Politics and Pedagogies of Queer Doing and Being in the Writing Classroom:
Rhetoric and Composition’s LGBTQ Student-Writers

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This dissertation titled
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ABSTRACT

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Politics and Pedagogies of Queer Doing and Being in the Writing Classroom: Rhetoric and Composition’s LGBTQ Student-Writers

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This dissertation revisits Harriet Malinowitz’ landmark 1995 publication Textual Orientations, where she argues for the integration of sexuality in the writing classroom and suggests the field, “find out about its lesbian and gay students.” In order to learn how writing studies has addressed sexuality and LGBTQ students, I provide a retrospective of the field’s scholarship since Malinowitz. I argue that although many of Malinowitz’ ideas have been taken up by queer composition scholars, queercentric writing environments, those that focus primarily on LGBTQ experience, have been left largely unexamined. In response, I argue that queercentric writing courses are more appropriate and generative environments for LGBTQ student writers because they foster queer literacy sponsorship and provide LGBTQ writers with alternative methodologies and rhetorical strategies for (queer) composing. Building from Deborah Brandt’s literacy sponsorship and Jonathan Alexander’s sexual literacy, and queer literacies, I also argue for the potential of queer literacy sponsorship, which I define as the people, texts, and resources that work in concert to foster LGBTQ literacies, widening and deepening people’s knowledge of the LGBTQ community and queer identities and politics. In service of this argument, and in response to Malinowitz’ call to learn more about LGBTQ students, the dissertation incorporates some preliminary findings of an IRB-approved pilot study focused on
LGBTQ students’ experiences in mainstream writing classes at Ohio University. Finally, in an attempt to “queer the brew” as Malinowitz suggests, I argue for queer methodologies of excess, failure, and ambivalence as strategies for rhetorical resistance and alternative meaning making for LGBTQ and other marginalized writers. Within a queer rhetorical context, I explore how LGBTQ writers benefit from being (re)oriented toward the dynamic connections among sexual identity, literacy learning, writing, agency, and ethos.
To my partner, Ginny; my parents; and my family – for your continued love and support.

To the generations lost to AIDS, violence, and suicide.

For those who have laid the path and those who continue to take it in new directions.
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To my parents, parents-in-law, and entire family, your confidence and pride in me is an absolute gift. From financial to emotional support, you have always been there for me. Special thanks go to my mom and dad, my biggest cheerleaders from the get-go until the end.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Acknowledging and Affirming the Out Academic and the LGBTQ Writer</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Malinowitz, an Origin and Springboard</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Malinowitz, A Retrospective</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude, Part 1: A Queer Literacy Narrative</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude Part 2: Preliminary Observations of LGBTQ Student Writers and Their Experiences in the Writing Classroom</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Queer(ing) Literacy, Writing Practices, and Ethos: Queer Literacy Sponsorship and the Work of Queercentric Writing Environments</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Making it Queer, Not Clear: Queer Methodologies of Excess, Failure, and Ambivalence</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: A Queer Orientation Toward Self-Development and Social Change</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Survey Questions</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION: ACKNOWLEDGING AND AFFIRMING THE OUT ACADEMIC
AND THE LGBTQ WRITER

“What does my lesbian identity have to do with writing or teaching? Everything”

– Catherine Fox

Sexuality, sexual identity, gender identity, and sexual politics shape us, and are shaped by us – individually and collectively – in profound psychological and material ways. As Jonathan Alexander explains in *Literacy, Sexuality, and Pedagogy*, the varying perspectives expressed in the recent marriage equality movement illustrate how much sexuality can be directly tied to a person’s rights and citizenship in both privileging and marginalizing ways (1). For those of us who do not identify as heterosexual and normative, navigating and negotiating our personal and social identities in a heterosexist and heteronormative culture can be taxing, with much at stake. How do we respond? Despite a history associated with erasure and discrimination, some lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer+ (LGBTQ) people accept the ways dominant culture writes us as LGBTQ; others resist and insist on writing themselves as LGBTQ, authorizing the value and knowledge of their own lived experience. Some write to hegemonic audiences, seeking permission, asking for rights, advocating for tolerance and acceptance. Others write against dominant discourse and institutions of power, problematizing permission, questioning the implications of rights, refusing assimilationist practices. This dissertation

1 Throughout the dissertation, I use the descriptor LGBTQ to identify those who are a part of the LGBTQ community; while some prefer queer as an umbrella term, and/or use LGBTQ and queer interchangeably, I understand queer also as a set of politics (in addition to a sexual identity). Therefore, for the purposes of maintaining the distinction, when speaking of people generally, I use LGBTQ, unless they identity themselves otherwise as queer.
is interested in part in what moves an LGBTQ person from the first perspective – a more homonormative2 stance, toward a more critical, queer view?

For me, this switch was flipped when my understanding of queer moved from a “warm and fuzzy” umbrella identity to a more nuanced understanding of queer politics, complex and unfixed LGBTQ identities, and resistance. Homonormativity, specifically, provided me with a lens that revealed the insidious ways LGBTQ people are repeatedly asked, even expected, to conform to hetero modes of belonging, family structures, and success. I gained this critical lens through what I call queer literacy sponsorship, an LGBTQ-specific set of literacy practices that carry their own set of resistance-based ideologies, developed and honed from a conglomeration of various sponsors including the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ-based media and texts, peer groups and mentors, and myriad other LGBTQ resources currently available to LGBTQ people. For me, queer literacy sponsorship came primarily from a collection LGBTQ texts, film and critical theory; it was then further shaped through my queer and feminist communities, my graduate advisor, the countless LGBTQ students I’ve worked with over the years, and even myself – through my own writing from a place of ambivalence and queer politics.

My two primary queer literacy sponsoring institutions – the LGBTQ community at large and LGBTQ and queer studies scholarship – share many values: affirming and celebrating queer lives and loves, addressing and fighting homophobia, challenging structural inequalities and oppressions, and working toward increased visibility and social

2 Homonormativity is understood as the normalization of LGBTQ people toward hetero standards of living, influenced by traditional and sanctioned forms of family structures, romantic and sexual relationships, and capitalistic lifestyles. While the “same love” line of thinking can be a strategic rhetorical move – don’t fear us or deny us rights because we are ultimately just like you, it can also assimilate LGBTQ folx, and their queerness, into more normative ways of being.
justice. There are also striking differences among them: access and privilege, education versus activism, and acceptance versus resistance. Deep into my graduate work and research, I started to feel an overwhelming tension, and my sponsors began to clash. Michael Warner describes this ambivalence succinctly, “like most stigmatized groups, gays and lesbians were always tempted to believe that the way to overcome stigma was to win acceptance by the dominant culture, rather than to change the self-understanding of that culture” (50). As an LGBTQ subject, I sought acceptance, inclusion, and celebration; as a queer subject, I felt anger, resistance, and agency. Gay pride parades, close-knit circles of LGBTQ friends, and popular culture pushed me toward acceptance. I found myself aiming to help non-LGBTQ people realize our struggles and histories in the name of allyship.

As a teacher I initially focused more on the value of empathy training for straight students, seeing them as potential allies. I was particularly interested in the subversive potential of my cis-gender, outwardly normative femme self as a way into straight audience’s hearts and minds about LGBTQ issues. This position came about after three successful years of teaching LGBTQ Literature to mixed classes of LGBTQ and straight students at a small university where there were few LGBT campus resources for LGBTQ students (there was an active and successful student group, but nothing by way of the administration – no LBGT Center, advisor, or LGBTQ-themed courses). At the time I was also guest lecturing in other faculty member’s courses, about LGBTQ issues and their intersections with various disciplines, as well as serving as a member of the Gender Studies Committee, which brought the first trans guest speaker to campus – a very
successful event and collaboration. I suppose at the time I saw my role as educating straight audiences, building empathy with them through texts like Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* and Reinaldo Arenas’ *Before Night Falls*.

But I was also advocating for queer rhetorical agency through the same texts with LGBTQ students, fostering the idea that writing and rhetoric could be a way to discover and hone their LGBTQ voices, express rage and pain, and establish community and engage in activism. It’s the latter goal that has seemed to take priority most recently, and it is where my current research is rooted. In time, my graduate work, queer colleagues, and queer scholarship moved me toward a queer reclamation project that asks for no one’s acceptance. I started to think about the reasons I had long focused my attention on mainstream audiences and populations. Why wasn’t I speaking to my LGBTQ community, from the inside? Whose rules was I following, and whose values did those rules represent? As time has gone on, after having developed some semblance of a scholarly identity that is firmly rooted in queer politics, rhetorical resistance has become incredibly important to me. Queer politics don’t just shape my thinking about and understanding of the world; they also shape my writing and greatly impact the kinds of texts I create. In my own writing, it is important for me to speak for, about, by and through queerness. I love the subversive and playful nature of multimodal texts and queer rhetoric because they provide genres and strategies that resonate with my experiences as a queer person. And I want to share that experience and empowerment with my writing students, especially those who identify as LGBTQ or under/misrepresented.
Some LGBTQ individuals may not feel that their sexuality is an important piece of who they are, but for me, it is one of the most important and defining aspects of my identity. It is especially critical to my teaching, learning, writing, and research, and continues to grow with every course I teach and each piece of academic scholarship I compose. I am a very out queer academic. I am rarely just a writer because I mostly identify as a queer writer. I write from a queer subject position, and I write to LGBTQ and queer audiences. Writing can offer LGBTQ visibility when authors write from and about their sexualities. Teaching also has the ability to foster LGBTQ visibility, if teachers are willing to be/come out in their classrooms. In openly identifying as a queer femme lesbian, I have the authority to bring queer materiality into the classroom spaces I enter, if I so chose. Because so many LGBTQ academics have paved the way for my own LGBTQ-related research and queer composing, subsequently providing me with a fertile venue and innovative methodologies for my ideas and musings, I hope to return the favor by adding to the ever-growing conversation in the field that engages queer(ness) and composition. Therefore, I am interested in researching the role sexuality plays in the ways LGBTQ writers authorize and express themselves, both in light of and in response to limited and oppressive perceptions of LGBTQ sexualities and the cruel nationalistic rhetoric that seeks to restrain and revise our rights and lived experiences.

Personally, I’ve found queer resistance much more empowering than movements primarily focused on empathy and acceptance, although movements with those values initially inspired my research and my teaching. And certainly, they are not the only two options available; they just tend to be two specific approaches I have spent a great deal of
time considering. These days I find that distancing myself from the norm has been much more generative and illuminating than trying to move myself closer to it. The farther I move from the center, the more I understand how it functions, how it seeks to maintain itself and embedded power structures, and how it works to keep fringe identities and voices at bay. And so, as a teacher of writing, I have to wonder: how might my own LGBTQ students situate themselves in public discourse, after considering these two, specific perspectives (which are by no means comprehensive, mutually exclusive, or intended to create a binary)? Do they see themselves outside of or as a part of public discourse? What would happen if LGBTQ students had the opportunity to write not just about but also from their sexuality? How might LGBTQ students understand themselves differently when their sexualities are engaged and explored, particularly in relation to their writing and literacy practices? Instead of listening to messages conveying how they are thought of, or written, as LGBTQ, what if we asked students what they think of themselves as LGBTQ subjects? How might that question become a place of empowerment and agency rather than one of apprehension and disenfranchisement? What insight can a queer lens and politic reveal to LGBTQ writing students, particularly in queercentric writing environments, those that focus on LGBTQ issues and experience? How does a material LGBTQ body function in the composition classroom? Finally, how

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3 The language of “centering” is tempting, and somewhat implied, here because the term queercentric puts queer and center together. However, the intention in affirming and acknowledging is not to center – to normalize or privilege – LGBTQ lives and material; rather, the point is to use LGBTQ lives and material as lenses, orientations, and contexts for writing and other literacy practices. As Malinowitzz points out, we risk losing the margin’s critical insight when we center the marginal. See Chapter 2 for a more developed conversation on the tension of centering.
might queer literacy sponsorship and queer politics enhance students understanding of rhetoric, audience, and (queer/ed) rhetorical agency?

