of Education’s decision to “erase” Helen Keller from K-12 history and social studies curriculum to make room for other identities. When I shared this with her, she mentioned that she had already read this same article. Eppie continued to share how grateful she was to be in New England where she could “openly” be liberal and continue to share these powerful stories with her students. In either case, in November 2018, the Texas Board of Education reversed their decision to keep Helen Keller in their curriculum. Eppie plans to do the same.

Toward the end of the first interview when sharing her urge to include all identities in her own biographical-history curriculum, Eppie shared in a “side note” that her daughter identifies as “trans.” This made me take pause. I felt privileged that she shared this with me, and so I did not probe further about her daughter, but I did ask her about the identities of the individuals in her curriculum. I asked Eppie if any of the individuals she has on her walls identifies as LGBT or Q. It was Eppie’s turn to take pause. After a moment, she said, “that’s a good question. I’m gonna have to work on that one.” It was important for her to share with me that when resources are purchased for grade levels, Eppie is not typically included in these discussions with her colleagues. Moreover, because grade-levels purchase the bulk of their resources for students
academically on-level, Eppie’s students are left out. This requires Eppie to purchase her own resources for students or find them, which typically, are not LGBTQ-inclusive per se, among other difficulties in building a curriculum to meet her students’ various needs.

At the end of the second interview, we revisited the lack of openly LGBTQ icons that she could include on her wall. I suggested Eppie could include Harvey Milk, the first openly gay politician from California; Andre Leon Tally, the first black and openly gay fashion columnist in Paris; and even her own daughter as a transgender person of color whom she could draw upon for inspiration. Eppie also suggested the following individuals she could include: comedian Ellen Degeneres; her former classmate and renowned architect, Charles; entertainer, author, producer and famous drag queen RuPaul Charles; singer and dancer Tommy Tune; and artist Jean Basquiat (who was actually heterosexual). It was from her list that I saw starting places to bring gender and sexuality into the biographies Eppie uses to teach, but also some misconceptions where she assumed that Jean Basquiat was gay. Admittedly, I did not know this on the spot and had to do research following our interview. From what I read online, it appeared that Basquiat was in a heterosexual relationship but was not labeled as heterosexual or bisexual, leaving me to wonder how others may have perceived his sexuality. This question emulated what teachers experience in thoughtfully including identities from history that may or may not have been labeled in a way that positions them as LGBTQ, but part of a larger conversation about gender and sexual identities.

Eppie and her students face hardships in overcoming their identities for a variety of reasons. Though this is still a struggle for Eppie, she is not resentful for those who have an easier time navigating the world around them due to their privileged identities. In fact, she is less concerned how it affects her, and more concerned about her colleagues and parents in the
community who create “the bubble” that protects students who do not face adversity in the town in which she teaches. Eppie sees that many students who are privileged in a variety of ways may not be as prepared as she was for the difficulties in the “real world” when they leave public school. Her main concern is that her colleagues are not addressing this privileged bubble:

I know that I have a lot of respect for my colleagues. And here in my own in little work community, they’ve been so lucky. You know? That bubble. They never worried about their rent. They always managed to pay their rent or pay their bills. They never had any car repossessed or a bad mark on their credit [laughs]. Their kid didn’t come out gay. They weren’t- they didn’t experience a divorce or maybe, you know, have a cheating spouse. Like, all the bad things that happen to other people that make things messy or disorganized or have a taste of “ick” from another standpoint, I guess. Like, they are in that wonderful bubble. And I’m happy for them, you know, nothing went wrong for them. But yet, to be that person that never had anything go wrong, and stand in front of these kids, it’s not- how do I say this? It’s like, they’re perpetuating the bubble.

Eppie’s mission is to push her students beyond the “bubble.” The ways in which she integrates the “Four Agreements” and the Six Principles of Kingian Nonviolence help to give students the skills they need to see and to navigate the world around them more peacefully. These are the foundation for building her curriculum. In one of her reflection journal entries, and throughout our interviews, Eppie referred to her most important lesson that she teaches each year to help students develop the skills needed to go beyond the bubble:

This is my most important lesson. To teach kids they have a power in the choice of what they believe about themselves...I remember my old boss rolling her eyes once when she overheard this lesson I taught with my students. Next year I will be sure to maybe have the kids draw their own self[-]portraits with a helmet shield and sword and to resolve to be people on earth who will be heroes on earth. We [w]ill caption this art "the time is always right to do what is right.”
Conclusion. There was no formal curriculum to be followed in each participant’s respective teaching context, except to adhere to the state’s curriculum standards. The use of their respective state’s curriculum standards provided wide latitude for teachers to make decisions as to what material is used and how it is taught so long as it is “aligned.” None of the curriculum standards call for explicit inclusion of gender or sexuality concepts outside of the heterosexual norm, thus making it a choice if a teacher decides to do so. When asked about their own identities, and how it relates to the ways in which gender identity is taught within the curriculum, each participant shared perspectives on how these discussions made their way into the classroom with students. It became clear that a teacher’s individual experience and belief system influenced the materials and topics chosen to address their students’ learning needs within their respective learning environments. Furthermore, it was having access to resources through which to have discussions that supported the explicit inclusion of LGBTQ identities in the formal
curriculum, while life experiences and belief systems informed the emphasis on identity conversations in the informal curriculum.

In most cases presented in this study, discussions of gender or sexuality are reactive to authentic situations that arise in practice. In only one instance was a gay male character explicitly included in the formal curriculum through Penelope’s use of “The Misfits” as part of her kindness-themed unit each year. Penelope also shared an instance of using a poetic text by a lesbian, teen author and was reprimanded by administration for using it without parental consent. Eppie made great use of biography and individuals from history to teach identity, none of which at this time were historically identified as LGBTQ. All other references to inclusive lessons were reactions to instances of name-calling or to prevent the perpetuation of stereotypes. It is in this decision-making that teachers made choices to navigate the tensions between the belief systems of themselves, their students, the parents, and the administrators.

Fourth Theme: Mediating conflicting messages from external sources

Children are especially susceptible to the messages sent directly and indirectly through adults’ words and actions. In many cases, it is what is not said or done that can teach children about a particular subject. The teachers in this study expressed the need to mediate the conflicting messages received from school administrators, parents, and the media when deciding how to discuss, or avoid, particular subjects with students. It was through discussing this mediation that the participants’ beliefs and values shed light how decisions were made related to their practice. For teachers, the discussion of identity in public school settings invokes a fear when it is not aligned to popular opinion. Thus, teachers’ stories revealed the potential consequence of parents complaining to administrators about them talking with students about political issues related to identities.
Carmen. Carmen’s approach to having difficult conversations with her students, who are primarily ELLs, is to appropriately engage them in discussion when it is relevant. The president’s rhetoric around immigrants, and the policies discussed rampant throughout media outlets brought this conversation to the forefront as it was difficult to ignore. Specifically, around the time of the marches that protested the initial immigration bans, Carmen explained that some of her students went with their families to march in solidarity against these policies. In this portion of her story, Carmen illustrated the complexities of discussing political topics that directly impact her students’ lives, while contemplating what Baycity’s Administration said was permissible to discuss, and how the parents may react:

We have so many kids [in Baycity] who are illegal, and families who are illegal. They were really scared. They just wanted to ignore it and we can't ignore it. We gotta talk about it. We gotta let them know that they're safe here, and it's whatever's gonna happen isn't gonna happen immediately, and whatever. We have to be open with them, but that was something else that [the Baycity Administration] didn't want to talk about, that they wanted no one to talk about that and that wasn't gonna happen. Well, not at least in my classroom. We want to talk about it...Maybe it was [risky]. You know? I don't know. Parents could call and complain, but I don’t tell kids what to think, I think I try to teach them how to think. And whatever opinion they form, they form that on their own. I never told them my political stance or anything, but we just talked openly about what was being said, what they were afraid of, what they were excited for, 'cause some kids were excited, and that's okay. Everybody's entitled to their own beliefs...They hear their parents, so they may not know, but they know what they hear, and they repeat it and they believe it because those are their parents. I had some kids marching in marches against Trump with their parents because they were afraid..."Well, we're gonna get taken away. They're coming to people's houses." I'm like, "Where did you hear this craziness from?"

"My mom seen it on TV, watching TV!"

So yeah. They hear all about it. "Well, on the radio it said...” So, they bring that all into school, but whether they verbalize and tell you about it, they're still carrying it with them even if they don't. Like I said, I have an open relationship with them, so they used to tell me everything. I know, even if they don't tell you, they're still thinking about it. Those kids are still thinking about it.

Carmen’s approach to these conversations which impact her students is to ask questions to help them think about what they believe, rather than to ignore the silence around what she knows is affecting them. It is through this approach that she mediates the concern that parents may
complain, while recognizing that she knows it is “risky” to talk about immigration openly against her administration’s wishes.

Carmen’s awareness of the need for students to be open-minded, particularly in the polarizing political state of our country, may be related to the disconnect she sees in the identities of her colleagues, and their beliefs, and the students who they serve in Baycity. In her personal experience as a student in Baycity, the readings in her formal pre-service education, and now as a professional teacher who identifies in the majority of a white, female, middle class workforce, Carmen sees how it impacts the need for family engagement, but in itself causes a disconnect because families do not feel they can connect or relate to the teachers on a more personal level:

I just feel like the people I went to college with, my colleagues mostly come from middle class, white backgrounds....[only] two [of us] are [Baycity] natives. Everybody else is from the [suburbs]...I don't know, they just don't seem to have a lot of the same views as me. Even some of them, even during Trump's presidency, I'm like, “We are teaching at [Baycity] Elementary School. Like I can't even believe we have those views and you're teaching here!” I just feel like it's a conflict of interest. We have like 70% ELLs. How are you here? But everybody is entitled to an opinion.

...I actually read a lot about it in college...A lot of times [white, middle class, female teachers are] looking for like family engagement and involvement, but families can't really connect to the teachers, because they just see themselves [as] so different, because teachers are educated...A lot of them middle class and they just feel like they have nothing in common with them or they're afraid to, because they just feel like they're not valued...because they're not as educated or they're embarrassed because they're not as educated. They don't have as much money or came from the same background. So, I always keep that in the back of my head. I don't want to ever make anybody feel that way, but I do see that, how they might feel that way, because some teachers do fit that mold. You know what I mean?...[B]ut we can't help how people view things. They just have to, I guess, keep trying to reach out and make a relationship or create some kind of a community.

It was not said aloud, but the implication of “those views” speaks to the alarming nature of President Trump’s immigration policies for those directly impacted by them. There was an ever-present fear that many students and families in Baycity carry about their unknown futures, and that some of Carmen’s colleagues align, or are assumed to align, with President Trump’s beliefs
that immigrants should not be allowed into the country illegally. Though she recognizes that everyone is entitled to an opinion, the disconnect in teachers’ beliefs and the needs of the students in which they serve was appalling to Carmen. Many individuals in the Baycity community carry their identity as an immigrant at the forefront because there is a political and social climate that is saying that being an immigrant is not acceptable in our culture right now. There appeared to be an undertone that the predominant identity of the teachers in her school, which largely mirror the teaching workforce nationally, are a barrier for parents in having more conversations with teachers. Moreover, this could have been a factor in mediating the risk of a parental complaint if there were existing cultural barriers between parents in the community and the teachers who serve Baycity students.

Having taught second grade for three years in her current school, Carmen was invited to loop with her class to teach third grade two years ago. She accepted this invitation because she was particularly fond of that group, while also having a reputation for building positive relationships with her students and improving student learning outcomes beyond some of her colleagues. She was admittedly hesitant to enter a grade responsible for annual state-testing on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). This added a pressure to her and her students that was not entirely aligned with her own educational philosophy. Carmen may have foreseen that this looping model would not be the most effective to meet her school community’s needs, in that, it only lasted that one academic year. The one-year duration of this model did not mean that it was considered a failed attempt. Carmen noted that the way this role change played out made her feel a bit manipulated by administration, confirming what she already knew about bureaucracy in a large urban school district: test scores are important, so put the most effective teachers in places responsible for those testing grades to improve those scores.
It was in this change that Carmen mediated meeting her students’ needs and her schools’ needs before her own preference in her professional capacity. Carmen reflected on her change in roles over the past three years and how it has impacted her perception of her own efficacy:

*I didn’t want to leave second grade, but they wanted me to go a “testing grade” because my scores were so good in second grade. They tricked me a little bit because there was three of us who were teaching second grade, they were closing one classroom, I had the least amount of seniority, but the other lady left on medical leave under stress...we all knew that she wasn’t coming back, but they said that the classroom was hers and they told me she was coming back. Made me sign third grade papers, and she resigned the next day...they just made me take the third grade so that I would be locked into a test-taking grade, and then they had to rehire somebody for the second grade....And the way that they did it [was manipulative], because they said I could either go to another school, which I kind of considered, but they said I would get to loop with my kids...I always knew that [administration was] like that. But I mean it just solidified it. [laughs]...Well, when we got back I only wanted to loop with my kids for third grade, I couldn't get back into second grade, so [my current] spot came up and I didn't want to teach third again, so I said, "Oh well, why don't I try it?" There's not a lot of people that have ESL licenses because they're pretty hard to obtain, so I had a lot of pressure from the outside, the ESL department, to use my license. I said, "All right, well I'll try it. It's at my school. I won't get this opportunity again at my school, so stick with my kids and try it in a more safe environment...I already knew last year that this wasn't really for me, but I was, "I'm gonna give it another year, plus second grade hasn't opened up again," [laughs]. So I thought. And it turns out it did open up, but we just weren't informed, so I had to stick with ESL again this year...I mean I would like to stay at [my school] because I really like that school, I like the population that they serve. But if I have to go to another school I will.*

It became clear in talking with Carmen that she puts her service to others, and the needs of her community, before her own without letting it detract from her work. Regardless of the way Carmen arrived at teaching third grade, her role as a teacher, mentor, and relationship-builder continues to be her priority.

The shared experience of growing up in the same community, coupled with her interest in learning about other people’s cultures, helps Carmen to create a learning environment that values the social interaction among students and teacher. Relationships with her students are familial, rather than authoritative. Family is an important aspect of Carmen’s own life and she recognizes
that many of her students lack this aspect of community due to an above-average immigrant population, some of which are here illegally. Though her experiences with the previous administration resulted in mistrust and some damaged relationships, Carmen found herself hopeful in hearing the opening remarks from Baycity’s new Superintendent of Schools during the district’s convocation this past August:

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\text{He's pretty impressive so far. I feel like a lot of my philosophies seem to align with his, which I was really happy about. Building relationships, and just being people. He told us about his family at convocation and I was blown away. But it's so nice to see the personal side of somebody. He talked about building relationships with the kids, and how kids need more play, and I was like, "[gasps] Oh my God!"...[A]nd he never, ever talked about [test scores]. I'm sure that that will come, but it's nice to know he's a real person. You know? He's not just this dictator who's gonna tell us what to do. And he talked about how he valued teacher's opinions and using your professional judgment on things. I was, "Wow, this is a breath of fresh air."... I mean, I don't know. [long pause] I don't really believe in testing, so it's hard for me to say because I feel like that's what we are so focused on is like testing and numbers...education as a whole I think needs to kind of be revamped. Be more child-centered instead of test score-centered and MCAS-centered.}
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Carmen’s philosophy on formal education runs deep, and it runs in stark contrast to the focus on testing in education. In asking about her own children’s education, and if they attend Baycity’s schools, Carmen explained that the emphasis on academic testing is not what she values:

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\text{[M]y youngest goes to a private school because I’m not really down with the whole...Well, it’s like before when they were so rigid on testing, and not a lot of play, so she ended up going to a private school where they believe more in that. And my son, from middle school, I sent him there too.}
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Carmen’s belief in the value of learning through play and socializing is shown through her commitment to give her children an education at a school that shares these same values. This belief as a parent, and as an educator, revealed the contradictory philosophy that puts her at the margins of her professional community. Carmen works to create learning environments that foster the same skills and so she was pleased to hear the new Baycity Superintendent relay this shared belief in his opening remarks. Though, from her experiences, she knows the
administration’s focus will eventually turn toward the improvement of testing scores, as it has in education at-large with most of the United States. This contrast between Baycity’s focus on testing, Carmen’s educational philosophy, and her children’s private education showed the complexities of working in education as a mission-driven teacher who is a resident and parent of the same community who wants to do right by her students and her children, even if it is not through the same environment.

**Penelope.** Penelope discussed many of the dilemmas that arise from being a teacher who aims to be apolitical by profession, in a politically divisive time period, where it is difficult to know what you can and cannot talk about with students. One of the teaching frameworks used in the Princeton Public Schools are the *Six Principles of Kingian Nonviolence*, developed from the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s (The King Center, 2018). Penelope spoke to her commitment to these as a frame for her teaching practice, feeling validated for doing so, yet the conflicting political messages students receive from the media cause her to feel frustrated in how to reconcile them as a teacher:

[Reading from the yellow paper on the wall behind her desk where she was sitting] Doing the right thing and being in a nonviolent way and reconciling with opposition as well as reconciling with yourself- that takes a lot of courage...It's like, "Well, somebody's got to do it. If not me, who? If not now, when?"...Now I really have [my students] questioning authority I guess and the rules that are in place. Are they just? Are they fair? Are they right? Every time they turn on the news or look at the social media, everything that I knew is totally undone in a matter of a Trump tweet. It's done. I combat that every day as well as their parents' politics... “Am I in some alternate universe please? Tell me I am and that I'm going to wake up because this is too crazy to be real.” That's where I am with all that and I think that we need to have that conversation because I'm looking at kids who in a few years are going to be making that choice of, "Now, what am I going to do? Am I going to be a police officer? Am I going to get to shoot black people? Am I one of those black people that are going to get shot? Am I going to fight for gay rights?" Or am I going to be one that says, "On my religious beliefs, I'm not going to bake a cake for a gay wedding."... As a reading specialist, it's really not my job [to help them make informed decisions on these topics], but as a human being, it's my job.
Penelope is aware of these conflicting messages sent to students about other politically-fueled topics but she is cautious not to impose her own personal views onto her students. Penelope went on to talk about the geographical closeness of Sandy Hook in Newtown, Connecticut where a violent shooting happened in 2012 when her current students were in elementary school. Like Carmen, talking about guns was considered “taboo” even though there are unexplained lockdown drills to prepare for such an event:

*The gun violence, gosh. [The students] talk about that. We need to. This conversation needs to be had. This is happening, and this is happening to children...When we’re told we’re in a lockdown and we have to shut everything down and hide behind things so that we’re not seen through the windows. Why are we doing this? This is why these things are real threats and to not talk about them is to say that they don’t exist and then we’re not ready to deal with it or be able to defend ourselves against it. That not only goes with the actual physical threat of gun violence, but the ignorance and hatred that is within our society and it’s becoming more so instead of less so. That is really a kick in the gut..."

Penelope is conflicted between her inner instinct to talk about the “why” of lockdown drills and her professional responsibility to follow administrative requests to not discuss issues of gun violence with students. Penelope is unsure of how to have broader conversations about these issues that students see in the news and their school safety policies, yet no one in her school is talking about the political issue at hand. Without support and guidance from her administrators about how to talk with students, Penelope feels that her silence on the issue contributes to the hatred she sees in society at-large. She used this as a parallel example to the ways in which teachers are silent about issues of hate in society.

Penelope works to integrate curriculum relevant to her students’ identities, and to meet their needs as learners and adolescents. The Princeton community is primarily white, conservative, and Christian, as described by Penelope, which has historically left minority religious beliefs at the margins of schoolwide recognition. Though, as administrators changed throughout her career, Penelope noted that the focus of conversations also changed about certain
religions within the community. Penelope recognizes that not all students identify as Christian, and there are less Jewish students than there were in years past. In all, now more than ever, it appears that there is a need to understand religious diversity in the divisive political climate in which we currently live. When asked what would be considered “radical” to teach in schools today, Penelope talked about religion and the complexities around talking about it:

*I'm not sure that there is much that would be considered radical. I think there are some topics that are more sensitive than others. I think that it's in the way that it's delivered...I think probably the most radical would be religion. Not so much preaching it or trying to convince one way or another, but even just the basic education of this is what it means to be Islam, this is what it means to be a Jew, this is what it means to be Christian, this is what it means to be a Buddhist, this is what it means to be you know, whatever. This is what this faith believes or that faith believes. That is, kind of, very taboo, definite separation of church and state and “Don't preach to my kid.”...I will give you an example of [long pause] the ignorance...I have colleagues who got a grant from Teaching Tolerance to put together a professional development day around Islam...[She] brought in people from the Muslim community, got an expert from Georgetown University to come and speak to us. We spent one day, and we had to get the grant in order to pay for [substitutes] because the district would not even let us...Even if we paid for it out of our pocket, wouldn't pay for our [substitutes] for the day...but when this was all coming together for this one in-service day on Muslims and how we can connect in the community and understanding Islam a little bit better and to get through that ignorance and the misconceptions, the principal at the time said, "Why do we need that in-service? We don't have Muslim students here."...Our jaw[s] dropped. No, we do have a couple. "We don't have that many Muslim students here, why do we need that?" This was from someone who is evaluating my job. So, I had a real problem with that on many levels...To then realize that if I had so much to learn, certainly the students have a lot to learn and a lot to understand. Maybe even to the point of understanding that it’s okay to not understand, but to accept and respect...I believe [we need to talk about religion]. My response was all the more reason we need it because we don’t [talk about it]. If we had more of a diverse population here, we may understand more because we would have more students. I had one student last year who observed Ramadan. One. I do know of a couple other Muslim students, but she's right, we have a handful, maybe in this community, but my response is all the more reason we need more learning on this. We need to open up and get this into our schools because they're part of our community and we need to take away these misconceptions and these fears that people have because they're unfounded for the most part [long pause].

Penelope and her colleagues openly appreciated the opportunity to engage in a “radical” learning experience about religious tolerance. This learning provided them with a structured space to ask
questions and learn from an expert, so that they may engage their community in conversations about religion from knowledge, rather than through stereotypes or assumptions. It also appeared that this type of professional learning was not frequent, yet it was perceived as very meaningful. Penelope expressed the disconnect between the administration’s assumptions about the students in which they serve, and how some teachers see, or need to see, their students’ identities in a more holistic way. Furthermore, it was clear that she needed to find a way to fund this learning because the district would not pay for teachers to be out of their classrooms for professional learning, thus having to mediate the financial aspect of her practice. This current view of religion in her school is contrasted by her first years in the district where the administrators, and the community’s demographics were different than they are today:

What’s interesting about that is my first 15 years here, we had a Jewish principal who was very supportive of everything we did and supportive of teaching [the Holocaust]. I’d have her come in and talk about Passover and certain customs and things like that. There was that [leadership] support. There was a time when we had a Jewish principal and vice principal, so we got the support. Now, we have a Jewish vice principal. Not so many Jewish teachers anymore, we did have a handful... [And now we have] A handful [of Jewish students]. A lot of them I may not even know about because they don’t necessarily take the Jewish holidays off from school anymore... We used to... I know that we are told, at least I know I am aware of when those holidays are and not to assign homework or give a test the next day or something like that and just to be sensitive of the fact that if a student is absent for a religious reason, not to penalize them in any way for that.

Penelope spoke to the disconnect between knowing her students’ religion when it’s not necessarily visible, or missing school for a particular holiday. It has not been an open discussion in her recent experiences, though it is only one of many topics that appear to be off-limits for teachers and students, even when it’s a recognized holiday. These conversations are left untouched for fear of disagreements with the majority of the community’s religious identities.

It is through a religious lens that Penelope also struggles with talking about gender and sexuality. She noted the homophobia in her community and how it is rooted in a predominantly
conservative, Christian ideology. This is juxtaposed with her knowledge of some students’ gender identity and/or sexual orientation that leaves her towing an ethical line in which she wants to support her students and validate their existence in a safe space, while recognizing that she is not fully equipped with the language or practices to make this work:

There are some [students] that I know [have come out], and they know, and I think that they’ve accepted it, but they haven’t advertised and expressly came out, but to a lot of their friends it's like no secret either. And I've had a couple that I can think of right now that were very sure of themselves, and they were comfortable in their own skin, so to speak. Which was unusual, but I look at their family dynamic, and saw that they have the support. And they had that safety net at home, and they had the support and loving family. And that regardless of who they were as far as if they came out as gay, or trans, or bi, or nothing, or something that it didn't matter. But they were still loved and accepted by their family and I think that that is a huge deal for kids at this age...I would feel comfortable talking to them about them being them, and that it's okay. And pretty much say that you know, to me, none of that other stuff matters, it is part of who you are, and I accept that. But I want them to know that. And that it wouldn't matter what they told me, that they're accepted regardless. But as far as like, and this is where I struggle, like educating the masses, I do not feel comfortable getting up and saying this is what a homosexual is, and this is what a transgender is, and this is what they do, and everything. Maybe because I don't have enough experience with that, or maybe because I cannot really empathize because I'm not one. So, I don't presume to understand how they might be feeling. And I don't want to overstep any of that, because I want to respect that they have the right to feel however they do. So, I struggle with that, and how do I get kids to understand that being different shouldn't matter?

Penelope went on to mention that the required transgender and gender non-conforming policies for all school districts in Rhode Island have not been discussed with her or made available. There is a concern that these issues affect students in schools, but policies have not been made clear to the teachers who need these to support students each day. It is through taking risks to mediate what she feels is right that Penelope works to create safe learning spaces, though she continues to ask for more resources and supports to accomplish this work more effectively.