A (Re)Turn to Malinowitz

To answer these questions, I (re)turn to composition scholar Harriet Malinowitz and her 1995 publication, *Textual Orientations*, which remains one of only a handful of book-length publications on sexuality and writing to date. Out of all the texts available that focus on sexuality and writing, it is Malinowitz’s book and articles that have resonated most with me. And when I think of the arch of the field’s engagement with sexuality over the decades, *Textual Orientations* is the one that seems to kick start the conversation because it positions sexuality as an “important epistemological context and social location in which writing acts were situated” (Malinowitz 23). Using two LGBTQ-themed courses as examples, and four case studies as illustrations, Malinowitz does the following:

- Addresses homophobia;
- Considers the experiences of LGBTQ students in writing classes;
- Affirms and acknowledges LGBTQ lives and issues in the writing classroom;
- Emphasizes discourses about queer lives and love;
- Points to the rhetorical savvy LGBTQ students develop as they strategize and construct their public and classroom identity performances;
- Argues for the power of the margins, and
- Suggests the field “queer the brew” by affirming and acknowledging LGBTQ existence.
Over twelve chapters, Malinowitz details the complexities sexual minorities face when they write in the context of mainstream, heteronormative and homophobic culture. Furthermore, and most interestingly, she describes the rhetorical savvy sexual minorities develop when they write queer texts, in queer contexts, from queer subject positions. Case studies capture the unique imperatives of four LGBTQ writers: Adrian struggles with authority and revels in the ability to express his identity through writing, merging the personal and public; Isabel seeks to explore and heal the divides she sees within the LGBTQ community and herself; John negotiates what it means to be both black and gay, exploring how “people of color develop gay identity along different lines” (212); and Mary speaks back to those who misunderstand her, writing to “set the record straight” and speak of herself as a bisexual for herself.

But these stories about queer students learning and writing in queer contexts aren’t the only reason *Textual Orientations* is decisive; Malinowitz also calls the field to take notice and do better. Twenty years ago, Malinowitz proposed a startling project for the field – she suggested, “composition find out about its lesbian and gay students” (6). Her call came in response to a glaring absence in writing courses – any focus on or acknowledgement of sexuality, specifically sexualities outside of the (hetero)norm. Although teachers of writing have attended to students’ subject positions at least since the late sixties, their focus has primarily been on gender, race, and class. Sexuality, sexual identity, and non-binary gender identities have only recently been considered in how we teach writing and understand the connection between lived experiences and literacy practices. Scholars working at the intersection of queer theory and composition call
attention to writing instruction’s neglect of non-normative sexualities and other marginalized subjectivities. Malinowitz calls this lack, “an expression of institutionalized homophobia, enacted in classrooms not randomly but systematically” (23). This intentional silencing of non-normative sexualities perpetuates the privileging of mainstream, normal identities, which is extremely problematic for LGBTQ writers like myself.

This dissertation aims to address this erasure, continuing the field’s work with sexuality in a few important ways: first, in Part I, it considers the context and reception of Textual Orientations, tracing Malinowitz’s influence within the field of rhetoric and composition, in both explicit and implicit ways. Secondly, a retrospective captures the arch of the field’s conversation on integrating sexuality into composition courses and writing practices, what some call queer composition. Then, in Part II, the dissertation takes up two aspects of Textual Orientations that have not yet been fully explored: queercentric writing classes and the power of the queer literacy sponsorship that takes place among LGBTQ persons within queer discourse communities. Finally, in an attempt to answer Malinowitz’s twenty-year-old call to learn more about some of the LGBTQ students in our writing courses, the dissertation incorporates some preliminary findings of an IRB-approved pilot study I began. The pilot study is intended to get a better sense of how sexual identity and homophobia influence LGBTQ students’ experiences in mainstream writing classes, as well as to texture the discussions surrounding queercentric writing courses and queer literacy sponsorship. Ultimately, the project considers what can happen for both LGBTQ students and teachers, when writing courses engage sexuality
and work to expand LGBTQ visibility, queer ethos, and queer rhetorical agency through queer pedagogies and methodologies. It is my intention to revisit *Textual Orientations*, listen to the text, consider its impact, uptake its critical work, build from its momentum, and contribute something meaningful to the on-going conversation regarding sexuality and writing studies.

Queer: An Orientation

“Queer is a term that offers to us and our students an epistemological position – a way of knowing, rather than something to be known”

– Karen Kopelson

“Though many people who call themselves queer have accomplished good things, queer ideology itself is ultimately selfish and immature. It presents itself as revolutionary, but instead of making a serious attempt to understand underlying psychological causes of homophobia and address them, it assumes homophobia to be implacable and confronts it with pointless, often quite puerile posturing. It’s not about substance, strategy, or sacrifice, but about style and self-image”

– Bruce Bawer

Queer is a nebulous term that thrives on perplexity and defies simple explanation⁴.

In the Introduction to *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, editors Kath Browne and Catherine Nash share a reviewer’s comment asking for clarity in their description of queer. They respond, “such a comment reflects the impulse to find commonality and

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⁴ Basic dictionary definitions describe queer as being strange or odd, abnormal and offensive; older uses of the term meant ruined or spoiled. It has long served as a pejorative for LGBTQ individuals, particularly effeminate gay men. Toward the late eighties and nineties, some LGBTQ people took up the insult, claiming it as an identity based around a non-normative desire, sexuality, or love. It became an identity, an umbrella term for those who do not identify as either normative or heterosexual.
coherence where often there is none” (Browne and Nash 8). The impetus to pin down a stable, fixed definition for queer is paradoxical; proliferation is inherent where queer is concerned. Many queer studies scholars turn to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s eloquent description of queer, “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (8). Queer is deeply personal, able to signify most authentically the first person, according to Sedgwick. She explains, “anyone’s use of ‘queer’ about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else” (9). Because it orients much of the thinking behind the dissertation, I would like to give the term queer some attention. Following is a brief snapshot of queer(ness), for the purposes of curating a frame – an orientation – for the dissertation’s work.

Queer challenges and resists the status quo, that which is considered to be normal, normative, or the norm. For David Halperin, “queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (62). If heteronormativity is “the normal, the legitimate, the dominant,” then queerness is at odds with it and seeks to diminish its pervasive hold. In The Trouble with Normal, Warner explains that he uses, “the term ‘queer’ is used in a deliberately capacious way,” arguing, “it is in much of queer theory, in order to suggest how many ways people can find themselves at odds with straight culture” (38). According to Warner’s classifications, queer runs counter to the good, the normal, the natural, the respectable; in other words, queer is bad, abnormal, illegitimate, deviant and inappropriate (25). As Judith Butler understands it, “‘queer’ derives its force
precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult” (“Critically” 19). It is reclamation, an historical marker of stigmatization, dehumanization, and a continued rebellion against Dominant culture’s moral imperatives.

In addition to positioning itself in opposition to the norm, queer also seeks to understand and dismantle the ideologies that establish and reify the (importance of) normativity. As Jonathan Alexander and Jackie Rhodes explain, “at many different moments, queerness appears (or emerges or erupts) to trouble normalcy, legitimacy, signification. It doesn’t fit. It skews the realities we construct for ourselves. It bends and detours realities constructed for us that try to induce a hetero-normative stance of stability and progress through the replication of particular kinds of people and particular kinds of families” (“Queer:” 181). In this way, queer becomes a critical set of radical politics that question the ways institutions exert and maintain power over marginalized populations. It sees all systems of oppression as being connected, kept in place in the service of one other. At this juncture, queer politics tend to experience distance from the LGBTQ movement, for they does not endorse commercialized assimilationist approaches to acceptance and second-class citizenship. As Steven Angelides points out, in “The Queer Intervention,” “queer has provided a new discursive space through which to foster political alliances across class, gender, racial, and sexual borders” (60). Queer is anti-racist and intersectional; it fights for the rights and justice of all, not just its own. Its work does not stop with rights-based social progress like marriage equality; in fact, its work wants no part in a movement that perpetuates extending the privileges of marriage to one
marginalized group at a time. Queer is a constant push back against the status quo, and it thrives on revealing the underlying ideologies and value systems that work to discredit and delegitimize real people in multiple realms of their lives.

In the field, “queer work” has historically aimed to unsettle, disturb, and challenge the status quo often upheld in the writing classroom, and over the past twenty-five years, queer theory has slowly crept into the discipline, providing new insight into the dynamic relationship between sexuality, sexual identity, and literacy practices. It did not take long for scholars to shift their use of queer as a noun to queer as a verb. Queers started queering. Alexander explains, “the movement of queering is more than just resistance, more than just negation; its recognizing possibilities that the forces of ‘authorization’ do not expect” (Literacy 47). The act of queering functions in order to reveal and produce new forms and modes of (un)knowing, rather than the reproduction and ossification of legitimized knowledge. As Karen Kopelson explains, queer, “as a verb, can become a generative approach to pedagogical inquiry that not only transcends categories of sexuality, but transcends individual selves as well” (26). Queering expands not only how something can be (un)known, but also what can (not) be known.

More recently, scholars have started investigating the power of queering composition, an active troubling of normative and sanctioned modes of composing, expressing, and publishing. The fact that we refer to queering composition as something to be risked, speaks volumes. It means there is something significant at stake, that there are people and systems that might be troubled or disrupted by such attempts. Queer

theory and gay and lesbian studies’ steady integration into English studies has also helped to transform the discipline on a larger level in terms of best practices and diverse and decolonized curriculums, as well as on smaller scales such as in English departments and individual classrooms. Lesbian and gay studies pushed for the recognition and appreciation of gay and lesbian identities and sexual politics. Queer theory pushed that work forward by inviting more non-normative voices into the conversation, seeking to understand how and why LGBTQ identities are produced in the first place. Adding queer to the mix takes it a step further by insisting that it is irresponsible to simply expose composition students to marginalized writers; they must also be expected to investigate the reasons why those writers are marginalized in the first place. As the field looks forward to the new possibilities a queer lens offers our work, it is important to remember the field’s history with homophobia and (in)visibility and remain situated in the context of queer(ness).

(In)Visibility in Academia: The (Out) LGBTQ Academic

Before writing about their students’ sexuality, English faculty spoke of their own sexualities and the tension they felt as gay or lesbian faculty members in their straight English departments and classrooms. Many present-day LGBTQ teachers of English hold close to their hearts the story of Anon., published in the 1974 College English special issue titled The Homosexual Imagination. Anon.’s constant shame, guilt, anxiety, and fear, both in and outside the academy, are directly tied to his being gay. He explains “the horror of detection” – a paranoia that his students, colleagues, classmates, and advising faculty will find out, resulting in removal from his PhD program and no hope for future
employment. Closeted and out faculty readers feel sad for Anon., who is left vulnerable, isolated, guarded, and skeptical. He writes, of his Professor and department chair, “His attitude toward that first poster announcing the gay alliance formation was the too common sarcastic disgust at having to admit that there were homosexuals in the university, who are not free to admit their existence and who in any case should keep to shadowy corners and urinals” (335).

Anon’s experience with homophobia not only alters the topics he chooses to write about in his coursework, it also forces him to discipline and censor his identity, which weighs on him heavily. It is clear Anon. does not feel safe, nor welcome, to be out in his department and in his literature classes, to the extent that he avoids all conversations regarding homosexuality and homosexual interpretations because of the perceived risk it presents. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault describes this as self-discipline and pathologization, one’s attempt to correct and normalize their own behavior under the looming presence and pressure of a larger regulatory system; they read themselves as they have been written by dominant culture. Louie Crew and Rictor Norton agree, stating, “we very much suspect that many homosexuals have internalized the homophobia of society” (274). In other words, because the subject is always reading their non-normative (i.e. deviant, disgusting, and unnatural) feelings and experiences through a (hetero)normative filter, they begin to pathologize their gayness. It becomes something that threatens them and their safety, and so they see it as their own problem rather than a produced effect of homophobic culture.

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6 I use the plural, gender-neutral pronoun here out of respect for multiple and fluid gender identities, as there are many in the LGBTQ community who choose to remain outside of the he/she binary and its binarized pronoun arrangement.
Crew and Norton, guest editors of the 1974 special issue, also address how external homophobia leads to homosexuals’ self-censorship. They argue in their introduction, “The Homophobic Imagination,” that in order to understand homosexuality, we must first understand homophobia. Crew and Norton describe the hostility homosexuals in the profession face in the ‘70s:

Within our terms of reference in this particular issue of *College English* homosexual critics have had their genuine interpretive voices stifled by blindly prejudiced publishers; homosexual authors are currently circulating hundreds of manuscripts which editors are refusing to publish because of the homosexual content; homosexual teachers at this moment are being fired and denied promotions; homosexual students have been convicted of kissing in public, sent to Atascadero state Mental Hospital in California. (273)

According to Jonathan Alexander and Michelle Gibson, the 1974 special issue was a tipping point for gay and lesbian discrimination in the field: afterward NCTE and CCCC passed resolutions to that effect, and rhetoric and composition witnessed “an identifiable, though somewhat intermittent, stream of lesbian/gay scholarship” (9).

They summarize the ‘70s in terms of “coming out and identifying oppression” (9); the ‘80s as “working toward inclusion and visibility” (10); and the ‘90s as “theorizing queer, teaching queer” (Alexander and Gibson 11). They explain how, rather than simply focusing on gay and lesbian identities through course material and out faculty, it became imperative that the field investigate the way all social identities are constructed and

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7 Additionally, in 1989, Paul Puccio formed the Caucus for Lesbian and Gay Professionals at CCCC, currently known as the Queer Caucus (Alexander and Gibson 10).
regulated, a move they trace to Malinowitz, who “presents us with a pedagogy that begins moving away from simple rhetorics of inclusion and asks us to query how identities are deployed and narrated” (Alexander and Gibson 14). In this way, Alexander and Gibson note a larger goal of gay and lesbians in the field: they wanted to “transform the academy” (13). From individual classrooms to departments, from singular university policies to academic culture at large, these gay and lesbian faculty members sought to identify, challenge, and undo systemic oppression and the resulting discriminatory practices.

Twenty years after Anon’s letter, in 1995, Malinowitz paints a slightly evolved picture of the field’s treatment of LGBTQ faculty members and LGBTQ scholarship. Homosexuality had become much less stigmatized by 1995, and the field experienced an influx of gay and lesbian studies and queer theory. But that didn’t mean departments weren’t still uncomfortable with “homosexual content,” guilty of being outwardly discriminatory. Malinowitz describes how having an LGBTQ publication or conference presentation on one’s CV could result in being removed from a selection committee’s list of potential applicants for a tenure-track position. Malinowitz explains that, at the time, even though some students avoid or outright reject homosexuality, many students are comfortable discussing gay and lesbian issues, often introducing them into course discussions of their own volition.

Throughout the dissertation, I use “gay and lesbian” to reflect and employ the exact language used by these sources, at the time of their publication. I do not intend to exclude bi, trans, or queer identities by doing so.
Compelled to Be/Come Out

Many scholars discuss how a lack of visibility and emotional, physical, and job-related safety make being out in the academy difficult, yet also imperative. Malinowitz was one of the first scholars in the field to write extensively about teaching gay and lesbian students, as a lesbian teacher. Her landmark book *Textual Orientations* provides a close look at what lesbian and gay studies can offer composition studies, and vice versa. Throughout the book she describes her experiences teaching two different composition courses, one at a public university and the other at a private university. Although both classes are comprised of LGBTQ and straight students, Malinowitz explains that the majority identify as LGBTQ. Malinowitz is upfront with the classes about her own sexuality, creating an atmosphere that has already-always invited in lesbian and gay studies. In this way, her classrooms become spaces where students can investigate homophobic culture and consider the importance of their own lived experience. Her class allows students to not only come out, but to “come out in a new way – perhaps in an academic way, or a more deeply theorized way” (22). It did not take long for LGBTQ people to realize their sexuality could be deployed strategically, i.e. *rhetorically*, in order to create change.

Scholarship reveals two compelling reasons for being/coming out in academic spaces: using disclosure to disrupt heteronormative spaces, moments, and/or practices

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9 Both courses, Writing About Lesbian and Gay Experiences and Writing About Lesbian and Gay Issues, were taught in Spring semester, 1992. Malinowitz notes that there were no heterosexual males, in either class. All students who identified as heterosexual also identified as female.

10 Zan Meyer Gonçalves also speaks of the rhetorical growth LGBTQ students gain when navigating their ethos in public spaces in *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom*. 
and using outness to increase and perpetuate LGBTQ visibility for other LGBTQ students and faculty. Malinowitz herself discusses the “political importance” of being out as a teacher, particularly when teaching LGBTQ students (8). In other words, coming out and being out in the classroom are transformative act(ion)s that have the potential to transform the university on micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Being and coming out are framed as responsibility and socio-political act(tion), a form of activism. Whereas some scholars situate coming out as more internally-drive, done for the self, Crew and Norton take it a step further by positioning it as more externally-driven, done for other LGBTQ people in efforts to challenge and change homophobic academic environments. In that vein, they argue, “Coming out is not strictly a matter of conscience: it is an academic responsibility” (288). Of course, coming and being out are most likely, and most often, both internally and externally motivated gestures. These gestures are what Wallace calls discursive performativity, specifically when the rhetor comes out to directly disrupt and challenge a moment of homophobia. Therefore, in “Out in the Academy,” David L. Wallace’s approach is more interventionist, as he frames coming out in specific heterosexist, academic contexts as citizenship. By “trying to put a human face (mine) on the argument,” Wallace is “making homosexuality visible” (61). In making his own gay identity visible, he makes other LGBTQ identities visible as well. These identity (and discursive) performances can shift smaller, individual moments of heterosexist thinking and ultimately, hopefully, lead to larger scale transformations in dominant culture, specifically in academia.
Furthermore, many LGBTQ faculty feel compelled to set an example for LGBTQ students who may feel they need to suppress their sexuality in academic (and other) spaces. It is likely most LGBTQ teachers, who are out, have had LGBTQ students share their stories of being closeted and/or out. Their stories remind us of ourselves, don’t they, of our own stories of being closeted and closeting ourselves? Sapp’s experience as a closeted gay man is similar to that of Anon’s. He explains, “I had lived my life letting others define me. I was an unhappy wreck and suffering from a terrible ulcer” (Sapp 16). He describes a life of anxiety and turmoil over his homosexuality, until he realizes, through reflective writing, the importance of his identity and the harmful ways others’ have influenced his own closeting. He experiences the freedom of being out – and more than that, a feeling of confidence associated with being an out teacher. Crew and Norton frame being out as an academic responsibility; Sapp agrees, calling it “an act of social justice” (18). He argues teachers can heal others when they heal themselves first; if a teacher is out and claims authority over their own life and experiences, their students will be encouraged to do so too. Invoking Paulo Freire, bell hooks and Thich Nhat Hahn, Sapp positions “teacher as reflector.” As Ellen Louise Hart asks, “as lesbian and gay teachers and academics we all must ask ourselves: what are our attitudes toward our gay and lesbian students? What kinds of responsibility do we have? […] As lesbian and gay teachers how does our invisibility [and, I would add, visibility] affect our teaching and our students’ lives?” (36). Being out is a way to not only transform ourselves, through self-acceptance and agency, but also a way to heal and transform our students, who will be inspired and encourage to accept and celebrate themselves in turn. This of course is
cyclical, as out students then reify visibility for their LGBTQ teachers as well. The shared
experience is both reciprocal and transformative. As Janet Pollack so beautifully states, in
“Lesbian/Gay Role Models in the Classroom: Where Are They When You Need Them,”
a student coming out to an out professor is an occasion to celebrate. Something went right for a change” (133). Coming out is always (and continually, since we must come out repeatedly) a critical and political moment; being out can be just as significant and transformative.

The LGBTQ Student Writer

In 1988, Ellen Louise Hart’s “Literacy and the Lesbian/Gay Learner” was published alongside other pivotal essays in the collection The Lesbian in Front of the Classroom. Alexander and Gibson acknowledge, “As far as we can tell, Hart’s is the earliest composition article to deal with the issue of the lesbian or gay learner, and because it moves those learners from the margins and places them at the center of theory and praxis, it is groundbreaking work” (10). Hart argues, “sexuality is much more than sex; it is integral to identity, culture, and all of life” (30). She draws connections between homophobia and literacy learning, pointing to a lack of gay and lesbian representation in books and in school. Drawing from a 1984 study at Berkeley, she discusses the discomfort LGBTQ students face in the classroom. She explains the impact on LGBTQ writers, “a student who is a lesbian or gay may not feel that she can express herself freely and honestly and she will therefore censor herself” (Hart 33). Alison Regan picks up this thread in 1994, pointing to the ways mainstream classrooms isolate LGBTQ students.

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11 I preserve the language used at the time, even though it is exclusive of bisexual, trans*, and queer identities.
asserts, “we need to recognize that lesbian and gay writers feel alienated in our classrooms, and that alienated students are less likely to be empowered to write, whether or not the subject matter covers lesbian or gay topics. We need to acknowledge the risk of self disclosure at the same time we encourage all students to contribute to conversations” (126). These lesbian scholars ask the field to do something it hadn’t previously: to consider the unique needs of the LGBTQ student writer.

Clearly, this is work Malinowitz takes up, since she also talks about the unique experiences of LGBTQ writers. Drawing from her classroom experiences, she explains how her students, “were struggling to locate their gay identities within their identities as writers, afraid that the gay part, so overloaded with cultural meaning, would drown out the other parts, render them invisible. Yet they also aid that it was the gay part that had always before been suppressed in their writing and that they longed to express” (Malinowitz 130). They avoid topics regarding LGBTQ issues and identities, therefore censoring themselves for fear of consequence. In addition to the typical stressors college students face, like doing well in their courses and managing relationships, LGBTQ students experience compounded stress because heteronormative culture adds another layer. LGBTQ students in mainstream writing courses are not just worried about writing a paper to earn a good grade; they worry about how they will come across to their teachers and classmates, if they identify as or are perceived to be LGBTQ.

Over time, rhetoric and composition scholars have pointed to the ways LGBTQ students and teachers suffer from institutionalized homophobia. They also detail the

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12 For a discussion on LGBTQ English-language learners’ experiences, see Cynthia Nelson’s Sexual Identities in English Language Education (Routledge, 2009). Nelson argues, “a queer framework holds much promise for engaging lesbian and gay issues in language classes” (25).
benefits for LGBTQ people experiencing what Malinowitz calls “gay positive discourse.” LGBTQ students have unique needs and experiences, and it doesn’t take too much imagination to figure out how we can start addressing them in more meaningful and generative ways. As Saralyn Chesnut declares,

> The good news is we know what young LGBT people need in order to thrive during their college years. We know that they need acknowledgement, affirmation, and support as LGBT individuals, both from their institutions and from individuals within those institutions,. We know that they, along with students who may be struggling with their sexual identities, need adult LGBT role models, access to objective information, and a community of peers in which they can feel comfortable as they explore their options. (221)

Queering our curriculums and pedagogies moves us closer to that kind of work and can be significant lifelines for LGTBQ teachers and students seeking affirmation and social change.

**Queer(ing) Pedagogies**

Although critical pedagogies and cultural studies still dominate many composition courses, rhetoric and composition scholars are moving from critical to *hetero*-critical pedagogies. The unrelenting erasure of sexuality and sexual identity, paired with institutionalized homophobia, fuel hetero-critical pedagogies. Teachers share Alexander and Wallace’s sentiments, “homophobia should not be allowed to stand unchallenged in composition classes, and composition teachers and students should not have to hide nonnormative sexual identities” (Alexander and Wallace W309). Despite, and perhaps
driven by institutionalized homophobia, compositionists – chiefly those who are LGBTQ – have risked their safety and jobs to queer the composition classroom in methodology, form and content, and pedagogical practice. The primary mode of doing so entails queer theoretical applications in the classroom. Queer theory enhances pedagogy, resisting feel-good approaches that aim to resolve or expunge difference, demanding a much more complex analysis.

In practice, queer pedagogies inherently demand courses that are critical in design. So, rather than just introduce sex and sexuality into the classroom, queer pedagogies call attention to the initial lack and the subjectivities it produces. As Alexander and Gibson point out, particularly in the writing classroom, “queer theory moves us beyond the multicultural task of accepting and validating identity and moves us toward the more difficult process of understanding how identity, even the most intimate perceptions of self, arise out of a complex matrix of shifting social power” (3). Students not only see themselves and Others as subjects caught in a web of power, but they also come to see themselves as contributing factors. When they see themselves capable of exposing and disrupting heteronormativity’s foothold in their daily lives, they move toward social action and social justice.