Eppie. Eppie spoke to the ways in which politics and the divisive state of the country are affecting some of her students, relationships with her colleagues, and her inner self. Eppie has been able to process her own thoughts and to build relationships with likeminded colleagues
outside of school through professional development on types of writing including self-reflections. It has not been as easy with her colleagues at her school for some who exhibit close-minded behaviors or political views in stark contrast to her own. Eppie is the only teacher of color in her school. She shared a poignant anecdote about how her own identity forces her to have conversations about her race with her students, and increases her fears about being a Hispanic woman in America during this political era:

[Princeton] is a very Republican town... It’s been tough [laughs]...I’m not a fearful person. I don’t like fear. I feel like fear makes me angry and makes me want to fight [pause]. So, if I’m fearful, I can’t imagine what these kids...Last year, I had one little girl, she struggles with writing. She says, “Mrs. [Eppie], how can I think how to answer this teacher’s question when Kim Jong-Il can end the whole world if he wants to?” This is a seventh grader thinking this. We used to think that during the Cold War. This is what she’s thinking. It’s like history is repeating itself, and I can’t control that. The world comes in here. It’s in all their minds. They know. The very day Trump won the election, the next day I put on my big girl panties after crying all night and coming here. The first thing I’m asked by a little girl was, “Mrs. [Eppie], I sure hope you were born in the United States, because I don’t want Trump to deport you.”... [whispers] I had to go home...I didn’t take anything that day to fortify me enough to be able to be prepared for a question like that. And it was devastating. I just couldn’t, I’d never had my citizenship questioned. I just sent off to renew my passport. There was a second like, “What if it doesn’t...?” There are people who look like me who are sending off for their passports, and they’re not getting them back. They’re not being approved, because of their last name...It’s probably gonna come back, but that’s the stupid fear. If it happens to them, it could happen to me. Just thinking about that just turned my whole world upside down.

It was through her students’ questions that the reality of the outside world comes into Eppie’s classroom. In these moments, Eppie shared her dismay at the fear that her students carry and how now, this fear affects her too. Though her instinct is to reassure her students, Eppie also seeks to balance the “truths” about the world, which she worries not all students are ready to learn. Eppie knows many of her students are “vulnerable” and “aren’t ready” for the truths of the world, which leaves her in a conflicted place about the right time and place to talk about certain subjects. When asked what the solution to these conflicts are, Eppie says that it is through the
use of literature that she can talk with her students about the world, and the ways in which they can contribute to Dr. King’s peaceful community.

Eppie also shared a story about the conflicting beliefs of her colleagues around topics of gender at her school. In the same week as our second interview, the Senate Judiciary Committee was conducting the hearings for now Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. The media coverage about gender, through the lens of politics and our judicial system, was overwhelming for students and teachers. Coincidentally, Eppie shared that there was a flyer from a local university on a speaker series called “Reimagining Gender: Voices, Power, Action” which invited educators to attend free weekly conversations about gender and inclusive practices.

Upon seeing this flyer on a table in the teachers’ lunch room, she noted one of her colleagues (to whom she refers as her “microagressor” and contributes to a “death by a thousand paper cuts”) quietly tucked the flyer under a stack of papers so no one would see it there:

*She’s kind of one of these people that’s like [motions being closed off]– this is even closed to her, like and I don’t know, I find this picture very provocative. I find that it shows the bumpy skin, and that it’s brown, and here you’re saying you’re “reimagining gender” makes her uncomfortable, and I kept thinking…she really is closed. Not only, I’m seeing this, and I’m trying real hard in my balance to not weigh judgment, but man I was mad that day [laughs]. Like the hearings, and I went home, I listened to Kavanaugh, and I’m like going, “I work right next door to somebody who can’t even stand a picture about what gender, and what we’re supposed to imagine with our students is supposed to be about” [just] tuck it away.*

This brief story shed light on the fact that her colleagues are not talking about gender roles, or consent, through the media even when it was impossible to avoid in current events. Arguably, the nomination process for a Supreme Court Justice is an historical event in and of itself. Even in this case, teachers were not comfortable discussing it amongst colleagues, let alone with their students. In this way, Eppie felt isolated in not being able to be honest with her colleagues, or to
explore new ideas knowing that it was an unpopular approach and that her students may not be ready to talk about it, which went against her own beliefs at that time.

I asked Eppie how conversations about gender and sexual orientation have directly come into her classroom. Eppie was clear that LGBTQ-inclusive conversations still aren’t directly coming into her classroom for discussion. In looking back on previous exposure to direct conversations with LGBTQ youth at her school, about ten years ago, Eppie recalled that it was too soon for her school to have these conversations with students. She related this collective apprehension to her “fear-based principal” at the time when a local LGBTQ youth group came to speak with students at her school:

*And with their short hair, and their earrings in different places, and the tattoos, teachers like to have a conniption [laughs], “Like, it’s too much, it’s too much.” And really, it’s like, at the time, we did have a fear-based principal. I don’t know what this new principal is like, but so far so good, I mean, seems like she’s able to walk-the-talk. She’s talking about, you know, when we have a problem with the student behavior, we’re talking about “Tell me what you saw first? Tell me what you think could be influencing this behavior?” It’s much more of a kind approach, versus, “All right, what did you do?” [laughs] It’s like, or fear-based, “Oh my God, what’s the parent going to complain about?”...But in terms of like what is happening in the news, actually affecting what we’re doing? It’s hard for me to say...I know that at some point we’re going to start having to make the turn to the harder conversations. But I have to scaffold.*

It was a common thread throughout our conversations that because Eppie had issues in the past with losing support from different administrators, she is apprehensive about diving into LGBTQ-inclusive work until she better understands the tone of her new leadership team so as to garner support for the work, rather than be admonished for doing so after the fact. Eppie expressed willingness to include LGBTQ identities in her curriculum once she has resources and the learning to support her work, but most importantly, she expressed the need for support from her administrator. Eppie refers to the need to “scaffold” conversations of gender and sexuality to appropriately meet the learning needs and ability statuses of her students. Moreover, it appeared
that Eppie wanted to enter these conversations carefully based on her previous experiences in her school, and with a new principal who has not made her position explicitly clear about LGBTQ-inclusive conversations in Eppie’s classroom.

**Conclusion.** Teachers, by profession, are required to mediate conflict. At times, the conflict is between their beliefs and the curriculum in which they teach. Other times, the conflict arises between the explicit and implicit messages sent from parents, administrators, and district policies which cause teachers to take pause before addressing students’ identities. That said, it became clear that even when faced with conflicting messages, teachers choose to address identity in ways that make their students feel comfortable and accepted, while not shaming a point of view for being “wrong” from the teacher’s perspective. It is in this way, and the absence of policy guidance, that teachers mediate what students need, and the resources at their disposal to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or calcifying gaps in knowledge about a particular identity. All the while, each participant felt it was not enough and problems need to be directly supported from administration for schools to be truly inclusive.

**Summation**

Stories are never complete, but they reveal so much about an individual’s lived experience. It was through the telling of stories that teachers revealed their preparedness to address gender and sexuality in their respective practices. Ultimately, Eppie and Penelope were faced with more instances of students who identified as, or were perceived to be LGBT or Q in the middle school which appeared to create an urgency in wanting to engage in more LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum work. They both intentionally engage in identity work, but feel it is not enough to truly address the needs of LGBTQ students. In Carmen’s case at the elementary level, in an ESL role, there were no instances of students or characters in her curriculum who were
LGBTQ in her experience, resulting not in urgency, but an increased curiosity about the ways in which gender roles are implied and manifest in young students who are still learning about their own identities.

Carmen, Eppie, and Penelope are driven to discuss identity with students as a result of their personal belief systems rooted in equitable outcomes for students, rather than an explicit curriculum or policy which tells them to do so. Each participant volunteered to talk about their professional practice and how personal experiences shaped their work over time. It was clear that when the participants were clear about their own identities, they were able to more clearly recognize their students’ identities. This did not mean they were equipped to teach identity in all manners of the term but were aware that it was not to be ignored. Interestingly to me, it was clear that each participant supports students who carry stigmas about their ability status, language acquisition, or reading ability which only add to the complexities of teaching identity within their local curriculum. In doing so, the participants revealed their willingness to mediate conflicting messages and to take risks in being honest with their students about the challenges of holding a marginalized identity while also conveying a consistent support system in the classroom environment. It was in taking risks to engage students in reflecting on their own identities and teaching through characters and texts about qualities that can help students to navigate societal constructs as they continue toward and through adolescence.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

Narrative inquiry as a methodology is “increasingly being seen as crucial to the study of teachers’ thinking, culture, and behavior (Zembylas, 2003, p. 214). The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to understand how three teachers’ stories reflected the degree to which they gave voice or contributed to the silence around LGBTQ-inclusive themes in history and social science (HSS) curricula, and how their professional preparedness undergirded these decisions. The participants’ narratives were the primary source of data collected and analyzed to better understand the complexities of teachers’ efforts to engage with LGBTQ-inclusive themes, corroborated by other field texts such as reflection journals, instructional materials, and photographs.

These data were analyzed by “queering” three teachers’ narratives through a poststructuralist, queer theoretical lens to reveal how heteronormative discourses shape their work and begin to shape an understanding of themselves within cultural systems of power. Moreover, the use of Bowen and Blackmon’s (2003) vertical spiral of silence provided a lens through which to analyze teachers’ stories to determine what was, and was not, spoken in relation to LGBTQ-inclusive themes in the curriculum, the media, and the schools in which each participant worked. These two theories provided a framework through which to shape the line of inquiry, and ultimately, to solve the study’s research puzzle (Clandinin et al., 2007).

The research puzzle was comprised of the following research questions: (1) How do teachers’ stories reflect their preparedness to disrupt heteronormative constructs through the inclusion of LGBTQ themes in their local curriculum?; (2) How do teachers navigate the decision to voice or silence LGBTQ-inclusive themes in the HSS curriculum?; and (3) How do teachers recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas surrounding LGBTQ-inclusive themes?
research questions framed the interview protocols for the two in-person interviews, and the collection of field texts, leading to an understanding of the ways in which the participants’ stories answered these questions. Moreover, a research puzzle recognizes the evolution of the researcher’s understanding of the problem and how s/he/they contribute to the line of inquiry throughout the study.

The following chapter will revisit the theoretical framework used in this study, followed by a discussion of the four major findings situated within the literature: (1) disruption of heteronormativity begins with awareness of self-identities; (2) recognizing students’ identities gives rise to ethical dilemmas in practice; (3) disrupting heteronormativity starts with the informal curriculum; (4) teachers need explicit support from policies and administrators to actively disrupt heteronormative discourses. The conclusion section will address the research questions using evidence and learned-lessons from this study, from which implications for future practice and research will be presented.

**Revisiting the Theoretical Framework**

In order for me to deconstruct each individual’s understanding of heteronormativity, it was necessary to shape the line of inquiry to first understand each individual’s construction of their own gender and sexuality. This study, and thus the line of inquiry, was framed using Queer Theory, rooted in a poststructuralist philosophy and a critical paradigm which “acts to erode ignorance and misapprehensions…to[ward] transformation” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). The underlying assumption that undergirded this narrative inquiry study was that creating a conversational space between researcher and participant to explore assumptions and beliefs through stories of experience about gender and sexuality would lead to transformation in understanding and ultimately, professional practice. Additionally, the assumption that LGBTQ-
inclusive themes are sporadically addressed in classroom settings supported the use of Bowen and Blackmon’s (2003) vertical spiral of silence framework to understand the degree to which individual teachers perceive public opinion and thus how they are permitted to give voice to marginalized aspects of their own, and others’, identities in the workplace (i.e. the school). Together, the use of Queer Theory and Bowen and Blackmon’s (2003) vertical spiral of silence theoretical framework helped situate the findings of this study for use in future research and practice toward the disruption of heteronormativity through LGBTQ-inclusive identities in the HSS curriculum.

**Queering Teachers’ Heterosexual Identities**

Queer Theory posits that heteronormativity is a form of institutionalized oppression which culturally privileges heterosexual cisgender males and females. All participants in this study recognized their positions as heterosexual, cisgender females through the understanding that we live in a heteronormative society. In an effort to model my own belief that gender is a spectrum beyond a male/female binary, and to facilitate the gender attribution process, I asked each participant which pronouns they prefer to use and offered my own as he/him/his. Gender attribution is the process of assigning a person’s gender through observation of characteristics and behaviors (Kessler & McKenna, 1993). Rather than for me to assume that each participant was female based on visual characteristics, or nonverbal cues, it was important to recognize that the gender attribution process is one that can immediately disregard an individual’s identity by incorrectly assigning gender to a person, which can be particularly harmful for transgender individuals who are often excluded. Additionally, it was my hope that modeling this practice would set the tone for our conversations and to establish a respectful rapport. Notably, Eppie thanked me for asking, signaling that this practice was known to her and appreciated. Later, I
attributed Eppie’s appreciation for this inclusive approach to gender when she shared that her daughter identifies as transgender. Carmen and Penelope responded with “she-her-hers”, though both hesitated, and had to think about one of the pronouns, signaling this was not an automatic response in sharing their individual pronouns with someone in conversation. What mattered in this setting was that they were receptive, and open to sharing their gender pronouns in this way. Giving voice to gender through the explicit sharing of pronouns early in the interview process also provided opportunities to explore how being female influenced the ways in which the participants saw themselves and their students.