In the 2002 College English Special Issue on Lesbian and Gay Studies/Queer Pedagogies, William Spurlin describes the basis of queer pedagogy and the possibilities queer theory offers English studies:

In one sense, a ‘queer’ pedagogy would imply not only an analysis of (sexual)
difference(s) in the classroom but of interrelated, broad-based pedagogical commitments to free inquiry and expression, social equity, the development of more democratic institutional and pedagogical practices, and the broadening of dialogical spheres of public exchange within and beyond the classroom as sites for engaged analyses of social issues and collective struggles. Indeed, the intersections of queer theory and critical pedagogy are filled with numerous and exciting possibilities for productive classroom inquiry, cultural analysis, public deliberation, and social (ex)change. (10)

Inquiry-based learning and a sustained analysis of the nexus of institutionalized power structures, dominant discourse, and (sexual) identity guide queer pedagogues and pedagogies. For instance, Malinowitz and Alexander discuss the importance of teachers and students contemplating not only the erasure of sex and sexuality, but also the ways in which the classroom and academia are already and always heterosexed. Amy Winans, too, argues, “the notion that sexuality and sexual difference are peripheral topics that have no real place in the classroom ignores the fact that both are already present there and that failing to address them supports and validates an unquestioned heteronormative environment” (106). These analyses extend to analyses of larger institutions of power, giving students a more holistic sense of how agency, voice, public discourse, and civic engagement and participation are intertwined and interdependent. In this way, queer pedagogy’s advantages reach beyond writing tasks and the classroom; activism, social justice, affect and emotion, and embodiment are foundational tenets behind these alternate pedagogies.
More specifically, feminist and queer pedagogies provide women, communities of color, and LGBTQ persons visibility and mentorship. These pedagogues work tirelessly to resist the institutional urge to mainstream and discipline their students and their various subjectivities. They also work to disband the discourses of power that ask them to do so for specific reasons. Mainstream writing benefits a particular class and discourse community, so LGBTQ student writers find themselves, again and always, positioned at the margins. As an alternative, as Laura Micciche explains, feminist and queer pedagogies “create spaces for marginalized voices and resist the constraints of academic discourse” (113). Further, these spaces can foster non-normative discourse community formations that are formed and supported in the vein of social justice. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, these environments are revolutionary because they can offer Othered students a level of community and solidarity that is often discouraged or outright prevented in more normative classrooms.

There is a sense of power and freedom embedded in these pedagogies; Micciche explains, “learning in feminist [and queer] classrooms, as I can attest, is frequently emergent, less measurable than is perhaps fashionable in assessment talk. In a way, this inchoateness is its most powerful effect: These classrooms can make you feel differently about the world, creating alternative alignments with other and investments in wild, imaginative, hopeful, unorthodox futures” (140). These pedagogies seek to provide validation for Othered individuals by inviting and engaging their lived experiences, allowing for emergent and experimental forms of writing and expression. Further, these learning and writing environments can foster transformative connections between and
amongst LGBTQ teachers and students, offering all members a space to not only critique, but also dismantle exclusionary dominant discourse. And in doing so, queer pedagogies move beyond what is required, sanctioned, and legitimate to become pedagogies of *possibility*.

Queer pedagogies might be best described as methods toward, what Malinowitz calls, “queering the brew” of traditional approaches to writing and authorization. Simply put by Winans, “queering pedagogy entails moving what is assumed by many to be on the periphery to the center” (110), thus demonstrating the power of Malinowitz’s call to queer the brew by offering courses that center queer experience. When we engage sexuality, focus on its knowledge complex, and allow for new and reclaimed rhetorics, we mess with traditional expectations, unsettle genre conventions, magnify silences and invite subjectivity. This is just some of the “queer smuggling” we do in the classroom, something intended for the benefit of our LGBTQ students and ourselves. Like queer itself, these pedagogies never stop their examination. They constantly uncover, dismantle, analyze, and resist. As Winan explains, “queer pedagogy challenges all students regardless of their sexual identities because it calls into question the process of normalizing dominant assumptions and beliefs, as it challenges instructors to questions and to continue to test their own pedagogy” (106). In fact, queer pedagogies have led queer scholars, among others, as far as to question their own disciplines, departments, and classrooms. They call on us to see ourselves as products of an historically

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13 In “Queer and Now,” Sedgwick speaks about the ways she, and other teachers, “smuggle representations of queerness” into normative spaces (5).
exclusionist academic culture and to push back against the academy at large – its policies, values, expectations, and conventions.

Identity & Writing: Academic Writing Conventions and the Silences They Produce

Numerous scholars describe how academic writing conventions reflect and perpetuate capitalist, heterosexist, and racist ideologies. Furthermore, they address the ways in which writing instruction is complicit in endorsing these practices in the classroom. The academy’s long-standing conventions can mean assimilation and silences for those who write from the margins; being historically under- and misrepresented can result in generative discursive resistances, calls for rhetorical sovereignty, Other/alternative rhetorics, and queer and multimodal compositions. Shaping those long-standing traditions and canons is the connection between power and discourse – ethos: who gets to speak? While John Trimbur does not write as a queer compositionist, or necessarily to queer composition scholars, his ideas are useful to queer because it positions knowledge in a complex matrix of power. In his “Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning,” Trimbur immediately uncovers “how knowledge and its means of production are distributed in an unequal, exclusionary social order and embedded in hierarchal relations of power,” and so he calls for a stronger critical consciousness and resistance of those power relations at the intersections of language and ideology (734). His point seems to usefully serve as an anchor, or frame, for the work of queer composition(ists): identifying power differentials, understanding their impact, and tracing their genealogies to better understand the motives, values, and practices that maintain such significant inequalities.
Numerous scholars explore the consequences of conventions and standards (Standard English being the most obvious and suppressive example) on students of difference – particularly those who are already situated on the margins. Steve Lamos argues that such standards reinforce and reify the white status quo, and it’s safe to say Alexander would add heteronormative here, too. Lamos, like Jacqueline Royster and Jonathan Alexander, accuse those in power of reinforcing racism and elitist tendencies in their attempts to democratize language practices in the academy. Lamos’ most significant point, one that links him to Richard Scott Lyons’ notions of rhetorical sovereignty, is that we should practice race consciousness rather than attempting to be “color-blind” usually works to erase, flatten, and/or ignore critical difference(s). CCCC’s 1974 resolution, Students Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) is an example of a move toward rhetorical sovereignty, especially for blacks who speak Black English (BE), although it does not feel as politically and emotionally charged as Lyons and Alexander’s discussions about Indigenous and queer persons, respectively, being able to compose and speak in their own way. In the same way other marginalized rhetors experience a silencing of their languages and voices, LGBTQ writers find their modes of expression regulated and normalized. This move toward sovereignty creates a space that does not rely as heavily on linearity, coherence, print, and traditional notions of ethos; meanwhile, it creates a space for multimodality, emotion, personal narratives, and poetics – tactics queer rhetors often employ, tactics LGBTQ students might benefi. The grand narrative of “normal discourse,” “academic discourse,” and Standard English as the surefire paths to academic success is exclusionary for those who struggle
to fit into the academy. Having one’s own language or discourse, or method of composing, labeled as abnormal or incorrect is damaging and forces those in minor subject positions to either straddle or choose between two or more dialects or discourses, or worse, it silences their subject position or may even force them to “pass” so they remain undetected. Kurt Spellmeyer succinctly states, “the roots of language lie in suffering, but the roots of the self lie in attunement and release” (837). The tumultuous relationship between language and identity is so deeply embedded in our personal, public, and political lives that exclusionary rhetoric can actually impact an individual’s sense of self. Scholars like Lyons, Royster, Brueggeman, and Alexander explore the contact zones that produce, construct, announce, and celebrate difference. They acknowledge the silencing; they encourage rhetorical listening; they resist discursive colonization; and they warn against falsely veiled attempts at commodified multiculturalism. Additionally, these scholars advocate for incorporating lived experience and knowledge in writing, what Victor Villanueva calls Memoria. Like Gloria Anzaldúa, he employs personal writing, a border language, and poetry to voice his experience and literacy learning. Geneva Smitherman enacts her hybrid identity by hybridizing her language, code meshing academic English with Black English. In this way, these texts use invention as intervention since they disrupt and challenge exclusionary academic conventions, enact subversive rhetorical strategies, and invite marginalized voices to self-present.

When these voices from the margins are valued, honored, and explored, we invite realities that have been neglected for too long. We come to the realization that writing, for these students, is considerably connected with who they are – as Others, as subjects,
as writers, as rhetors, as citizens, as agents of change. Specifically, for LGBTQ student writers, the writing classroom can generate newfound confidence in their identity, a space that fosters a better rhetorical understanding of the ways we (re)present ourselves to others. It can sponsor pride, which leads to agency. Once students realize they can author-ize themselves to speak as LGBTQ subjects, they move into a space of queer rhetorical agency. Drawing energy and empowerment from their experience within the margins, they are more likely to resist and seek autonomy. These are the hopes and dreams I hold for the LGBTQ student writers in our composition classes. Rather than see their sexuality as a hurdle, I want to see teachers work to create courses that use it as a launchpad.

Therefore, my research uses Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations* as a compass of sorts, guiding teachers of writing toward queerer composition classrooms, curriculums, and pedagogies so that LGBTQ students gain a critically queer understanding of the role sex and sexuality play in our personal, public, and academic lives. As a whole, the dissertation is motivated by the following research questions:

- How has the field responded to, utilized, and been explicitly and implicitly shaped by Harriet Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations*?
- How has the conversation regarding sexuality and writing studies taken shape in the past twenty years, since *Textual Orientations* was published?
- What can queercentric writing environments offer to LGBTQ teachers and students? What insight can/do LGTBQ student writers and LGBTQ
composition instructors gain in a queercentric course, as opposed to a mainstream writing classroom?

• How does queer literacy sponsorship develop and function? What knowledge is/can be generated in a queer discourse community?

• How might queer methodologies of resistance, excess, and ambivalence allow for more generative and organic composing for LGBTQ and other marginalized student-writers?

The dissertation also seeks to uptake the following research questions from Harriet Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations*, which I feel deserve more time and attention:

• How and when do LGTBQ students see homophobia “reproduced in the mainstream writing class?” (xvii)

• “What tensions surround the naming of [a LGBTQ] identity, and what are their effects likely to be on writers who are asked to compose reflectively and critically?” (xvii)

• “What can change for lesbian and gay writers when they are in a writing class in which lesbian and gay existence is acknowledged and affirmed?” (xviii)

Relevance and Importance of Project: What I *Have* To Say

Ultimately, the dissertation works under the postulation that LGBTQ student writers benefit from writing courses that engage, rather than ignore, their sexualities and sexual identities, framing them as “key components of how we conceive of ourselves politically, organize ourselves collectively, and figure ourselves politically” (Alexander
Therefore, the project follows in Malinowitz, Sedgwick, and countless others’ footsteps in acknowledging sexuality as not just a way of being, but also as a way of knowing. LGBTQ persons carry powerful marginal knowledge and experience, and composition classes that draw from and build on that knowledge and experience can be amazing learning environments for all students. As many queer scholars have argued, college students are often already exploring and negotiating their sexualities, and many of them carry related trauma that compounds the weight of their experiences.

The projects, courses, writing environments and pedagogies I advocate for within the dissertation recognize how hard writing instruction has worked in the past to distance student writers from their sexualities and lived experience, especially if they are LGTBQ or from an additional/another marginalized community. My research advocates for inviting that subjectivity in with the intention to draw, learn, and write from it. When LGBTQ students have access to a writing classroom, or any course, that values their experience and presents them with “gay positive discourse” and an out LGTBQ role model, they are more likely to explore and embrace their identities rather than conceal and doubt their legitimacy in public spheres.

The preliminary findings I provide in the Interlude and Chapter 3 are compelling additions to these current scholarly conversations because they offer the perspective of the LGBTQ learners in our classrooms. Rather than just look to the voices of scholars, I aim to highlight those of a few LGBTQ students in order to learn more about their experiences in mainstream writing courses, to bear witness to their experiences with homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism, and to enrich the field’s current approach to
integrating sexuality into writing studies. In returning to Malinowitz, I hope to reorient the field to her work, which remains timely and insightful after twenty years. I also hope to inspire the field to focus less on queer material and more on material queers; we need to be willing to learn more about, and *from*, our LGBTQ students.

The hope is that LGBTQ student writers, and faculty members, become more confident, hone their voices, and develop a queer ethos on their own terms. Queer rhetorical agency can be a powerful gesture toward a more powerful methodology of queer composition since it draws attention to the very different experiences and needs of LGBTQ student writers and gives them the tools and motivation to *speak for themselves* rather than being spoken for by their allies and others. I believe these things to be true not just because they make a lot of sense, but because I have experienced them for myself – from all sides: as an out LGBTQ teacher, as an LGBTQ student writer, and as a queer rhetor. I know the power of having an out teacher; I understand how desperate some of our LGBTQ students are in their searches for understanding, community, information, and support. I have witnessed them write themselves into queerness, on and off the page.

**Relevance and Importance of Project: What I *Need* To Say**

Thinking about the significance of this project stirs up queer feelings. At the moment, I write with a knot in my chest, from a space of complete ambivalence. There is an intense swelling in my chest. I am so proud to be queer; I love the experiences and richness queer love has offered to me through the years; and I feel encouraged because
the public rhetoric surrounding LGBTQ folx\textsuperscript{14} seems to be more generative than in the past. We are coming to the end of Barack Obama’s presidency, one that has meant so much to me, a feeling shared by many LGBTQ people and those from other marginalized communities. I have felt supported, uplifted, and honored because during his two terms I have seen a substantial shift in the affirmation and acknowledgement of LGBTQ persons. But I also feel nervous, discouraged, deeply saddened, and heavy with the weight of a collective history of hate speech, brutal crimes, and abuse directed toward LGBTQ people, a history the conservative right seems to cling to. The trauma, the fear, the dehumanization, the illogical policies that add insult to injury: they are all still pervasive today... and yesterday.

Yesterday, on June 12, 2016, a hundred people were gunned down at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, FL. Fifty of them died, including the attacker, who was mostly certainly homophobic and may have even been struggling with his own sexuality. Those who died were brown LGBTQ bodies, and they are grievable. They were dancing, laughing, singing, living, and celebrating. As it is June, Pride is in the air, and LGBTQ people across the world are taking to the streets, infusing public spaces with rainbows and myriad expressions of queerness. It’s like Bakhtin’s carnival: the oppressed are granted a time and space for release, for resistance, for jubilation, for indulging, and for their survival. And although there is palpable joy and solidarity, there is also the looming reality of control, regulation, and punishment. I imagine the suffocating, small space between dancing joyfully with fellow queers during gay pride and hearing a semi-

\textsuperscript{14} I use folx for rhetorical reasons: to be gender neutral and to honor members of the LGBTQ community who are genderqueer, trans, and gender non-conforming.
automatic weapon discharging, and it is soul crushing. It is this space – the one all LGBTQ people carry and think about every day, the space of threatened safety and injustice: that is why this project is significant. Because LGTBQ students write with their queer hearts full of these spaces, moments, and feelings, and acting like they don’t exist doesn’t change the fact that they do.

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The dissertation is organized into two parts: the first section positions Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations* as foundational to the queer composition conversation. With the aim to better understand the scope of Malinowitz’s ideas and impact, I trace the field’s conversation surrounding sexuality and writing studies to better understand how scholars address and integrate sexuality in the writing classroom. The second section looks forward, seeking to “queer the brew” of writing instruction by taking up two of Malinowitz’s ideas that I feel deserve further attention: queercentric writing environments and learning more about the LGBTQ students in our composition classrooms. I argue that queercentric classes – those that affirm, acknowledge, and focus on LGBTQ experience – can be a transformative space for LGBTQ writers because they foster queer literacy sponsorship and provide LGBTQ writers with alternative methodologies and rhetorical strategies for composing. Within a queer rhetorical context, LGBTQ writers are re-oriented toward the dynamic connections among sexual identity, literacy learning, writing, agency, and ethos.

Chapter 1 provides a contextual and bibliographic portrait of Malinowitz and *Textual Orientations*, offering political and temporal context. After revisiting the text’s
main ideas and arguments, I look back to published reviews to learn more about *Textual Orientations*’ reception. My research shows that despite a few critiques, reviewers provide overwhelmingly positive feedback about the book. Whereas one reviewer finds Malinowitz’s text lacking a call to action, I argue that she offers promising and revolutionary tips for writing teachers: do more to learn about LGBTQ students; expand and decenter research practices to include LGBTQ subjectivities; address and fight homophobia; and include and contextualize marginalized voices and lived experience. Additionally, I seek to explore the range of impact her book has on conversations within and outside the field. Since the dissertation hinges on the connection between an author’s identity and their writing, the chapter looks to Malinowitz, herself, for hints toward her work. I argue that Malinowitz is, and has long been, revolutionary in her research foci, her queer pedagogy, and where her politics are concerned. Situating Malinowitz’s 1995 publication as one origin for the field’s conversation surrounding sexuality and writing studies, I argue that *Textual Orientations* is pivotal because of its efforts to incorporate and embrace queer lives, discourses, and love.

Building upon Chapter 1’s context, in Chapter 2, I trace a selection of the field’s conversation concerning sexuality and writing studies since Malinowitz’s publication, using a retrospective framework. My intention with the retrospective is to look back in order to better understand current best queer(ing) practices and conversations regarding LGBTQ student writers. I consider the ways queer theory has shaped and changed the ways we think about heteronormativity and identity construction and performance, resulting in queer pedagogies. Then, I turn to the conversation centered on the connection
between literacy learning and sexuality, pointing to the connections between identity, ethos, and agency. Next, I focus on the incommensurability between queer and composition, which emphasizes the discipline’s history of regulating and correcting students’ writing and, by association, their non-normative and “uncontainable” identities vis-à-vis academic writing conventions. Finally, I explore the notion that both literacy learning and writing instruction censor and censure LGBTQ (and Other) subjectivities by directly and indirectly limiting LGTBQ students’ access to meaningful literacy sponsors and anti-kyriarchial classroom environments. The chapter argues for a more serious consideration of two of Malinowitz’s most compelling ideas that have gone unaddressed: queercentric writing courses (those that include and explore LGBTQ experience) and a call to learn more about our LGBTQ students.

Chapter 3 explores the power of feminist and queer mentorship in academia. Applying Deborah Brandt’s work with literacy sponsorship, alongside Jonathan Alexander’s arguments for sexual literacy in the writing classroom, I argue for what I call *queer literacy sponsorship*, an LGBTQ-specific set of literacy and learning practices that carry their own set of resistance-based ideologies, developed and honed from a conglomeration of various sponsors including the LGBTQ community, LGBTQ-based media and texts, peer groups and mentors, and myriad other LGBTQ resources currently available. In support of these arguments, the chapter is informed by IRB-approved qualitative research I conducted in order to learn more about LGBTQ students’ experiences with homophobia in classroom settings; consider the ways they acquire knowledge about their sexuality and LGBTQ identities and culture; and determine how
sexuality might influence their writing practices and sense of ethos. The pilot study suggests that LGBTQ students do experience blatant and latent homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia in their courses; students also report ambivalent feelings – fear and anxiety alongside joy and relief – when faced with coming/being out in academic settings. The most compelling findings capture a positive association with coming/being out and writing about LGBTQ material in writing courses that acknowledge and affirm LGBTQ existence.

In Chapter 4, I further consider the tension conventional academic writing, the standard research essay, and conventional research methodologies pose for LGBTQ writer-researchers. In response to normative and tightly controlled parameters, I argue instead for queer methodologies of meaning making, which allow for more resistant rhetorical strategies (like illogic, love, and pathos) and alternative composing practices (such as digital, visual, and multimodal composing). The chapter positions ambivalence, failure, and excess as more organic and generative ways to express and discuss the lived experiences of those who have been historically disenfranchised. Using a multimodal course project I assign as an illustration and practical application, I consider how these queer methodologies might trouble the (field’s) valorization of normativity, firm stances, and conventional ethos, thus providing more meaningful and authentic composing experiences for LGBTQ student writers.

In the final section, I look forward to new(er) ways of “queering the brew” of composition studies, in both individual classrooms and for the field at large. I position queer rhetorical agency and queer rage as effective, affective, and indispensable
method(ologie)s for LGBTQ student writers as they navigate their own sexual identities and the institutions and systems of power that work tirelessly to negate and control them.
CHAPTER 1: MALINOWITZ, AN ORIGIN AND SPRINGBOARD

Harriet Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations* (1995) is the first pivotal text that comes to mind when I think of the work rhetoric and composition scholars have done to integrate sexuality into the field. Her book represents a turning point in the way the field has not only acknowledged, but also engaged sexual identity and writing. It’s not that there weren’t publications beforehand that dealt with sexuality; queer theory had already made a sizable impression on English studies and gender studies. The difference is that Malinowitz’s text identified and addressed a significant gap when she asks how LGBTQ student writers could benefit from becoming a part of a discourse community through, or in, the space of the queercentric writing classroom. Twenty years later, I still find *Textual Orientations*, its ideas and stories to be provocative, and I want to better understand the trajectory of the field’s scholarship, in terms of sexuality and writing studies, after Malinowitz’s contribution. In other words, I am interested in determining the impact – both direct and more latent – her work has left upon the field.

When I first finished reading Malinowitz’s book, I had the sense that although the field had taken significant strides toward queer theoretical applications and acknowledging LGBTQ existence in the writing classroom, it hadn’t quite necessarily spent enough time conducting research or thinking about ways to engage and learn about the LGBTQ writers in our classrooms, a direct call Malinowitz makes in *Textual Orientations*. As a queer composition scholar and queer rhetor, I am left with a series of

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15 Although Malinowitz never directly defines or explains what she means by *queercentric*, one is able to surmise it entails LGBTQ content as its focus, and I would also assume (based on Malinowitz classes) the majority of students and the teacher identify as LGBTQ.
pressing questions: in what ways has rhetoric and composition and writing studies responded to Malinowitz’s call? What has the field’s scholarship done regarding LGBTQ student writers since? How have rhetoric and composition scholars used Malinowitz in their own work? And how has Malinowitz influenced our scholarship and current conversations about queer (and) composition? Is composition still “debilitat[ing] lesbian and gay students as writers by ignoring their experience”? (Malinowitz 141). Is rhetoric and composition concerned (enough) about meeting the intellectual needs of LGBTQ student writers? How has the conversation taken shape over the years?

In this chapter I consider the role Malinowitz has played in shaping the field’s discussion of sexuality and composition. First, I discuss the ways Malinowitz’s work has inspired other scholars in and beyond the field; then, I examine the field’s response to Textual Orientations in order to better understand its impact. Finally, using a retrospective approach, I trace the conversation regarding the integration of sexuality into writing studies since the book’s publication in 1995, to see how the field has responded to Malinowitz’s call to learn about our LGBTQ students and address their unique needs in our writing classrooms.

Malinowitz: A Portrait of the Writer

Harriet Malinowitz is a Jewish, atheist lesbian feminist from Queens, who earned her PhD from NYU. She served as the Writing Center Director at Long Island University for five years, where she established the Women’s/Gender Studies program; for four years, she served on the Board of Directors for the New York Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies; and she has written a host of book reviews for The Women’s Review of Books.
She is currently lecturer of English at Ithaca College. Much of her work is interdisciplinary in nature, which is not surprising considering her love for creative writing and social justice imperatives. In addition to her academic work, she writes comedy for her long time partner Sara Cytron to perform, to whom Textual Orientations is dedicated. (This type of writing reflects Malinowitz’s early love for memoir, the personal essay, and creative non-fiction, which she explains in her 2003 College English article “Business, Pleasure, and the Personal Essay.”) Immediately in the Acknowledgements, the reader senses the closeness of their relationship, as Malinowitz generously and lovingly thanks her for her support throughout the project. As I read, I couldn’t help but think of my own partner, Ginny, and how she, like Sara, has learned the language of my field and research, and spends countless hours discussing it with me. Malinowitz sweetly describes, “I’ve always said that what I wanted in life was a John-and-Yoko relationship, by which I meant one informed by a shared sense of creative energy and excitement, a passion that was charged on multiple levels” (xiii). Both of their work brings (sexual) identity to the forefront, which seems to bring Malinowitz a bit of anxiety in 1995, a time when being out was becoming more common, but was still risky.

It is no secret Malinowitz has a history of focusing her research where others won’t. Almost all of her work falls under the prevue of existing outside of normativity’s realm. Before publishing Textual Orientations, Malinowitz wrote a few articles on lesbian and gay realities and knowledge in the writing classroom16, and in 2002, Malinowitz published the provocative “Unmotherhood” in jac. After discussing the ways

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16 See “Construing and Constructing Knowledge as a Lesbian or Gay Student Writer” (1992) and “Lesbian and Gay Reality and the Writing Class” (1993).
in which unmothers are socially constructed as unhappy, lacking, drains on society, she argues for the personal choice to not have children, free of stigmatization. Twenty years after publishing *Textual Orientations*, she has turned her attention toward Zionism and propaganda, which has proven to be another potentially controversial research agenda to pursue. She focuses on how Israel, in its efforts to portray Palestine as socially backwards, sells itself as gay-positive. Furthermore, she exposes the United States’ problematic ties with Israel, despite its continued brutal invasion and occupation of Palestine territory. Israel’s acceptance of homosexuality is used to misdirect Americans, including liberal progressives, from the larger violence Israel is perpetrating against the Palestinian people. Anti-Zionists assert that the United States’ amicable relationship with Israel is fostered and enabled by the very denial of this violence and Israel’s long-time oppression of Palestine. Most recently, in the closing chapter for Alexander and Rhodes’ *Sexual Rhetorics* and in her article for *The Writing Instructor’s* special issue *Queer and Now Remix*, “Torches and Metonyms of Freedom,” Malinowitz focuses on the connection between LGBTQ rights’ based rhetoric and the constitution as well as homonationalism – the concept that LGBTQ people are accepted if/when they mimic and perpetuate heterosexual relationship and family structures, consume eagerly like other capitalists, and behave like “good Americans,” and so on.