Individuals subconsciously attribute gender to those whom they observe in everyday life. Based on that determination, the behaviors that are attributed as masculine or feminine begin to suggest sexual orientation attribution if they do, or do not, align with the cultural norms for that particular gender. In most cases these are stereotypes. Sullivan (2003) refers to Wittig’s (1980) essay entitled *The Straight Mind* where she argues that “heterosexuality as an institution is so embedded in our culture, that it has become almost invisible” (p. 121). In recognizing the invisibility of heterosexuality, I did not directly ask the participants to share their sexual orientation, nor did the I disclose my own sexuality at the start of the interviews. It was through the sharing of stories and the details therein that participants’ sexuality was implied when the social space appeared to make room for such information. This was an intentional on my part to respect the fragile social space between researcher and participant, and to create an authentic space within which the researcher and participants would be comfortable sharing their life experiences.

In a heteronormative society, heterosexuals do not have to “out”, or reveal, their sexual orientation. Heterosexuality is assumed based on the binary construct of male/female genders
and the culturally-normed roles attached to each respective construct. In this way, there is an implied social responsibility for someone who identifies as LGBTQ to reveal themselves, ultimately disrupting the heteronormative assumptions individuals put on others. The risk in doing so with an unfamiliar individual is that if belief systems about gender and sexuality are dissonant between two or more individuals, it can significantly impact the social space in which they inhabit at that point in time. Thus, in an effort to generate a social space for authentic dialogue about the participants’ experiences through narratives, I did not want my own (homo)sexuality to shape how the participants responded to the first set of interview questions in the case they may have held back adverse opinions on the subject. It was toward the end of the first interviews that I was able to authentically voice my sexual orientation as “gay,” though I assumed it was of no surprise based on the context of this study, the participants’ perceptions of my gender and/or sexuality, and my closeness to the subject at hand.

Much of the conversations with each participant involved discussions about the implicit formation of gender roles in young children, and how these gender roles manifest in a patriarchal society as adults. Moreover, these conversations were framed in the context of talking with colleagues or administrators in their school settings, rather than between teacher and student. This suggested that there is more work to be done in disrupting gender and sexuality with the adults in the school community before students can be actively brought into more formal conversations. Conversations with Penelope, Eppie, and Carmen supported the notion of influential feminists who “have argued that heterosexuality is not simply a natural, universal, and trans-historical phenomenon, but rather, is a culturally constructed institution that most often functions to the detriment of women” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 120). Thus, it was just as important for
me as a researcher to understand the participants’ positions as women in a patriarchal, heterosexual society as it was to consider my own homosexuality in a heteronormative society.

Each identity marker, when marginalized by adverse positions of cultural privilege, can carry its own weight on the individual’s perception of their life experiences. Eppie shared stories of being marginalized by men in the workplace, the role of being a working mother and wife, and having been silenced by her colleagues both as a result of her gender and her race. Carmen’s awareness of the ways in which her young students internalized gender roles, and how those roles shaped their decision-making, caused her to reflect on her own contributions to these cultural norms as a teacher and as a parent. Penelope expressed her concern for her students who have transitioned their gender identity and/or gender expression, and whether or not they have support systems at home and school, and how she herself might be a better support for those students. In short, it appeared that negotiating gender roles as female professionals was difficult enough to talk about in their everyday lives, never assisting in the efforts to discuss them with students in a more formalized way. Though it was recognized by Eppie, Carmen, Penelope that through the individuals who are represented in their respective curricula, and the every-day social interactions between all individuals in schools, students were implicitly learning and enacting the heteronormative gender roles enculturated in our society. This further supports Bruner’s (1996) conclusion that “[i]nstitutions do the culture’s serious business” (p. 30).

Eppie, Carmen, and Penelope voiced their acute awareness of their social responsibility as females who identify as mothers, teachers, and citizens to teach identity in an inclusive way for all students’ benefit. Drawing a parallel to Lorde (1984), who explained that “it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes…Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world” (par. 2). So, just as an LGBTQ person may feel the
responsibility to educate heterosexuals, female gender roles arguably place the same burden of responsibility on women to teach others about who they are in a patriarchal society, particularly when so many stories shed light on male oppression in the workplace and society at-large. While this burden may be a catalyst for individual responsibility to teach those who identify as privileged, it is not solely the responsibility of minoritized individuals to educate the masses.

The deconstruction of these stories through a queer lens raised new questions about the intersection of identities toward disrupting the social norms of minoritized individuals. First, is having an identity marker that is culturally oppressed a catalyst for recognizing the struggle of others? Or, does having a shared life experience lend itself to becoming an ally for others? Finally, is there a connection between individuals who hold the “mother” and “ally” identities? These are new questions that have emerged through this study of teachers in recognizing the complexity of intersecting identities in a multicultural and heteronormative society.

**Disrupting the Spiral(s) of Silence**

Though none of the participants themselves identified as LGBT or Q, they empathized with their students who may or may not identify as such, and shared a belief that all students, no matter their identities, should feel included in the classroom and in society. The participants in this study voiced their value of all identities. This value shaped the learning environments in each of their respective classrooms. The difficulty is that even though gender is an identity that is ever-present for all students, conversations about gender roles and sexual orientation are predominantly silent without curricular policy, or instructional materials, through which to structure developmentally-appropriate conversations with their students, all of whom are under the age of fourteen. Furthermore, teachers negotiate levels of professional risk when deciding whether or not to voice or silence LGBTQ-inclusive topics in their school environments. Thus,
heteronormativity is evident through the pervasive silence related to gender and sexuality, upheld in the participants’ schools through policies and individuals who are unaware of (hetero)sexism, or do not wish to risk voicing the issues in absence of resources or policies to protect them in doing so.

Carmen, Eppie, and Penelope voiced concerns about the ways in which the mass media coverage in recent years is impacting students of varying identities. Moreover, it was evident that their colleagues and administrators were not always willing to support, or make space, for conversations with each other, nor with their students regarding discussions of gender and sexuality in current events. Each participant felt that their individual willingness, and ethical imperative, to voice what is right or wrong with their students in many cases was not popular amongst her colleagues, or her administration. It was in this negotiation that each participant recognized an impulse to voice the issue but felt stifled by a lack of support in some cases.

Teaching about political issues in schools has historically been contentious even though HSS curricula is the most commonly accepted place through which to discuss political issues. Carmen, Eppie, and Penelope discussed current events including immigration, gun control, violence, gender roles (specifically, “toxic” masculinity), and sexuality. Since the start of the Trump Administration, these issues have increasingly been discussed in the media, and in their heightened state of social awareness, larger numbers of individuals in society continue to be impacted. Notably, these politically-fueled issues raised by each participant in their respective contexts speaks to an identity or belief system that is invisible, unlike gender expression or race which can physically be seen. The problem is that these invisible topics have been unavoidable for teachers, and students, in the era of technology in which we live. They are arguably the most important issues to address, yet they are the least discussed due to the political risk. The silence
around these ever-present issues support the philosophical argument that “in order to be silent, one must have something to say” (Zembylas & Michaelides, 2004, p. 193). Moreover, it is when an individual’s opinion is perceived to be in the minority position that the individual chooses to be silent in order to avoid the political and social risks of giving voice to alternative viewpoints.

**Horizontal Spiral of Silence.** The local conditions, at this point in time, described by Carmen, Eppie, and Penelope in their interviews suggested that Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) spiral of silence is contributing to the lack of LGBTQ-inclusive topics at the school-level. The spiral of silence is a dynamic process that occurs over time (Scheufele, 2008), of which each participant noted that these conversations were received differently in their schools based on (1) the macro-political context of the media coverage in the Obama Administration versus the Trump Administration and (2) the micro-political context of the school which has shifted over time based on the school’s administrators, and the community’s population. If the spiral of silence is impacting the silence around LGBTQ-issues in schools, it suggests two conclusions: (1) that as time and individuals’ opinions shift within the macro- and micro-political contexts, LGBTQ-inclusivity could at one point in the future be a more easily discussed topic as it was suggested toward the end of President Obama’s Administration in his second term, and (2) that the risk of not voicing minority opinions further contributes to harmful learning environments for LGBTQ students, and the public opinion toward individuals who identify as LGBTQ.

In a later development of this theory, Bowen and Blackmon (2003) explain that “Noelle-Neumann (1991) argued that for a spiraling to occur people must perceive a threat of isolation *and* they must fear isolation” (p. 1396). Each participant expressed a self-perception of being isolated from their colleagues based on their personal beliefs in relation to the conservative views of administrators and or the broader community, and isolated in their professional roles as
educators who serve students at the social margins. It is important to note the participants did not fear isolation, as they already felt this way related to voicing minority opinions, yet they were notably cautious in weighing the risk of voicing an opinion or viewpoint if the administrative opinions or policies were not in a position to support them in doing so. Though there is evidence of a spiral of silence, because it is a macro-level theory and this study did not completely capture the depth of the climate of opinion at the school-level, it suggests further study employ the horizontal spiral of silence framework to understand the relevance of the theory to this topic, and to understand its influence on a larger number of participants to confirm its existence and impact on LGBTQ-inclusive themes in the curriculum.

**Vertical Spiral of Silence.** Bowen and Blackmon (2003) further developed a contemporary vertical model of Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) horizontal spiral of silence. Though not conclusive, the data from this study suggest that a horizontal spiral of silence may be impacting LGBTQ-inclusivity in schools at this point in time due to the macro- and micro-political contexts in which the participants are located and influenced by media and majority opinions. Regardless of its existence, the use of Bowen and Blackmon’s (2003) vertical spiral of silence can be applied at the individual level to develop an understanding of how invisible aspects of the individual teacher’s identity may also contribute to giving voice or silencing minority opinions related to LGBTQ-inclusive themes. Figure 7 illustrates how the vertical spiral of silence represents “the dynamic effects of silence on a controversial invisible diversity characteristic on group communication” (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003, p. 1405). In the context of this study, the invisible diversity characteristic is sexual orientation. The four statements on the left, starting at the bottom, or base of Figure 8, are prompts that increasingly “spiral” upward toward repression of organizational voice. For example, the lowest instance of repression of
organizational voice would be an affirmative answer to ‘I am not free to talk about who I am’. Thus, each statement above this signals an increased degree of repressed voice within an organization when an individual agrees, or affirms, the statement(s) on the left. Furthermore, the emotional and social consequences of agreement with each statement are found to the right, further implying a spiral of silence that occurs over time. None of the participants identified as LGBT or Q, initially suggesting that this framework to understand the impact of invisible identities may not immediately reveal the ways in which their own personal identities resulted in self-censorship within their schools. A deeper analysis of the complexity of individual identities suggested an alternative application of this framework to better understand how participants’ intersecting identities contributed to their group communication in the school setting.

Figure 7. The vertical spiral of silence. (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003, p. 1404)

**Carmen.** Carmen’s identity as a heterosexual cisgender female positioned her at the base of the vertical spiral of silence framework through its original intent. She explained on multiple occasions that she is free to talk about who she is with her students, and they are open with her
because she is “so open with them.” Moreover, Carmen discussed her participation in this study and its content with her colleagues to gauge how they might react to LGBTQ-inclusive work in elementary schools. It suggests that as a framework, Carmen does not experience a repression of organizational voice because of how she identifies herself. Carmen suggested that even when in conflict with her administrator’s or colleagues’ opinions on certain political topics, she is still willing to voice her opinion in a professional way so as to discuss the topics relevant to students’ needs. Thus, Carmen’s identities do not appear to have adverse effects on her contributions to organizational communications.

**Penelope.** Penelope’s identity as a heterosexual cisgender female also positioned her at the base of the vertical spiral of silence framework. In comparison to Carmen, Penelope’s stories did not suggest she is as personally open about herself with her students in relation to gender and sexuality. In this way, Penelope may experience minor organizational repression of voice where she self-censors on certain topics though it may have less to do with her own identity, and more to do with her perception of public opinion on said topic. Penelope exhibited an “identity conflict” related to her role as a reading specialist as her colleagues’ positions were eliminated in recent years, and she feels like a “dumping ground” for students who need more support than she alone can provide in some contexts. This supports Penelope at the base of the vertical spiral of silence, experiencing only minor self-censorship when it comes to voicing her own identity in the school context.