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17 Malinowitz, who worked for years as a full, tenured Professor of English at Long Island University, was denied her sabbatical request twice by Vice President for Academic Affairs: initially and again after revisions (even though no suggestions were made and no reasons were offered for its denial). After the union got involved, her requested sabbatical was granted upon the condition that she resign/retire afterward and not use the case as “evidence” in the future; she refused, leaving LIU for Ithaca College. As a result, her colleague, Bronwyn Jones, started a Change.org petition calling LIU’s administration to honor academic freedom and be more transparent in their decision making process (Malinowitz was approved for the sabbatical in the first round by her department and Dean; the Dean pulled his support after the second submission). *MuzzleWatch*, a site that describes itself as “tracking efforts to stifle open debate about US-Israeli foreign policy,” also covered the story.
In 1995, Malinowitz, then Associate Professor of English at Long Island University, published her groundbreaking book, *Textual Orientations*. Malinowitz centers the text on her experience teaching two gay and lesbian\(^\text{18}\) themed writing classes in the Spring of 1992, one at a large private university (Cosmopolitan University, titled Writing About Gay and Lesbian Experiences) and the another at a large public university (Municipal College, titled Writing About Gay and Lesbian Issues\(^\text{19}\)). She describes her mixed methodological approach to the text as, “part biographical narrative, part literacy narrative, part textual analysis, part an inquiry into epistemology, and part cultural theory” (157). Her research aims to fill the gap she articulates – the field doesn’t address gay and lesbian issues, sexuality, students, or their experiences (xvi). In focusing her courses on gay and lesbian experiences/issues, Malinowitz creates a space for her students to consider the public and private meaning and construction of their own sexualities; analyze gay and lesbian texts, like coming-out narratives and “AIDS activist graphic art”; and examine homophobic culture.

In the Preface’s opening scenario, she imagines entering a conference presentation room, already assumed to be a lesbian because of her paper title; she says, “I’m already out; when I walk into this room it’s into an existing discourse that I have already instigated” (xv). The scenario’s purpose is two-fold: first, it presents readers with

\(^\text{18}\) Malinowitz acknowledges that she lumps bisexuality into the “gay and lesbian” category (82). She makes no mention of trans identities in the text, an issue Char Ullman takes up in her review, which I discuss later in this chapter.

\(^\text{19}\) According to Malinowitz, both classes had high enrollments of both gay and lesbian and straight students, with the majority identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual in both classes. She also notes the only heterosexual students enrolled in both classes were female.
a very real professional moment – one many of us have faced as LGBTQ scholars doing LGBTQ work; secondly, it serves as metaphor for the material she is about to present her readers with. Her title announces sexuality, invokes inquiry, and sows an early iteration of what is now known as queer composition. She instigates this conversation in response to a lack she identifies, to address and combat homophobia, and to provide a space for gay and lesbian students to be gay and lesbian writers.

Malinowitz’s main argument draws from James Berlin’s social-epistemic theory of writing and critical pedagogy: she argues, “that sexual identity is inscribed in discursive acts in ways that both parallel and overlap with the effects of these other [racial, gender, and class-based] identities, and that including sexual identity in our consideration of diverse identities is a necessary component of legitimate composition research and practice” (25). The first half of the book is comprised of multiple relevant, thematically partitioned literature reviews centered on anthropology, teaching, liberatory pedagogy, and gay and lesbian studies. The second half briefly lays out the site, participants, data, and course context and assignments for her classroom research before moving into the meat of this section: the “interpretive portraiture” of four students. These case studies elucidate the potential for integrating gay and lesbian studies, and most importantly sexuality, into the writing classroom.

Malinowitz explains, “my primary purpose in this book is to illustrate some of the complex dimensions of lesbian and gay experience in composition classes” (25). In that vein, she provides readers with a thought-provoking snapshot of how she and her students were affected by their membership in these gay and lesbian themed writing courses. The
result is a fascinating discussion about what happens when lesbian and gay students are asked to consider (their own) sexuality in the critical space of the writing classroom. The readings and course assignments Malinowitz describes focus on three things: thinking about how and why sexuality is important; bringing sexual identity into writing; and considering the meaning of sexuality and sexual identities through writing, something students were initially hesitant to do. Many of the students reported feeling hesitant to write about and from their sexuality, sensing that being LGBTQ would hamper their authority as writers. Yet, the four students she discusses all report experiencing a new level of “intellectual and creative freedom” as they explore their own sexualities through writing. Adrian O’Connor, a 19-year-old middle class gay male, starts to understand the personal as social and the feeling of exploring rather than “justifying” LGBTQ issues. Isabel Serrano, a 32-year-old Puerto Rican lesbian Jehovah’s Witness, writes to “set the record straight” through counter-discourse; with confidence, she writes to form and join the LGBTQ community (rather than writing to straight audiences). John Lee, a 25-year-old black gay first generation college student, uses course assignments to investigate his intersectional identity, which isn’t adequately or accurately represented. Finally, Mary Donoghue, an 18-year-old bisexual from an upper middle class family, negotiates what she knows about herself as a bisexual and what her parents assume about her and other LGBTQ people. Each case study details one example of the unique “rhetorical self-consciousness” LGBTQ students experience when writing about issues related to sexuality.

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20 See Chapter 3 for a more developed discussion on how LGBTQ student writers feel their sexuality might negatively impact their authority in writing classrooms.
Malinowitz’s text is indispensable for a few reasons: she situates the writing classroom as a sensical place to discuss and explore the impact of sexuality and homophobia; she discusses the importance of being an out lesbian teacher in order to create a more LGBTQ-inclusive and positive environment for both LGBTQ and straight students; and she argues for the potential impact of queer discourse community formations for LGBTQ students, which are fostered within and through these writing environments. But it is her direct call, that “the field of rhetoric and composition find out about its lesbian and gay students […] to reduce them from the abstractions they have always been,” which has resonated with me most (6). Despite the strides the field has made in terms of integrating sexuality and sexual orientation into writing studies, using queer theory effectively as a critical lens, much of it has been relegated to the realm of multiculturalism and inclusion efforts, which can cause more harm than good by failing to address difference beyond a surface-level approach.

Malinowitz explains early on in Textual Orientations that the original aim with her dissertation was to focus on the fact that, “lesbian and gays were a group still neglected in academia’s movement toward inclusiveness of diverse social groups and particularly in composition’s interest in ‘multiculturalism’” (16). But under the influence of identity politics and the implications of essentialism, her work soon shifted to consider the problematic nature of inclusivity, generalizations, and the stable “we” identity category. She states, “there were significant ‘truths’ to be learned from the contradictions themselves” (Malinowitz 17). In fact, Malinowitz is one of the first scholars in the field to discuss the many ways multicultural approaches to sexuality are misguided and
retrofit, at best. Clarifying the difference between inclusive and queer pedagogies, she explains, “what I am suggesting in place of ‘inclusion’ is a pedagogy that takes into account the often very uncelebratory conditions which underwrite the exclusion one is trying to cancel” (Malinowitz 251).

Alexander, among others, often emphasizes the importance of not just exploring subjectivity, but also the sobering conditions that create, maintain, and perpetuate subjectivities and their subsequent privileges and/or consequences. While mainstream courses can be supportive of LGBTQ students and their experiences, they do not offer the same kind of space for LGBTQ students to flex their queer critical thinking and queer literacy sponsorship. Malinowitz clarifies, “it is clear to me from the stories they tell me of their experiences and from my own experiences of including lesbian and gay issues in mainstream contexts that, although this inclusion can have very important results, it falls radically short of what can happen in a class which is structured to utilize knowledge generated within a lesbian and gay community” (262). It seems to make sense to me, as an LGBTQ person, that meaning made with, among, and from queerness develops and resonates quite differently than that made with, among, and from mainstream spaces and heteronormativity: we’ve had enough of that, thank you very much.

Although its goal is to break away from traditional and exclusionary traditions in order to expose students to lived experiences outside their own, multiculturalism often focuses on sameness rather than cultivating a deeper appreciation for and understanding of difference. In smoothing over difference, it is possible that actual LGBTQ subjects and their experiences – especially those that are non-normative or non-assimilationist – can
become moot points in larger discussions. Rather than becoming a subject to study and discuss, the focus must include actual LGBTQ subjects and the subject positions they occupy and experience. It is critical we acknowledge and address the actual LGBTQ bodies, lives, and experiences, especially those present in our classrooms. Malinowitz offers the field a space to do so in asking an important question: *what do we really know about our LGBTQ students?* Because Malinowitz’s social identity, or subjectivity, as a lesbian shapes her research, teaching, and writing, she acknowledges that students’ work, too, can be greatly impacted by and reflect their social identities. Rather than writing about gay and lesbians, she asks her students to write *as* gays and lesbians…and *about* being gay and lesbian.

Learning more about the place Malinowitz was writing from in the mid ‘90s is crucial in understanding the short and long-term significance of her text. The publication’s context offers invaluable insight into where the field was, and where it was headed, at the time. Throughout the text Malinowitz makes references regarding the general attitude toward gay and lesbian studies, particularly as the specialization made its way into English studies. She describes both her students’ interest in and disdain for discussions of sexuality; some students did what they could to address it while others worked to avoid and decry it. She explains that CCCC was just starting to integrate sexuality, with only a few presentations on sexuality and/or gay and lesbian studies listed in the conference program. According to Malinowitz, 1993 was the first year CCCC offered a “Gay and Lesbian Concerns in the Profession” category, but despite emerging

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21 In 1989, Paul Paccio had started a CCCC special interest group for gays and lesbians in the profession.
avenues to explore and discuss this integration, Malinowitz reminds readers that it was a risky moment for those whose identity and/or research was associated with homosexuality. In fact, she suggests that a gay or lesbian publication on one’s CV might mean getting turned down for a job one is otherwise qualified for – something that certainly still happens at institutions even today.

Culturally, the nineties brought more visibility and viability to gays and lesbians and gay culture. The community was just beyond the plague years, in an early era of AIDS activism – spearheaded primarily by ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), research, education, and support, and it was starting to realize progress in the demand for equal rights and protections, on a small city-level scale and internationally as well. In 1993, two years before Malinowitz’s book’s publication, Brandon Teena is murdered and Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell becomes policy. By 1997, two years after publication, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) is enacted and Ellen DeGeneres comes out. So, not surprisingly, there is a strong sense of social change throughout Malinowitz’s text.

Outside the academy, she explains that things were happening at an alarming rate, as “lesbians and gays moved quite abruptly from the problems of ‘invisibility’ to a dazzling and confusing new ‘visibility’” (Malinowitz 5); but academically, things were happening at a much slower pace. The disparity between social and academic progress on the gay and lesbian front was further emphasized by the tension between activism and academics. From the mid eighties to the early nineties, before Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and queer theory exploded on the scene, the LGBTQ community was more invested in protesting and front line activism than advocating for change by taking college classes,
especially since gay and lesbian studies course offerings were quite limited at the time. Thankfully, Malinowitz’s book adds to that canon, in addition to inspiring other texts, courses, and pedagogical approaches that focus on honoring and pursuing justice and sovereignty for LGBTQ lives.

Bibliographic History

Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations* has been cited 116 times, predominantly by those working within the field of rhetoric and composition, with the next significant area being education. Other scholars to cite her work include those in the social sciences, psychology (including one article on pedagogy for LGBTQ students inclusion in the psychology classroom), and family studies. The majority of these publications are books, chapters, and especially journal articles, mostly under the large umbrellas of writing studies (*jac, Computers and Composition, Journal of Basic Writing, Composition Forum, College English, The English Journal, and TESOL Quarterly*) and sexuality studies (*International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies, Journal of Language and Sexuality, Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education, and Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*). Malinowitz’s name is also found in numerous rhetoric and composition dissertations published online – I imagine many more dissertations and texts cite Malinowitz that are not available online, a handful of qualitative and quantitative studies, two interviews (one with CCC Editor Jonathan Alexander and another with lesbian playwright Joan Schenkar), Rob Linne’s book review of *Academic Outlaws* by William Tiernay, and a 2000 *jac* response article by Robert Brooke. Interesting, yet related

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22 According to Google Scholar, as of 16 Dec. 2015.
applications of Malinowitz’s work can be found in articles focused on the following topics: access and basic writers, a study on minority student stress, queer studies and the job market, academic engagement, and writer authority in collaborative legal writing (for domestic partner benefits). Outliers include an essay on virginity and another on role-playing. In addition to noting the publication venues for these citations, it is illuminating to consider the content foci of this body of scholarship.