**Eppie.** Eppie’s identity as a heterosexual cisgender female of color positioned her differently than Penelope and Carmen. Eppie’s stories suggested that in many ways, as the only woman of color, she self-censors in a variety of settings because she recognizes that in a minority position, she is seen through a socially-magnified lens. This causes her to be cautious
when reacting to the racial and gender inequities she witnesses in her students, and experiences as a professional. When Eppie recalled the story in the teacher’s lunchroom where she saw her colleague hide the flyer for a gender-inclusive workshop at a local university, she chose not to say anything to this person with whom she had negative experiences in the past. Eppie carries her gender, and her race, strongly at the forefront of her identity and her belief system which she has found to be silenced in various ways, resulting in somewhat inhibited social interactions with particular people, or fewer casual conversations with others. These anecdotes suggest that Eppie is higher on the vertical spiral of silence in her school where she does not perceive herself as able to fully engage with her colleagues, or her school, depending on those around her at a given time and place. She does not feel inhibited with her students based on her sexuality, but expressed a caution about how her views can be heard or seen more acutely because of her minority position as a woman of color. In this way, the framework suggests that Eppie experiences higher levels of organizational repression of voice when compared to Penelope and Carmen due to her racial identity. Though race is not an invisible identity, there is room here to suggest that the intersection of identities may be an alternative application of the vertical spiral of silence through which to understand the degree to which organizational voice is repressed at the individual level.

**Further inquiry.** Another consideration for the use of Bowen and Blackmon’s (2003) spiral of silence framework is to consider the invisibility of the participants’ “ally” identities, or their identities as non-content area classroom teachers. Each considers themselves an ally for LGBTQ identities, and as such, enact inclusive environments within their own contexts. Though there was less evidence of this as repressive within the organization, there was more evidence of organizational repression of voice as it related to professional roles within their respective contexts. As a result, this framework could frame future inquiries which seek to understand
individuals’ invisible identities beyond sexual orientation toward a deeper understanding of the impacts on organizational repression of voice.

Conclusion

The application of queer theoretical concepts, and spirals of silence theories, revealed that heterosexual female teachers recognize their positions of privilege as heterosexual, and also the challenges of being female in a heteronormative and patriarchal society. Moreover, giving voice to issues of gender and sexuality, or any other political topics, are difficult to navigate in school settings. Public opinion is shaped by the political messages disseminated through the media, which change over time. It is through an understanding of an individual’s own identities, beliefs, and values, in relation to the opinions of others within local contexts that teachers decide to give voice to LGBTQ-inclusive themes in school settings. These efforts, though only the beginning, are important toward recognizing, and disrupting heteronormativity. It is through future research that queer and spiral of silence theoretical concepts should be explored at the school-level to better understand how silence theories can disrupt organizational repression of minority opinions, especially as it relates to personal identities. Moreover, the intersection of identity markers, both visible and invisible, suggests a future application of the vertical spiral of silence to better understand the impacts of repression on organizational voice as a result of identity.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature

Heteronormativity is the culturally accepted assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation for males and females. This assumption leaves LGBTQ identities at the margins of social norms and ultimately silenced without a conscious disruption of the (hetero)norm. A disruption is only the beginning step toward the true deconstruction of heteronormativity. My assumptions about the degree to which LGBTQ-inclusive work is
happening in elementary settings, and the analysis of the data in this study yielded findings that suggest only a minor disruption of heteronormative discourses through the informal curricular inclusion of LGBTQ themes. A true deconstruction of heteronormativity is the theoretical long-term goal of this work and would only be possible through a large-scale societal commitment to deconstruction of gender and sexuality. In short, the following findings, grounded in a queer theoretical framework, suggest that only a minor disruption of heteronormativity has occurred in each participant’s respective curriculum. That said, these findings further suggest that the most influential disruption occurred within the individuals themselves as a result of participating in the narrative inquiry process.

Finding #1: Disruption of Heteronormativity Begins with Awareness of Self-Identities

The complexity of individuals’ intersecting identities must be recognized and understood to thoughtfully engage in identity work with others. Penelope, Carmen, and Eppie engaged with this study to share their stories of personal experiences from which their beliefs systems revealed the reasons for the willingness to engage with LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. In doing so, each of the participants perceived their respective professional identities as marginalized when compared to content-based, classroom teachers. It was this finding that affirmed how teachers’ beliefs about history, knowledge schema, socialization within their discipline, moral values, and perception of how students learn influence how teachers approach their respective content area (Sawyer & Laguardia, 2010).

Different stories shed light on the ways in which the participants’ identities implicitly inform their inclusive approach. In most cases, it was professional role, gender, and race that were at the forefront of their identities. Carmen and Penelope considered the ways in which being middle-class, white females influenced how they addressed characters or historical figures
in texts. They questioned how their explicit and implicit teaching influences the ways in which students learn about class, gender, and race. Carmen became interested in the need to review her own text resources in her classroom library to see who the characters were and how their identities may, or may not, connect to her own students. Penelope wondered in her use of relevant literature, like Jerry Spinelli’s *Maniac Magee* how her identity as a white teacher discussing issues of racial and economic divide sent the right, or wrong, messages to her students experiencing these same issues in their community. Similarly, Eppie felt a burden as the only woman of color in her school to attend to gender and racial disparities in her work, as she felt she could rarely escape being so visible to people in her school and that it was her responsibility to do so.

It was through sharing their experiences with a marginalized part of their own identities that each participant began to consider how their position as heterosexual females impacted the ways in which they talk about gender and sexuality in their respective contexts. The participants’ engagement with the narrative inquiry process led to an initial, internal disruption of heteronormativity, which shaped new ways of seeing and interacting with their respective environments. Moreover, this process of recognizing heteronormativity and an increased awareness of individual contributions to a collective system that contributes to heteronormative privilege led each participant to question their respective practices. The narrative inquiry framework for this study led each teacher to question their current approach to LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum in the form of pedagogical conundrums, which Scheible (2012) suggested is an important step toward disruptive pedagogies and more inclusive practices.
Finding #2: Recognizing Students’ Identities Gives Rise to Ethical Dilemmas in Practice

Eppie, Carmen, and Penelope all voiced their value in creating more inclusive classroom environments for all gender and sexual identities. They deserve credit for their continued work in classroom settings toward LGBTQ-inclusive discourses. Moreover, they all addressed cautious optimism in doing this work so long as their students were perceived to be “ready” for such conversations. They continue to seek new ways to disrupt the normalization of heterosexual identities, and male/female gender binaries, to make room for those who identify at the margins of social (hetero)norms. Heterosexual teachers who commit to “ally work” (Ryan, 2016) through the “ally identity” in schools emulate how they are positioned to minimize “the risk of being sanctioned specifically because of their sexual or gender identities” (Smith, 2015). Thus, because each of the participants self-identified as heterosexual, voicing their own sexuality, or LGBTQ-identities, does not put them at personal risk in their respective professional environments.

It is important to note that the participants in this study and I acknowledge that the act of disrupting individual perceptions of heteronormativity is merely the first step toward a true deconstruction of heteronormative discourses, and that this work requires a long-term, collective effort beyond individual teachers and toward institutional change. That said, in recognizing that ally work is on-going, the participants should continue to explore their ally identities. An ally is a well-intentioned identity which seeks to support LGBTQ-inclusive spaces. Though as Smith’s (2015) study of teachers who identify as allies concluded, this identity should be more deeply and introspectively explored, as to whether or not students who are, or are perceived to be LGBTQ are not seen through a deficit lens as a victimized population. Eppie and Penelope told stories that confirmed ethical dilemmas in teaching practice are unavoidable (Colnerud, 1997), in
that, when they saw students who they perceived to be LGB or T in their school and were not able to directly address their questions or concerns, they fell silent and felt frustration. Moreover, when students were perceived to be LGB or T, an initial reaction may have been to protect these students from their peers out of fear for their well-being, and inclusion in social spaces. It is important to consider how the reaction to protect students perceived to be LGBT and to recognize the need to properly support them because they fall outside the (hetero)norm forms a dilemma-in-practice. In order to resolve this dilemma, individuals must act proactively to further understand the context and what supports are needed toward the transformational work of disrupting heteronormativity.

**Finding #3: Disrupting Heteronormativity Starts with the Informal Curriculum**

None of the participants in this study were required by their respective state’s HSS curriculum frameworks, or the local school policies, to explicitly include LGBTQ identities in K-8 education. Beyond the individual teacher, this supports Smolkin and Young’s (2011) conclusion that the omission, and erasure, of LGBTQ identities from HSS texts imply that it is not important enough to warrant mentioning. Though the new HSS K-12 frameworks were adopted in Massachusetts in June of 2018, it is only in grade five and two high school history courses that LGBTQ-inclusive content is explicitly addressed in the frameworks, leaving K-4 and grades 6-8 educators without formal guidance on where or how to include LGBTQ-identities. When I brought this up to Carmen, she said that she would teach “that stuff” but felt her colleagues would not be as prepared or willing to do so as she was. Carmen referenced LGBTQ themes as “that stuff,” though in recalling the conversation she was having with colleagues she may have paraphrased their words, or it could have been her own. Regardless, it’s important to note that without the vocabulary to engage in conversations about gender and
sexuality, LGBTQ topics are regarded as “stuff” in the larger educational discourse. In Rhode Island, the Grade Span Expectations (GSEs) for HSS curriculum were developed in 2008, with revisions approved in 2012, continue to provide broad categories for historical topics while never explicitly addressing LGBTQ identities in any part of K-12 education. Eppie does not include homosexuality as part of her *Genocide and The Holocaust* unit, and Penelope said she only addresses homosexuality “on the periphery.” The participants all said that the teachers in their buildings responsible for HSS curriculum were not engaging in LGBTQ-inclusive identity work to their knowledge.

It was clear that Eppie, Penelope, and Carmen saw the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals as important because of the individuals they have encountered in and out of school, revealing a personal belief that gender and sexual identities do have a place in the curriculum. Moreover, Penelope expressed frustration in having the will to commit to more LGBTQ-inclusive teaching, but not having enough resources through which to do so. Carmen and Eppie both see new opportunities to explore places in their curriculum to bring in LGBTQ-inclusive themes and expressed interest in doing so this academic year. Though it raises the question where these resources will come from, knowing that none of the participants themselves could name an LGBTQ historical figure, or a resource through which to address the topic at this time.

The silence around LGBTQ identities in each school’s curriculum reifies heteronormative discourse and students’ understanding of heterosexuality through “constant exposure and negotiation” (Ryan, 2016). Gender and racial identities are visual and are the predominant focus of the ways in which individuals identify each other. In these observations, individuals attribute assumptions and stereotypes, which in turn impacts interactions between individuals. These identity markers were also present in each of the participants’ formal curriculum, which
integrated literacy and social studies themes through skills-based instruction respective to each teachers’ context. As seen in her classroom, Eppie uses a variety of biographies of men and women from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds to talk about identity throughout the year. Penelope shared how texts like “Maniac McGee” bring in the racial disparities of socioeconomic statuses in urban cities and the implications for those students who experience that in her own town today. Carmen did not suggest a specific example of gender or race in her formal curriculum, though when asked about it, she developed a heightened realization that characters in her formal curriculum can imply gender roles suggested that she needs to audit her own curriculum to see how her materials address gender. This supports Eisner’s (2002) suggestion that curricular materials require “a subtle critical analysis…to discern the kinds of social values that are being promulgated within the materials that students and teacher employ” (p. 88). Though to vary degrees, Carmen, Eppie, and Penelope addressed gender and race in their curriculum, the same was not true for sexual orientation.

Sexual orientation lives in the silent assumptions, and approval, of male/female identities in a predominantly heterosexual society. In stark contrast to gender and race, sexual orientation is only visual when the behaviors attributed to an individual fall outside a culture’s gender role norms. For instance, when a male expresses feminine behavior, or a female expresses masculine behavior, their sexuality is questioned as a result of the dissonance that rises from the expected gender norms of a male always expressing masculinity, and a female always expressing femininity. Eppie and Penelope both shared multiple instances of seeing students’ gender expression that appeared dissonant with their gender identity, which in turn, implied they needed to be watched or protected from the “homophobic” community environment upheld by Princeton’s majority’s conservative, Christian values. It was clear that all participants agreed
with their “moral and legal obligation to respect every student and prevent harassment and bullying” (Kitchen & Bellini, 2012, p. 457), though unfortunately, the ways in which LGBTQ-inclusive themes came into the classroom reified what could be interpreted as a deficit-based victim narrative (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011) of marginalized identities.

Carmen and Eppie did not address sexual orientation in their formal curriculum, but both agreed that with materials and guidance they see it would be important to do so. Penelope includes a gay character in “The Misfits” and a poem by a lesbian teen author in an effort to give voice to a gay identity. Unfortunately, there were no lesbian, bisexual, or transgender identities in any part of the curriculum. Eppie and Penelope see a reason to include transgender identities in their curriculum as they know individuals who have transitioned and believe it is important to value their identities for the benefit of all students’ learning.

These findings support Briscoe (2005) who noted that the exclusion of LGBT identities continue to support homophobic and transphobic forms of institutionalized oppression. The absence of instructional materials, and collegial or administrative support, further suggests that learning environments continue to impede positive identity formation and to support hostile learning environments for LGBTQ students (Dessel, 2010). That said, Penelope and Eppie have seen positive shifts over the years toward students who identify or express themselves as LGBTQ in their school community which suggests a larger social acceptance of LGBTQ identities, rather than a shift in the school’s approach to explicit LGBTQ-inclusion in the curriculum.

**Finding #4: Teachers Need Explicit Support from Policy and Administrators**

The participants in this study confirmed that pre-service teaching, and in-service professional development did little to explicitly address LGBTQ issues (Gorski et al., 2013;
Kitchen & Bellini, 2012). Moreover, supporting Brant and Tyson’s (2016) findings, that even though LGBTQ-inclusivity was a goal for inclusive teaching, the participants’ stories revealed concerns for implementing LGBTQ-inclusive topics as a result of a lack of preparedness from pre-service and in-service education, and the resources through which to do so. A lack of preparedness coupled with policies and public opinions that do not favor the inclusion of LGBTQ-inclusive topics in the curriculum result in complicit contributions to heteronormative discourse. This suggests that interventions from administrators and/or curriculum policies could support teachers in making the decision to voice LGBTQ-inclusive topics in the curriculum. Moreover, it affirms that explicit policies would force the hand of administrators and teachers to engage in LGBTQ-inclusive work, while raising the concerns about teachers’ preparedness to do so.

Eppie, Penelope, and Carmen voiced the impacts of administrators’ views on political topics in their schools. Penelope and Eppie noted that when one or more of their administrators openly identified as Jewish, there was an increased religious discourse and engagement in their school including the discussion of religion, holidays, and aspects of their Holocaust unit through their own personal connections to the Jewish identity and heritage. Adversely, when administrators did not identify as Jewish, Penelope and Eppie perceived a decrease in religious discourse during that period of time as it related to the study of Jewish religion and customs. Regardless of the administrator’s religious views, they were still required to teach aspects of the Jewish religion, suggesting that the organization’s religious discourse was different depending on who was in charge at the time. Drawing a parallel to Penelope and Eppie, Carmen expressed that her administrator preferred teachers did not openly discuss immigration or poverty with her students, though she felt it was important to recognize the degree to which these cultural issues
intersected with her students’ lives. In all cases, Carmen, Penelope, and Eppie had to weigh the risk of having these discussions with their students knowing it was not limited by an explicit policy but would be dissonant with their administrator’s opinion or point-of-view. Without consequences beyond social isolation, these teachers chose to have conversations with students about identity where it was most important to create an inclusive space. Thus, in absence of approval or a policy, these teachers’ belief systems and willingness to engage in conversations led them to voice informal conversations about gender and sexuality in their respective settings.

Notably, the administrators were not a direct part of this study. Ultimately, it is their role to understand and enact all school, district, and state policies that apply to their respective contexts and to consider the community in which they serve. The complexity raises the question as to how administrators weigh the risk of voicing or silencing their personal views on political topics when policies do not provide clear guidance on the ways in which to navigate them in practice. Moreover, administrators also impact, and are impacted by, public opinion (i.e. the community) from a different perspective than a teacher with greater political risk. These questions lend themselves to a future investigation to the role of administrators on the enactment of policies and to what degree their contributions to creating inclusive policies, or enacting exclusive policies, and impact the inclusive work in teachers’ classrooms.

Finally, there is the role of policy in LGBTQ-inclusivity. There was no single policy that explicitly called for the inclusion of LGBTQ identities in each of the participants’ respective contexts. Policies are written, in many cases, to be interpreted and navigated through the individual and collective beliefs of the institution in which they are enacted. That said, when policy is a choice, it will most likely be shaped by those who enact it. So, if heteronormativity exists to the point of being invisible, and few teachers take action to disrupt this construct, would
explicit policy inclusion increase the number of teachers who engage in this work? Are administrators open to working with teachers to create more inclusive curriculum and school policies that are proactive, rather than reactive? How would conversations among educators change? How would students see themselves differently if gender and sexuality were normalized in their early educational experiences? These questions suggest the need for future inquiry to explore the impact of a comprehensive effort on behalf of administrators, teachers, and the policies that shape their work to acknowledge the need for, and to address, LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.

**Limitations of Findings**

As stated in chapter three, a narrative inquiry methodology provided a space through which teachers’ experiences shared through narrative data shed light on how they make meaning around lines of inquiry. In this case, I sought transformative change through co-constructing stories about identities by drawing on past experiences and to craft new stories that validate work in the field. Thus, the intentions of this study were to impact the participants’ future practice and contribute to the corpus of research, while understanding that a small sampling and qualitative methods in general limit the generalizability of this study’s findings (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). In this case, the data revealed a disruption of heteronormativity at the individual level, to varying degrees among participants, while seeing little or no disruption to the formal curriculum. That said, the impact of said disruption on future practice is outside of the scope of this study’s design, suggesting limitations in its applicability toward curricular implementation.

Transferability is difficult in qualitative studies in social sciences because “human behavior is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one person experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). Though the same results would not yield from one
qualitative study to the next because the participants are unique variables, that does not imply the methods of a narrative inquiry study are not valid. It is important to consider the limited perspectives captured in this study through the shared heterosexual, cisgender female perspectives. It is noted that future studies of a similar design should seek to understand heterosexual, cisgender males, as well as LGBTQ teachers of various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic identities to broaden the understanding of heteronormativity in local teaching practices and the degree to which there is a relationship between identity markers and levels of heteronormative disruption in teaching practice.

**Conclusion and Implications**

The research puzzle of this narrative inquiry study was comprised of the following research questions: (1) how do teachers’ stories reflect their preparedness to disrupt heteronormative constructs through the inclusion of LGBTQ themes in their local curriculum?; (2) how do teachers navigate the decision to voice or silence LGBTQ-inclusive themes in the HSS curriculum?; and (3) how do teachers recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas surrounding LGBTQ-inclusive themes? The use of a narrative inquiry methodology, through an underlying critical paradigm, provoked each participant to reflect on their own beliefs and actions through the performance of sharing stories. By design, the researcher becomes part of the transformative process, in that, through using stories to understand the participant, they are concurrently evolving the way they see themselves and act because of telling those same stories. This process intended to provoke transformative ways of thinking and acting as it relates to this study’s topic. The following section will address each of the research questions based on the evidence presented throughout this study and will conclude with implications for practice and future research related to this study’s topic.
Addressing the Research Questions

How do teachers’ stories reflect their preparedness to disrupt heteronormative constructs through the inclusion of LGBTQ themes in their local curriculum? This question focused on teachers’ preparedness. The narrative inquiry methodology employed through this study provided a space to have conversations related to participants’ own K-12 education, pre-service teacher education, professional experiences, and the resources needed to engage with LGBTQ-inclusive themes. Reflecting on the “self” through stories of experience provides an opportunity to realize their own preparedness and what they might need next to do this work. Each teacher felt that their respective pre-service education did little, or nothing, to prepare them to address LGBTQ themes in their respective curriculum. Their own formal K-12 education yielded not one LGBTQ historical figure whom they could remember or discuss in an educational context. Moreover, they were not aware of any individuals taught in a colleague’s course that would include LGBTQ identities. The participants expressed an urgency and a willingness to engage in LGBTQ-inclusive work in their respective contexts, but do not ultimately feel prepared to do so with little support from their administrators and not knowing where to find new instructional resources. That said, each participant agreed that with the appropriate text resources, their willingness and recognition of the importance to be inclusive would be a catalyst in support of their ability to navigate the curriculum frameworks, local policies, and moral imperative to serve all of their students’ identities. In concert, these findings suggest that professional learning must be the avenue to support teachers in learning about LGBTQ histories, instructional materials, and inclusive pedagogies that support LGBTQ-inclusive education. Together, these professional learning experiences will advance the individual and collective disruption of heteronormativity in K-12 spaces, and hopefully, beyond.
How do teachers navigate the decision to voice or silence LGBTQ-inclusive themes in the HSS curriculum? Each teacher in this study shared an ethical and moral obligation to address the inequities they see and hear among their students in their schools. This belief system, combined with a recognition of their own identities, position these three teachers to make decisions as to where, and how, to address LGBTQ-inclusive themes in their respective curriculum. That said, it appeared that in most cases, discussions about gender and sexuality with students, and colleagues, were at the margins, if at all. This does not imply that marginal conversations about the social responsibility to be accepting of all identities do not seek to disrupt heteronormativity. Rather, it signals that teachers are positioned to choose silence when the supports and resources are not there to help them navigate identity work within themselves, their colleagues, and with their students. The curriculum frameworks and local school policies do not call for the explicit inclusion of LGBTQ-inclusive identities in the curriculum. Administrators, in some cases, discouraged teachers from addressing issues related to invisible identities so as to not to give rise to minority viewpoints within an assumed conservative majority of stakeholders. In the end, it was when a student’s identity became visible in some way that each of these teachers felt it was their moral and professional obligation to voice acceptance, and support for who they are amongst their peers. This further suggests that normalizing conversations of gender and sexuality through proactive curricular inclusion might reduce the burden on teachers who are left to assume aspects of students’ identities, which predominantly result in silence, thus contributing to the cultural silence around LGBTQ identities which are left out of textbooks, policies, and discourse altogether.

How do teachers recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas surrounding LGBTQ-inclusive themes? Ethical dilemmas arise when teachers are faced with messages from the
media, policies, stakeholders, that conflict with their personal belief system. Moreover, they are unavoidable in teachers’ professional practice. This suggests the need for more strategies to resolve dilemmas of practice to improve outcomes. Though the participants in this study talked about the implied need for teachers to be apolitical, it is not truly possible to enact an apolitical curriculum. Teachers are constantly faced with decisions about which political issues they are allowed to address with their students. In most cases, dilemmas arise when teachers feel it is their social responsibility to foster independent thinking related to issues that impact individuals in the community, but they also know that administrators would prefer they do not have discussions with students about guns, immigration, or the elections, let alone gender and sexuality norms to avoid parental complaints. When teachers are silent on issues because the risk of professional consequences, or social isolation are too great, they are protecting themselves or someone else, but risk contributing to, or perpetuating, harmful learning spaces.

The critical paradigm of this study actively raised participants’ awareness of telling, and hearing, their stories of experience and to reflect it back onto them with new knowledge. Each teacher was aware of LGBTQ issues to varying degrees at the beginning of this study, though once these teachers became aware of the underlying inequities of gender and sexuality, particularly for LGBTQ students, they are now faced with new dilemmas of practice. This implies that dilemmas vary in size and scope, some of which cannot be immediately resolved. Though this study did not seek to resolve all ethical dilemmas surrounding LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, it did require each teacher to spend time reflecting on their own role in disrupting heteronormativity, which resulted in feelings of frustration, guilt, and responsibility. It is through inner dialogue, and conversations with others that teachers can move from feelings of guilt and/or frustration toward acting responsibly to impact change in their local communities for
more inclusive environments. Each of these teachers, as reflective practitioners, recognizes that in resolving dilemmas through enacting new practices, this will in turn yield new dilemmas of practice. Thus, it is being equipped with a strong belief and comprehensive support system comprised of policies, materials, and collegiality that teachers can better access, learn from, and enact LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.

Implications for Practice

This study yielded implications for practices that support LGBTQ-inclusivity in the formal, and informal, HSS curricula. These implications include but are not limited to the following: understand identities through self-reflection, audit local curriculum materials for multicultural identities, attend professional learning experiences focused on LGBTQ-inclusive practices, and access, study, and implement high-quality LGBTQ-inclusive resources.

Understand identities through self-reflection. Reflection is an integral part of the learning process and can be performed in a variety of ways. Moreover, it should be a habit of career practitioners in the social sciences. Internal reflection is on-going and can be codified through written, typed, or voice-recorded self-reflections in the form of thematic entries (i.e. memos) to document one’s thinking at a particular time and place. External reflection can take the form of discussions or sharing stories with friends, colleagues, and administrators where critical feedback is encouraged, and assumptions are challenged. In combination, internal and external reflections can come together for an understanding and increased awareness of individuals’ identities.

Telling stories or writing journal entries are a powerful first step, but all too often these important sources of information are lost or forgotten in the overwhelming duties of educators in the 21st century. Reflection is transformative when these primary sources are reviewed,
synthesized, and shared with individuals so that the learning becomes intensified. Moreover, using reflection as a means of understanding oneself requires an actionable vulnerability and an openness necessary for transformative change. This study demonstrated that the narrative inquiry process, which was intentionally designed to engage individuals in personal reflections in a variety of ways, yielded transformative results in the individual, and how they understood their intersecting identities. Moreover, the narrators began to see their own identities in new ways having had an opportunity to reflect upon their own words through the re-storying of the listener (i.e. the researcher). Educators must question their assumptions and challenge viewpoints by exploring identities, asking questions, and reflecting in a variety of ways to better understand how individual beliefs and values are shaped by the various intersecting identities all individuals hold.