Because of her own heavy focus on teaching, it is no surprise Malinowitz is cited in articles discussing various critical pedagogies, including queer(ing) and feminist, activist, anti-oppressive, performative, and experimental pedagogies. Other articles citing her work speak of activism, disruption, and social justice. There are also numerous publications focused on classroom issues related to LGBTQ students (including non-native speakers and immigrants) and teachers and academics; coming out/being out; applications of queer theory; and technology, online identities and literacies. In terms of English and writing studies, a wide variety of conversations on subjects like literacies, narrative, personal writing, ethos and rhetorical agency, sexual rhetorics, community writing and workshops, writing centers, and writing as a peace making and healing practice also draw on Malinowitz. Large-scale curricular issues are also at the center of a good number of articles citing her; these include LGBTQ administrators, increased LGBTQ representation in textbooks and curriculum, diversity, and discrimination and equality in higher education. Other articles research and trace the history of the field and consider its future, all noting Malinowitz as one the prominent voices advocating for the connection between sexuality/identity and writing. And, of course, many of articles citing
Textual Orientations examine LGBTQ identity, materiality and the body, intersectionality, feminism, queer epistemologies, and hetero- and homonormativity, proof that sexuality studies and writing studies have proven to be quite a compelling combination.

The Response to Malinowitz

Textual Orientations has been reviewed three times: in 1996 by Mary-Ellen Jacobs, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Palo Alto; in 1997 by Michelle Gibson, Professor Emerita, Women’s Studies, University of Cincinnati; and in 2006 by Char Ullman, educational anthropologist at University of Texas, El Paso. The book was also briefly written up in CCC (1995), where it is mentioned that Malinowitz won the 1994 CCCC Award for Outstanding Dissertation for the original manuscript. In Gibson’s concise review, published in The Feminist Teacher (1997), she calls Textual Orientations “the first of its kind.” She argues, “it calls for a complete and unflinching interrogation of the academy, one which would not erase queerness either by passively ignoring it or by actively ‘including’ it as a subject matter to be ‘celebrated’; it takes us beyond the ‘add queer and stir’ method of subverting homophobia in the academy” (72). Gibson values Malinowitz’s willingness to call out the academy for institutionalized homophobia, arguing for total transformation rather than a retrofit approach. Gibson describes the text as “learned, insightful, touching, and transformative,” praising Malinowitz’s “intense commitment to politicizing writing pedagogy” (70). Gibson’s only critique is that Malinowitz rushes the conclusion toward practical, rather than truly disruptive
suggestions. Gibson’s review is positive, but it isn’t extensive in its considerations or critiques.

Jacobs’ review, published in the *Harvard Educational Review*, offers an even more glowing review of Malinowitz’s work. Jacobs confirms the pressure to remain closeted, the pain of silence, and the “rhetorical acrobatics” gay and lesbian authors perform in mainstream, homophobic culture. She also agrees that sexual identity is significant, and does so from a personal standpoint. Jacobs’ review is actually quite warm and emotional; Malinowitz seems to provide her, a reviewer, with the same occasion and space to write *as a lesbian* (similar to the way Malinowitz provides her students the space to write as LGBTQ individuals). Readers bear witness as Jacobs breaks her own silence, appearing to come out in the review: “Equally crucial, by reviewing *Textual Orientations* — weaving my own discursive tapestry of private and public meanings — I break the stranglehold of silence and discover that being lesbian is a difference I must cherish out loud.” It is a full circle moment any LGBTQ academic would appreciate. It is apparent Jacobs agrees whole-heartedly with Malinowitz that mainstream discourse and academia are silencing and constraining for LGBTQ people, and that it is crucial that we honor, rather than conceal, our sexual identities, as she does with her own.

Aside from that, Jacobs ponders the implications for LGBTQ persons who have long been situated outside, and different from and within, mainstream discourse. More specifically, she notes how this marginalizing experience can carry over into mainstream writing courses. She praises Malinowitz’s “astute critique of the rhetoric surrounding contemporary writing pedagogy” since it demonstrates how “most theoretical
perspectives of composition situate themselves squarely within the realm of mainstream
discourse and, thus, diminish gay and lesbian identities.” For this reason, she sees great
promise in Malinowitz’s queercentric courses, since they “shift the terrain of epistemic
privilege” to form a new sort of rhetorical space for LGBTQ students (Jacobs).
According to Malinowitz, a queercentric environment provides students with a more
nuanced understanding of LGBTQ identities and a chance to explore tensions and
conflicts surrounding those different identities. Rather than simply including LGBTQ
students and LGBTQ texts to a mainstream course, Malinowitz argues for entire courses
centered on LGBTQ experience. This changes the formula drastically. So while Jacobs
says Malinowitz doesn’t offer a recipe for “queering the brew,” beyond suggesting that
we learn about gay and lesbian students, I would argue Malinowitz has already offered
some direction: she advocates for queercentric writing courses, LGBTQ students and
teacher together, with LGBTQ content and critiques of homophobia at their core. It’s a
pretty radical idea, and what I consider to be a transformative queer pedagogy.23

In 2006, Ullman writes her review from a much different and more secure place.
She is safer being out and more confident as a lesbian academic than Jacobs (a decade
earlier). Ullman also holds Malinowitz more accountable than Jacobs does. As a result
her tone is harsher and slightly agonistic at times, even though she ultimately offers
praise. Ullman frames her review by asking, “what might happen if education which
purports to educate the whole person really did. That is, what if the traditionally silenced
aspects of a learner’s identity were given voice in university level writing classrooms?”

23 In Chapter 3 I uptake Malinowitz’s directions and provide a more developed discussion on LGBTQ
students’ experience in mainstream writing classes and the benefits of queercentric courses and queer
literacy sponsorship.
(43). Like Jacobs, Ullman agrees that writing classrooms can be silencing, and she seems relieved that someone else is wondering how sexuality might “find its way into a paper,” especially since she is a lesbian herself.

Calling Malinowitz’s methodology “eclectic,” Ullman traces Malinowitz’s path toward her niche: “She begins by dividing writing theory into three branches: the expressionist approach articulated by Peter Elbow (1973); the social constructivist approach espoused by Kenneth Bruffee (1980, 1983, 1986); and James Berlin’s (1988, 1991) social-epistemic rhetoric stance” (50). Ullman agrees with Malinowitz’s queer political stance, which helps establish connective tissue between the three branches, noting the interplay between discourse, ideology, and identity. As Ullman explains, expressivism positions the classroom as “safe,” a place where students’ “real selves” and voices are accessed, but this line of thinking also relies on stability and too much focus on the individual. She explains that social constructivism moves far beyond the self to consider larger influences, but that it too is limited in its scope. Specifically, she points to its advocate, Kenneth Bruffee, who “avoids any analysis of power as it operates in the classroom or in students’ lives” (Ullman 51). As a result, Ullman notes that the social epistemic and critical pedagogy are better fits for Malinowitz’s work since James Berlin centers the examination of ideology, and Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and Henry Giroux advocate for critical action.

Her points are accurate, and Malinowitz’s methodological mash-up works since knowledge and identity are socially constructed, and LGBTQ individuals benefit from authoring and understanding their individual lived experiences. If Ullman had been
writing from inside the field, she might have mentioned Sherrie L. Gradin’s synthesis of
the two latter branches with a discussion of social-expressivism, a grounding of the self
with/in the social. Ultimately, Ullman describes Malinowitz’s pedagogical approach as
“firmly grounded in a knowledge of contemporary queer politics in the United States”
(44). She applauds Malinowitz’s contributions, but not without finding multiple aspects
of her text problematic.

The first issue Ullman raises with Malinowitz is her blanket use of “gay and
lesbian,” which excludes bi and trans people. She says,

Although Malinowitz has done everything right in using self-identifying terms for
the people with whom she is working, I am concerned about the continued
political invisibility of bisexuals, and especially transgendered [sic] people, whom
she doesn’t mention at all. For this reason, I am using the word queer in this
review, which is inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered [sic]
people. (Ullman 44)

While I noticed this too, I understand terminology, usage, and visibility are fluid and
temporally situated. So while I commend Ullman for fighting for bi and trans
representation, I also find her fuss about it somewhat unfair, considering trends change
over time. Using “gay and lesbian” as an umbrella term was fairly common in the
academy around 1995. That would be like me holding Ullman accountable for using the
now-outdated *transgendered* rather than *transgender*, even though her review was written

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24 Further, she argues that Malinowitz pigeonholes LGBTQ individuals into a singular community identity,
“a coherent and unfrAGMENTED group,” by using Robert Paul Wolff’s 1965 “Beyond Tolerance,” calling the
misstep a “philosophical inconsistency” because the application can be essentializing (46). Ullman herself
makes it a point to use queer as a more inclusive term (in direct response to Malinowitz’s use of “gay and
lesbian”). See also footnote 2.
ten years ago. In other words, Ullman is a bit hard on Malinowitz, considering she has a
decade’s worth of new LGBTQ history, culture, knowledge, and experience at her
disposal. And, as we’ve witnessed over and over, a decade can mean tremendous changes
in the language surrounding LGBTQ people, particularly how they name and identify
themselves.

Ullman’s second point is that Malinowitz fails to fully engage with the concept of
what is now known as intersectionality. (Even though intersectionality was coined by
Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1993, the term isn’t used in either Malinowitz or Ullman’s text.)
Although she does not call for the term intersectionality directly, conceptually Ullman
wants Malinowitz to acknowledge the ways, “identities intersect in complex ways, and
that one aspect of identity may take precedence over another in a given context” (48).
Malinowitz clearly understands that identities cause conflict, particularly from within the
LGBTQ community, but it is her student John Lee who talks the most about the nuances
of intersectionality since he uses the course to explore what it means to be both, and
simultaneously, gay and black. Ullman wonders why she fails to consider this given her
own intersectional identity, “since Malinowitz is both lesbian and Jewish, it is surprising
that she does not choose to develop this point” (45). And, along these lines, Ullman is
disappointed Malinowitz doesn’t spend more time developing the comparison between
racial passing and queer closeting. Furthermore, she calls for a deeper discussion of
moments when marginalization and privilege coincide, for Malinowitz is both professor
and Jewish lesbian: “this multiple identity as both oppressor and oppressed is something
that I wish Malinowitz had really explored” (Ullman 52). Considering the number of
scholars who have since argued that composition courses have traditionally reified heteronormative and racist ideologies through assimilationist and normalizing practices, I agree this would have been a provocative tension for Malinowtiz to explore. Particularly because at the time, many LGBTQ faculty would have experienced being both “oppressor and oppressed,” especially if they felt forced to remain closeted by their institution, thereby possibly, indirectly (and quite ironically) encouraging the closeting of their LGBTQ students.

Ullman’s third point is two-fold: the benefits of queercentric courses are limited to the learner, and Textual Orientations includes no call to action. I would disagree on both accounts. First, an environment that only impacts the learner is not a failure, for the knowledge is likely to become a part of the learner. And if the learning experience is transformative, the learner will most likely share their knowledge with others. For example, if an LGBTQ student feels acknowledged and encouraged, rather than excluded and silenced, then others will surely benefit from their voice because they will be more willing to use it. Surely that student will be more likely to come out/be out, address homophobic culture when necessary, and feel more authorized to speak/write as an LGBTQ person. Perhaps they will become a teacher and introduce queer methodologies to other LGBTQ people because they feel inspired, confident, and moved to do so; this is certainly what happened for me. My own personal transformative learning experiences have pushed me toward greater activism and social justice efforts, in and out of the classroom, so who is to say that the benefits are limited to just the learner? Additionally, Ullman doesn’t acknowledge how this practice benefits the out LGBTQ teacher.
As an out queer teacher of writing, who teaches using the queercentric model, I sense tremendous potential here, in terms of the following: personal and professional growth (and support), for both teacher and student; a greater understanding of (non-normative) sexualities, so LGBTQ students don’t feel the need to justify their sexuality before launching discussions and/or arguments; LGBTQ experience positioned at the forefront, so, again, it need not be explained, allowing for deeper and more critical engagement; a move away from rights-based discussions and debates toward an exploration of more dynamic and complex issues facing LGBTQ individuals (exploring the tensions of homonormativity rather than advocating for same sex marriage, for example); a deeper, more nuanced sense of the richness of LGBTQ identities, histories, and lived experiences; and considerations of the ways writing is shaped by and helps shape LGBTQ identities and queer politics.