**Audit local curriculum materials for multicultural identities.** In conjunction with self-reflection to better understand identities, teachers should conduct an audit of their instructional materials for multicultural identities. When participants’ awareness of their own identities increased, it raised new questions as to the representation of identities in their respective curriculum. An identity audit, in the context of HSS curriculum, can start with documenting the gender, race, ethnicities, or sexualities of historical figures throughout the course of study. This data can be used to take a closer look at the implied curriculum and suggest areas where representations of particular identities could be broadened, questioned, and discussed in new ways with colleagues and students. This practice is a starting point for recognizing the implicit messages transmitted through instructional materials, and an opportunity for educators to give voice to gender and sexuality that may lead to more inclusive spaces for discussion between teacher and students.
Attend professional learning experiences focused on LGBTQ-inclusive practices.

Teachers spend many days throughout their career attending professional learning events which focus on a wide variety of topics. Most likely, few of them have focused on gender and sexuality in the form of LGBTQ-inclusive practices. The combination of reflective practices, and a review of local instructional materials, may reveal particular areas of professional interest and/or need to develop new ways to broach LGBTQ-inclusive topics. An important learning from this study is that all individuals are impacted by gender and sexuality. This learning can be used as a talking point with those who may initially resist the idea. Depending on the local structures in place, teachers and administrators should advocate for schools and districts to fund, and invite, LGBTQ-focused professional learning experts to schools and districts to engage groups of teachers in identity work. It is not enough to invite professionals for one day and consider gender and sexuality “done” on the proverbial checklist. This work requires a consistent effort on behalf of all adults for a transformative impact.

This process can pose challenges. Those who are willing, but are restrained by lack of resources or access, can start small by gathering a group of likeminded colleagues who are interested in this work. If, like Eppie and Penelope, there are opportunities to explore these topics at an institution of higher education or professional organization, this may also be a similar starting point for other educators to learn more about LGBTQ-inclusive topics and build a network to continue the learning process.

Access, study, implement, and share high-quality LGBTQ-inclusive resources.

There are national organizations who provide access to high-quality LGBTQ-inclusive text resources. Though they are not always widely known, these organizations can be found through internet search engines. It is not enough to access and/or purchase a set of LGBTQ-inclusive
curriculum materials to begin teaching the content right away. Consumers of LGBTQ-inclusive instructional materials should study the materials before employing them in the classroom. This studying process, which should be done in conjunction with reflection and discussion with colleagues, can reveal new questions about identity and how to structure conversations with students in an individual’s respective context. Moreover, teachers should consider how their identity positions them with the LGBTQ-inclusive materials. Individuals should question which aspects of their identities are similar and different to the characters or figures in the texts and consider why it matters through the lens of race, gender, sexuality, etc. This deeper exploration of oneself in relation to the text can begin to shape new ways of thinking about interacting with students through topics of identity, particularly around gender and sexuality. Moreover, consider how teaching an LGBTQ-inclusive unit offers opportunities for co-teaching and opportunities for critical feedback about practice while providing a collegial support system in enacting new and inclusive practices.

**Implications for Future Research**

The critical paradigm on which this study was designed generates a tension between the researcher and participant. In seeking to critically transform the participant’s knowledge, and thus, the participant’s practice, the researcher tows an ethical line when such changes are provoked through the telling and retelling of stories. The intentional design of this study sought to learn from participants through their stories, but as the participants’ and my own awareness of the challenges in enacting LGBTQ-inclusive practices in their local contexts were heightened, I formally disengaged with the participants at the conclusion of the data collection phase. This, then, provoked an ethical dilemma in me, because I felt that starting this process was not enough to fully understand the depth of this work. In bearing the responsibility of imposing such change
on the individuals in the study, the suggestions for future narrative research would be for me to work with participants over a longer period of time so as to not engage the participants in this new, critical knowledge without the supporting resources or practices that would yield further transformational change. Moreover, future research studies of a similar design should include male and LGBTQ perspectives, as they were missing from this particular study. Finally, the spirals of silence theoretical frameworks should be further employed, and modified to accommodate the impact of organizational silence, and intersecting identities, on LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.

**Replication of study with male and/or LGBTQ teachers.** This study sought to gain an understanding of teachers’ preparedness to teach LGBTQ-inclusive themes in K-8 classroom spaces. The findings pointed to the inextricable link between teachers’ identities, their lived experiences, and the ways in which personal identity shapes the degree to which LGBTQ identities are voiced in the curriculum. Notable limitations in this research study were the missing perspectives of LGBTQ educators, cisgender male educators, and HSS content-area educators. This limitation in generalizing the findings reveals an opportunity to replicate this study’s design to gain the perspective of other intersecting identities on this work. Identity was found to be at the core of both the process and the outcomes of this study through which I could continue a similar line of narrative inquiry. Replicating this study with specific populations who share identity markers could provide deeper and more varied perspectives on the ways in which intersecting identities influence LGBTQ-inclusive themes in classroom settings, particularly at the K-8 level where the HSS curriculum frameworks in 48 states do not explicitly call for LGBTQ identities. Moreover, replicating this study in one or both of the two states where HSS frameworks do call for the explicit inclusion of LGBTQ identities would help to correlate the
findings about teachers’ identities, beliefs, and values which contribute to the degree to which LGBTQ themes are present. This work is burgeoning in the field of education, and the time is ripe to continue this line of inquiry with more educators in hopes of understanding how policy is enacted through the lens of individual and collective identities.

**Narrative action-research on LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.** There was a notable tension in the design of this narrative inquiry study. Research rooted in critical paradigms seek to raise individuals’ consciousness related to issues of oppression toward transformative understanding and ultimately action for change. The use of a narrative methodology provided a space through which I was able to be a participant in the learning process, while critically engaging participants in the understanding of gender and sexuality within the context of our culture and the educational institutions’ contributions therein. The study took place over the course of six weeks with the participants in which time each expressed a raised awareness of the lack of LGBTQ identities in their curriculum, and how gender and sexuality is ever-present in the act of teaching. As a researcher, the end of the study’s design raised ethical questions about a critical framework where participants became acutely aware of their contributions to heteronormativity, and thus their willingness to responsibly take action to disrupt some of these constructs within their locus of control. That said, without resources or places to begin this work, the study’s design suggested that a longer-term engagement between the researcher and participants through a partnership would be more ethically sound. Moreover, documenting the transformation of teachers’ perceptions and pedagogies beyond initial awareness of institutional and cultural oppression in the form of heteronormativity would add to the research base where implementation continues to be absent from the literature. Narrative methodologies provide mutually beneficial learning opportunities for researcher and participants to attend to the inner
transformational work necessary to enact more transformational outer work in the form of LGBTQ-inclusive pedagogies.

**Summation**

This study found that the disruption of heteronormativity begins with the individual. Reflection is a process through which to raise an individual’s self-awareness of identities, and the ways in which they are enacted in individuals’ personal and professional lives. For teachers, this self-awareness of identities, particularly gender and sexuality, increased the ways in which they saw their students’ identities. In recognizing gender and sexuality as ever-present in a heteronormative society, teachers were able to begin a disruption of cultural norms through the informal curriculum. Though this is a start, the participants in this study recognized there has to be a collective effort to include identity in the formal curriculum for disruption to yield a wider impact on students. A disruption of cultural norms requires explicit policies, support from administrators, LGBTQ-inclusive instructional materials, and a collaborative effort to engage in this process of self-awareness for the benefit of supporting all students in multicultural society. Without this collective effort, the education system will continue to leave LGBTQ identities at the margins and contribute to the disparities in health and wellness for these individuals.
References


Appendix A

Initial Email for Participant Recruitment

To: <<email/LinkedIn recipient>>

Re: Recruitment for Research Study

Dear <<insert name>>,

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study of elementary (K-8) teachers who integrate history and social studies themes and content in their curriculum. The study is being conducted by a Doctor of Education candidate in Curriculum, Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts.

This narrative study will explore the stories of multiple elementary (K-8) teachers’ professional experiences with teaching identity. Stories will be elicited through two interviews and a concurrent reflection journal that document how teachers recognize, experience, and address identity in the curricula.

I am contacting you in the hopes that you, or an educator you know, may be interested in participating in this study. Participants must have been in their school for at least two academic years and integrate history and social studies themes and/or standards in their curriculum. If you know of any educators that fit the criteria for this study, please forward this invitation to them. After completion of the study’s requirements in-full, participants will receive a $50 Amazon gift card.

If you would like additional information regarding participation in this study, please email the researcher at labounty.s@husky.neu.edu. There is no obligation to participate in this study upon request for more information. Participation is entirely voluntary.

Thank you for considering this research opportunity.

Steven A. LaBounty-McNair, Ed.D. candidate
Appendix B

Flyer for Participant Recruitment

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Elementary Teachers' Experiences with Teaching Identity

Are you a K-8 educator who integrates identity & social studies themes in your teaching?

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Ed.D. Research Project
Investigator (student): Steven A. LaBounty-McNair

Volunteers are needed to participate in a study aimed at understanding how elementary teachers address identity, specifically LGBTQ-inclusive identities, through history and social studies themes and/or standards. The purpose of this study is to contribute new understandings from teachers’ experiences with identity work in elementary classrooms for future research in education.

Participant qualities:

- You are a practicing K-8 classroom educator who integrates social studies themes and/or standards in their curriculum.
- You have been in current role for at least two academic years.
- Participation is voluntary. Those who complete the requirements in-full will receive a $50 Amazon gift card at the completion of the study.
- Time required for the study will be no more than 5 hours (two interviews, a brief reflection journal, and a final check-in).

Interested in participating?

Contact the researcher, Steve LaBounty-McNair
labounty.s@husky.neu.edu
(508) 850-6824
Appendix C

Follow-up Email Response for Recruitment

To: <<email recipient>>

Re: Information Regarding Participation in Research Study

Dear <<insert name>>,

Thank you for contacting me for more information related to this study. Attached you’ll find the Informed Consent Document which outlines the details of this study’s purpose and the process for participation. As noted in form, participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

After reading the provided document, you are welcome to reach out to the researcher with any additional questions pertaining to participation in this study. If you meet the criteria for this study, and wish to participate, you can return your signed copy of the Informed Consent Document via email to labounty.s@husky.neu.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and interest in this research study.

Steven A. LaBounty-McNair, Ed.D. candidate
Appendix D

Informed Consent Document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigators: Dr. Cherese Childers-McKee (Principal Investigator), Steven A. LaBounty-McNair (Researcher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of Project: Disrupting Heteronormativity Through LGBTQ-Inclusive Histories: A Narrative Study of Elementary HSS Teachers’ Experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask Steve, the researcher, any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

### Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be a part of this study because you teach elementary history and social science (HSS) themes within the K-8 curriculum. Participants are required to have been in their current school for at least two years, and over the age of 18.

### Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this narrative research study is to understand how LGBTQ-inclusive topics are addressed in the elementary HSS curriculum, and how the experiences of teachers can influence future practices in the field.

### What will I be asked to do? Where will it take place, and how much of my time will it take?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in the following ways:

- An initial 60-90 minute, in-person, audio recorded interview at a mutually-agreed upon location to discuss your experiences as related to this study’s purpose.
- Between the first and second interviews, you will be asked to maintain a reflective journal or diary, either in a notebook or digitally, in a style of your choice. The purpose is to reflect upon experiences in practice that relate to this study for discussion at the second interview. You will be asked to allow the researcher to use a copy of this journal in the data analysis and ultimately, the findings of this study.
- A second 60-90 minute, in-person, audio recorded interview at a mutually-agreed upon location to discuss your experiences as related to this study’s purpose and expand on any learning from the reflective journal.
- A third 45-60 minute, audio recorded interview via Google Hangout, Skype, or telephone, based on your preference, for the researcher to share the findings with you and to invite you to share your opinions on these findings, which aim to build a valid understanding of the study’s overall data.

### Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There is no anticipated risk for your participation in this study. You will be provided with a pseudonym to maintain your confidentiality throughout the study, and the reported findings. If the conversational topics in the interviews cause you discomfort, you maintain the right to ask questions of the researcher at any time during the study, or to decline to answer a question.

### Will I benefit from being part of this research study?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the information gleaned from this study may help others by increasing an awareness of the ways in which teachers are/are not prepared to implement LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, from which actionable steps can be taken as a result.

### Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Upon the agreement to participate in this study, you will be assigned a pseudonym to provide confidentiality in the study’s findings. Only the researcher will have information about you. The principal investigator will have access to the data only through the assigned pseudonyms. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this project.
Interviews will be audio recorded (no video), with your permission, through the use of a MacBook laptop and the researcher’s iPhone. Audio recordings of the interviews will be transcribed through www.Rev.com which will be used for analysis. MAXQDA software will be used for coding of field texts (interview transcripts, journals, and policy documents), of which both companies follow strict confidentiality standards of practice. Once transcriptions are uploaded to the researcher’s password-protected Google Drive, audio files will be destroyed. Any hard copies of documents collected from you will be labeled with your assigned pseudonym, scanned into the computer and stored digitally in the same password-protected Google Drive and a PIN-protected external hard drive, and then stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home for the duration of the study. This data will be collected and analyzed for the purposes of reporting the findings of this study. Only the researcher has access to these documents. A reasonable outcome may be that you withdraw from the study before it is complete, in which case, all contributions in the form of data will be destroyed immediately and not used in the study’s results.

This signed consent form, per Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board requirements, will be stored in a locked cabinet for three years and then destroyed once that time has been reached.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have. Any data collected from you as a participant will be immediately destroyed by the researcher and not used in the study’s findings.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the person mainly responsible for this research:
Steven A. LaBounty-McNair (Researcher), 508.850.6824 (c), or email labounty.s@husky.neu.edu
Dr. Cherese Childers-McKee (Principal Investigator), 867.295.1491, or email at c.childers-mckee@northeastern.edu

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

Participants who complete the study’s requirements in-full will receive a $50 Amazon gift card.

**Will it cost me anything financially to participate?**

There is no financial cost for you to participate in this study.

**By signing and dating the lines below, I agree to take part in this research as described above.**

_________________________________________  ________________
Signature of person agreeing to participate in this research study  Date

_________________________________________
Printed name of person above

Please email a scanned copy of this form back to Steve LaBounty-McNair at labounty.s@husky.neu.edu to confirm your participation in this study. At that time, he will follow up with you regarding next steps for participation.
Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Introduction for Interview #1:

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in this first interview today. This is the first of three interviews that will act as a primary form of data collection for this study. As stated in the consent to participate, today’s interview will be recorded with your permission, and all information will be confidential, including a pseudonym for your name [choose one with the participant here, and document this in the researcher’s journal]. I have eight questions prepared for this interview today, which should last 60-90 minutes. If at any point a question is unclear or uncomfortable, please let me know and I’ll rephrase, or move on. After the interview, I will provide you with a transcript of this interview to ensure that I have captured the conversation with accuracy. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do I have your permission to continue under these parameters? (If “yes”) Thank you. I’ll turn on the recording device now and we’ll begin.

Protocol for Interview #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I want to start by recognizing your willingness to engage in this process with me. I am truly looking forward to getting to know you and share our experiences to learn from each other through this process. My goal is to create a space for us to share experiences in hopes that it shapes a narrative to explains who we are as individuals at this point in time. To start us off, tell me about what interested you in participating in this study and what you hope to get out of it as a participant.</td>
<td>Narrative; Mini-tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• [Respond to any questions/concerns about the study itself and signal the trajectory, as needed, of the questioning across the first and second interviews]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>In getting to know each other better, could you tell me about where you are from and where you went to school?</td>
<td>Narrative; Elaboration prompt; touring; branching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• [Listen here for themes and/or key words to follow-up w/ elaboration/clarification prompts] Could you tell me more about...? OR I heard you say that you _________, can you explain _______?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Where are you from originally? Where did you go to college?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What was your major in college? How did you come to choose this major?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How do you feel your college(s) prepared you to teach?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What were some of the most valuable lessons from your preparation as an educator?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. Experiences shape our lives in many ways, particularly for teachers who choose to go into this profession. Elementary school was a formative time in my own life where I was able to escape the many frustrations I experienced at home. I always appreciated how my teachers were like second parents to me, and I was driven to create the same safe spaces for my own students to learn years later. **In thinking about what may have brought you into the profession, what was your own elementary school experience like?**
   - Whose voice connected with you in school?
   - Who was the most influential teacher?
   - Were there teachers that you did not want to emulate in your practice?
   - What were your social relationships like with other children in school?

4. I have found in working across multiple school settings throughout my career as an educator, local context can influence the work in many ways. **Can you tell me about your school and how you came to teach there?**
   - What is the building like? Your classroom? Do you have any pictures?
   - How many teachers are on your team?
   - Can you tell me about the professional culture around new ideas in teaching?
   - How do these compare to other places you have worked/taught?
   - What are the expectations from the wider community? Do you have a voice with parents?
   - In what other ways are you involved in your school community?

5. **Tell me more about your role as a social studies teacher.**
   - How did you come to teach this content area?
   - Is this your full teaching responsibility? Do you prefer one content area over another?
   - How well do you feel your college program prepared you to teach social studies?
   - Do you feel you could use more support in some way? What might that look like?
   - Do you feel your students enjoy social studies? Why or why not?
   - What are your favorite topics to teach in this content area?
   - Is social studies a prioritized content area in your school?

6. Having discussed your local school context, and how you came to be a social studies educator, it would be helpful to know about your curriculum. **Can you tell me more about the content and design of your social studies curriculum?**
   - How do current events influence your curriculum? The media?
   - Are you able to talk to your students about these current events? If not, what are the protocols for getting approval to do so?
7. In looking at the whole picture you’ve shared with me today, how would you say your work continues to shape who you are as an educator?  
- What are your future professional goals? How might you go about achieving them?

8. We have covered a lot during our time together today. It’s important that whatever place we’ve concluded that you feel that you’ve been represented accurately through this process. **How do you feel this first interview has captured your identity?**  
- What else might you like to add?

Closing for Interview #1:

Thank you for volunteering your time to share your experiences with me in this interview. I will follow-up with you via email with a transcript of this interview for your review. My goal is to accurately and honestly capture this experience as I continue my research. Furthermore, we’ll be in touch regarding the second interview.

At this time, it is important for us to discuss your reflection journal. Part of this study’s design is to engage each participant in reflection on the curriculum-in-practice as it relates to our own, our students’, and the individual identities and values represented in the curriculum we teach. At a minimum, between this interview and our next, it would be helpful to have 3-4 entries. This could be in written form, video blog, voice memo, or another format of your choosing. What is important is that your thoughts about identity are captured so we can discuss this further in the next interview.

Do you have any questions for me?

[End recording]

Introduction for Interview #2:

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in this second interview today. This is the second of three interviews that will act as a primary form of data collection for this study. As stated in the consent to participate, today’s interview will be recorded with your permission, and all information will be confidential, including a pseudonym for your name. I have eleven questions prepared for this interview today that build on our first interview and your reflection journal, which should last 60-90 minutes. If at any point a question is unclear or uncomfortable, please let me know and I’ll rephrase, or move on. After the interview, I will provide you with a transcript of this interview to ensure that I have captured the conversation with accuracy. Do you have any questions before we begin?
Do I have your permission to continue under these parameters? (If “yes”) Thank you. I’ll turn on the recording device now and we’ll begin.

Protocol for Interview #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 | I want to start by thanking you for your continued work in this process with me. I am eager to share our experiences to learn from each other throughout this process. My goal is to create a space for us to share experiences in hopes that it creates a narrative that explains who we are at this point in time. Throughout the interview, please feel free to refer to your journal entries as they relate to the following questions. At the end, you agree to share these entries as an accompanying document to the interview transcripts. **To start us off, tell me about any developments in your work, or notable events, since the first time we talked together.**  
  - [Listen here for themes and/or key words to follow-up w/ elaboration/clarification]  
  - *Could you tell me more about...?*  
  - I heard you say that you ________, can you explain _____?  
  - How did the reflection journaling? | Narrative; Mini-tour |
| 2 | **What, if anything, surfaced since our first conversation about “identity” through the journaling process?**  
  - [Listen here for themes and/or key words to follow-up w/ elaboration/clarification] | Narrative; Elaboration prompts |
| 3 | I want to build on the idea of interpersonal relationships in the classroom. In thinking back to my own experiences, I distinctly remember that I always had few close friends. I tended to always have female friends, rather than male friends. I never felt like I could relate to the boys for some reason. I was polite, but shy, and always felt different for some reason that I couldn’t identify why at an early age. **As you think about your own experiences in school, can you think back to the first time you realized you were different from other children in some way, if at all?**  
  - What effect did this moment have on you? Why?  
  - Share a story of yourself as a child.  
  - If you could go back and give advice to your childhood self, what would you say?  
  - Does that part of you still impact your life today? Your work? | Narrative  
Elaboration prompt  
Narrative; touring; branching  
Hypothetical; branching |
| 4 | As I developed, my primary focus became more about civics, and less about just history lessons. **Describe your primary focus, or goal, as a social studies teacher.** | Descriptive |
| 5 | We talked about our own experiences in elementary school, and how some events both inform and are informed by our identities. Though I’ve been out of the classroom for two years, I still largely identify as a | Descriptive |
teacher. I’m still not used to being out of the classroom. Particularly, I have had a unique experience as a male elementary teacher who has predominantly worked with and only for women. **How have your experiences in teaching reflected, and been reflected by an aspect of your identity, if at all?**

- Could you give me an example…?
- Tell me more about _______.
- Does this influence your teaching? Your interactions with students?

| 6. | As individuals, we hold complex and intersecting identities on multiple levels that change as we have different experiences in life. When I became engaged to my husband and wore an engagement ring, I began to develop a feeling of hypocrisy in not being honest with my students about all of my identity. I saw that it was easier for my “straight” colleagues to discuss their families with students than I felt that I could. I struggled to strike a balance between voicing and hiding my identity as a gay male teacher to connect with my students and encouraging them to be who they are. **What do you share with your students and/or colleagues about your own identity?**

- Do you feel you have a voice amongst your colleagues? Are you able to be open with them about who you are and what you value?
- Has a student asked about something in your own life that encouraged you to share? Or, have you avoided talking about some part of your own identity?
- Do you feel prepared with the skills and/or resources to engage in conversations with your students about differences? Share an experience with this.

| 7. | In thinking about these conversations with students and colleagues, it’s important to recognize how they “fit” with the curriculum. **Within your social studies curriculum, where is identity addressed, if at all?**

- If not, how might (should) this be addressed?
- Are these conversations that happen on your teaching team? In your school?
- How does your curriculum reflect your wider school community?
- Would you change anything about your curriculum as we discuss these topics in more depth?

| 8. | Imagine you have a new student next September that openly identifies in some way that is unlike any student you have had before. **What is your process for supporting students who are different from other students in some way?**

- How will your school support this student? How will other students support them?
- How might this student be represented within the curricula?
• Do you feel that the curriculum should support these conversations? If so, is there room to include these topics?

9. In your current context as a teacher, do you feel you have the ability to be a voice for those students who are “different” in some way from the others?

• Do you feel a responsibility to educate students on differences? If so, how?
• How might this be different if you worked elsewhere? In another field?
• How are your students a reflection of you as an educator? How aren’t they?

10. Let’s fast forward to your retirement party after being a career educator. What would you hope to hear in your colleagues’ remarks on your identity as an educator?

• Your students? Your family? What do you hope to say?

11. We have covered a lot during our time together today. It’s important that whatever place we’ve concluded that you feel that you’ve been represented accurately through this process. How do you feel this first interview has captured your identity?

• What else might you like to add?

Closing for Interview #2:

Thank you for volunteering your time to share your experiences with me in this interview. I will follow-up with you via email with a transcript of this interview for your review. My goal is to accurately and honestly capture this experience as I continue my research. Furthermore, we’ll be in touch regarding the final interview. This final interview can be conducted via Skype, Google Hangout, or by telephone, whichever is easiest for you. It will provide me an opportunity to share the overarching themes that came out of our conversations together to ensure that I’m accurately interpreting the data. Because this will take some time to collect and analyze all of the data from participants, I anticipate more time before the next interview that between the first and second.

Do you have any questions for me before we conclude?

[End recording]
Carmen: I mean, I think that we start to talk to them about that, like if she tells you to leave her alone or he tells you to leave him alone, they said, "No, you don't touch them again." I think we start with little things like that or you say you can't share his blocks with him today. Like he says no, it's no. Move on. Find something else. Don't keep bothering him and asking him or do it anyway, because he said no. I think that's where we start the importance of it. I don't know or think it always translates, [laughs] but I think that we try to ... That's the way, in elementary school, we try to enforce consent.

Steve: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, it's taking turns. It's listening.

Carmen: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And really hearing what the other person is saying and respecting it.

Steve: My wondering about social studies as a constant area is where ... Like we have this sort of story about how teachers are in the work force. That traditional, this is a "woman's profession". Nursing is a woman's profession.

Carmen: Right. Yeah, my kids couldn't believe that a nurse could be a man and they're in second grade.

Steve: Really?

Carmen: Yeah. Couldn't believe it.

Steve: So they're already associating it.

Carmen: Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: But if you said doctor;

Carmen: Oh, it would be a man. It was like crazy to them. I was like, "A boy can be a nurse." "No, he can't." "No. He can." [laughs] Why do you think that? No, he's a doc ... Well, that's what they would say, "No, he's a doctor." "No, No, he's not."

Steve: So the question is, again, where are they seeing these things? I would go so far as to say a lot of the media.

Carmen: Oh, definitely. TV, TV shows. The teachers are always female. Nurses are always female. Construction workers are male. Police officers are male.