Secondly, Ullman’s conclusion that the book fails to include a call to action is problematic. Malinowitz’s call is for the field at large: do more to learn about LGBTQ students; expand and decenter research practices to include LGBTQ students and identities; combat homophobia; include marginalized voices. These are pretty tall orders, in my opinion. Ullman’s points are often fair, but all the same, Textual Orientations falls fairly early on sexuality studies’ timeline, and it is always easier to be critical in hindsight.

Ultimately, Ullman pens a positive review, finding Malinowitz’s work important for all teachers who want, or need, to de-center their classrooms. She believes Malinowitz, “succeeded admirably,” with “truly inspirational results.” Ullman writes,
“She [Malinowitz] argues compellingly and with great passion that discourse about queer lives and loves is essential in the academy, not only for queer students and teachers, but for everyone” (44). She agrees queer and straight students benefit from queercentric courses, since homophobic culture is a common experience; but I would add that we must remember LGBTQ people experience homophobia and transphobia very differently than heterosexuals. Ullman is particularly moved by Malinowitz’s posturing of coming out as a speech act. LGBTQ people must decide continuously – even daily, to come out/be out/not disclose, which Ullman says, “certainly presents the rhetorical skills used in everyday discourse about queer lives as something a teacher can build upon in the writing classroom” (49). This rhetorical savvy becomes useful both in and out of the classroom as LGBTQ and straight students navigate homophobia, heteronormativity, and sexism. It has also been just one idea of Malinowitz’s that many others in the field have taken up and drawn from in their research, scholarship, and pedagogy.

Impact on the Field: Drawing From and Extending Malinowitz’s Work

Many queer composition scholars draw from Malinowitz’s groundbreaking book in order to pursue the kind of work we take to task. Queer composition investigates the harmful consequences of homophobia in mainstream writing classrooms; integrates sexuality into composition so students better understand how identity, discourse, literacy, and power are connected, in both affirming and alienating ways; advocates for “queering the brew” of normative writing classes and academic institutions; and explore the powerful transformative effects of queer pedagogy and being/coming out in the classroom. In the following section, I aim to trace the explicit ways other scholars have
since used Malinowitz to ground and develop their own research, scholarship, and teaching. Then, in Chapter 2, “Malinowitz: A Retrospective,” I trace the more implicit traces of Malinowitz’s footprints on queer composition scholarship over the previous two decades. Going back to Malinowitz could reenergize the field’s work with sexuality and bring us closer to meeting the unique needs of our LGBTQ teachers and students.

Mary Elliott’s 1996 “Coming Out in the Classroom: A Return to the Hard Place,” is one of the first articles to cite Malinowitz. In a piece reminiscent of Anon’s disheartening 1974 College English article, Elliott discusses the fear, shame, and vulnerability gay and lesbian teachers might feel over their sexuality, constantly wondering whether or not they are safe in their departments and in front of the their own writing classrooms. Even in the wake of queer theory and gay and lesbian studies, gay and lesbian teachers nervously “pass,” and experience extreme apprehension they experience when outing themselves. Elliott uses Malinowitz to demonstrate that gay and lesbian visibility in the classroom is a powerful way to unsettle dominant ideologies and address homophobic discourse, arguing that “self-disclosure” is an academic and ethical responsibility (702). When teachers are out, their students are presented with a counter-narrative that might force them to reconsider what they think they know about LGBTQ people. These moments of negotiation, as Malinowitz points out, can combat ignorance and homophobia, expanding people’s narrow ideas about LGBTQ people.

Drawing from Malinowitz’s experiences as an out lesbian writing instructor, Karen Kopelson (2002) discusses the performativity of visibility and the danger of
“preserving stable identity categories, rather than to proliferate new and unexpected ones,” something she (like Ullman) accuses Malinowitz of (27). She acknowledges the tensions identity-based pedagogies present in the classroom: being theoretically driven toward deconstruction and postmodernism while also, practically, tending to secure a social subject that experiences identity-based oppressions.

Both Will Banks (2003; 2009) and Catherine Fox (2002), discuss Malinowitz in terms of the limited scope of the kinds of LGBTQ narratives students – LGBTQ and straight – are exposed to in English classes, most of which focus either on LGBTQ characters who die or provide coming out narratives. While Banks uses her work to argue for a broader inclusion of LGBTQ texts and characters, Fox takes it a step further and considers the ways these narrow narratives impact students who might feel “‘epistemologically straight-jacketed’ in the mainstream composition class” (81). Fox also considers how this limited exposure to LGBTQ stories and experiences can result in the “straight-jacketing” of LGBTQ teachers who feel unable to come/be out in their teaching, using her own closeting in the classroom as an example. Fox argues, “allowing space for naming and articulating [LGBTQ] experience is necessary in the composition classroom” (83). For her, expressivist writing is a good start, but it is critical these

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25 Surprisingly, despite the groundwork she lays for a queer pedagogy, Malinowitz’s name does not appear in William Spurlin’s “Theorizing Queer Pedagogy in English Studies after the 1990s,” which is the introduction for College English’s 2002 special issue (the same special issue the aforementioned Kopelsen article appears). Particularly since he provides a brief overview of queer theory’s expansion into writing studies, I was surprised to see Malinowitz excluded. And again Malinowitz is omitted from the introduction to his well-known edited collection, Lesbian and Gay Studies and the Teaching of English: Positions, Pedagogies, and Cultural Politics (2000). However, she is invoked in Ann Smith’s essay, which discusses the fine line between passing and being out as a teacher.
narratives capture and allow for expanded, fragmented narratives as well, since LGBTQ identities exist within and alongside Dominant discourse.

In 2004, in *Computers and Composition’s* special issue, Barclay Barrios also discusses Malinowitz’s LGBTQ-centered classroom and her moves toward queer and identity-based pedagogies. However, he extends the benefits of these classes to straight students as well, a connection other scholars\(^{26}\), including Malinowitz herself, have made as well. He argues, “a queer classroom, then is not just for queers; it enables all students to see their sexuality and to see as well the ways in which that sexuality is created by and through cultural discourses, a realization that serves as a precondition for change in the larger social context” (Barrios 345). Additionally, like Kopelsen and Ullman, Barrios points to the fragmented identities within the LGBTQ community, which challenge a singular and stable community identity; he states, “as identities continue to fracture the possibility of forging such a narrative becomes increasingly tenuous” (351). Through this point, he launches his examination of the “proliferation” of the LGBTQ community identity through an analysis of the growing number of flags representing various identities within the community (beyond the original rainbow Pride flag).

In 2005, in *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom*, Zan Meyer Gonçalves also considers how people can change their negative thinking about gays and lesbians after being presented with actual LGBTQ identities and stories. She considers how LGBTQ students in the Speakers Bureau group navigate potentially homophobic audiences and establish their own ethos through rhetorical savvy. Gonçalves

\(^{26}\) See Alexander, *Literacy, Sexuality, and Pedagogy*; Kopelson, “Dis/Integrating the Binary”; and Banks, “Literacy, Sexuality, and the Value(s) of Queer Young Adult Literatures.”
examines how these students “learned to use the texts of their lived experiences in order to construct and perform complex public ethos,” contextualizing their “[specific, outlaw] identity performances bound by social discourses” (xv). In this way, Gonçalves offers a brilliant discussion of the ways LGBTQ college students articulate their identities in spite of, and in the face of, homophobia. But despite being the next significant book-length project after Malinowitz to focus on LGBTQ students and writing, Gonçalves spends little time discussing Malinowitz’s ideas. Her influence first comes through in Chapter 4, where Gonçalves discusses a “GLBT-themed experimental writer’s workshop” she organizes with colleague Karen Skolfield, titled Needing to Shout! Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Voices. The two team-teach, inspired by Malinowitz’s work in queercentric courses. They agree with her that these writing courses provide LGBTQ students with opportunities that put them in the position to “validate rather than defend their lives” (Skolfield qtd in Gonçalves 92) in an “open safe environment” (95). Although Gonçalves ’ book leans more toward acceptance from straight audiences, Gonçalves and Malinowitz both advocate for LGBTQ students sharing their stories in order to transform people’s worldview; fight homophobia; speak for themselves, and to their own lived experience, rather than becoming a representative for the entire LGBTQ community; and negotiate and establish ethos with possibly-hostile audiences.

Of all the field’s scholars, Jonathan Alexander not only writes the most – and the most recently – about sexuality and writing, but he also cites Malinowitz more than any

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27 It is interesting that despite Gonçalves ’ focus on a GLBT theme, transgender voices have been omitted from the title.
other author throughout his body of work, in both individual and collaborative projects\textsuperscript{28}. Alexander has repeatedly taken up and drawn from the following ideas from Malinowitz:

- Sexuality’s omission from education is indicative of blatant and latent institutionalized homophobia;
- Shallow multicultural efforts, what Malinowitz calls “mere inclusion,” are damaging because they are ultimately assimilationist;
- LGBTQ students engage in complex identity constructions and negotiations in and out of the classroom, both face-to-face and in online/digital spaces;
- Even when centered, LGBTQ knowledge must remain marginal to retain its critical insights; and
- Queer theory and pedagogy are ways to alter the composition classroom, and larger academic institutions, from the inside out.

In their publication for \textit{jac}’s 2004 special issue, Alexander and Michelle Gibson trace the impact of queer theory’s integration into writing studies, arguing that it “moves us \textit{beyond} the multicultural task of accepting and validating identity and moves us \textit{toward} the more difficult process of understanding how identity, even the most intimate perceptions of the self, arise out of a complex matrix of shifting social power” (3). The authors provide a brief history of gay and lesbian scholarship in English studies, delimiting three critical phases: (70s): “coming out and identifying oppression”; (80s):

\textsuperscript{28} Malinowitz does not appear in his early, 1997 article with Karen Yescavage, “The Pedagogy of Marking: Addressing Sexual Orientation in the Classroom,” published in \textit{The Feminist Teacher}, which I assume is due to the short time in between the two publications.
“working toward inclusion and visibility”; and (90s): “theorizing queer, teaching queer” (Alexander and Gibson 9). In the final section, Alexander and Gibson discuss the impact of Malinowitz’s book on the field, the importance of maintaining differences, and her emphasis on the power of the margins. Using Malinowitz, they argue that the writing classroom is a fitting site for critiquing and examining various real and complex identities, in addition to considering how those identities are culturally constructed and valued, or devalued, in the first place. Not surprisingly, the authors position her work as a starting point for much of the work queer theory and queer composition aim to do.

Similarly, in both his book, Literacy, Sexuality, and Pedagogy (2008), and his 2009 CCC article, authored with David Wallace, “The Queer Turn in Composition Studies: Reviewing and Assessing an Emerging Scholarship,” Malinowitz’s book is listed as the first text of a handful that constitute what they call the “queer turn” in composition. Drawing from Malinowitz (along with Keith Gilyard and Richard E. Miller), he describes how “composition courses are sites in which students can productively engage a variety of significant sociopolitical issues,” reaching beyond LGBTQ issues and marriage equality to the effects of 9/11 and globalization (Alexander Literacy 12). In the final chapter, he comes back to Malinowitz’s efforts to “queer the brew,” focusing on the possibilities of cultural critiques in the composition classroom, in addition to the epistemologies of the margins and contradiction – projects housed under what he calls sexual literacy.

confronting homophobia and including the perspectives of LGBT people remain important strategies for making our discipline more inclusive, these strategies often do not challenge the underlying presumption of a hetero/homo binary that continues to privilege heterosexuality in our society and in our disciplinary practice” (793). They reiterate Malinowitz’s points that inclusion efforts are not enough; students must hear from real LGBTQ individuals who challenge notions of a singular LGBTQ identity. Furthermore, they argue, to have a lasting and significant impact, writing courses that are informed by queer theory must also require students to scrutinize deep-seated power structures that produce discriminatory effects that work to disenfranchise certain individuals’ participation. Inspired by Malinowitz, the authors remind us that even rhetoric and composition, a field largely mindful of power differentials, perpetuates these dominant ideologies and discriminatory practices. As a result, in numerous recent collaborations with Jackie Rhodes, Alexander situates the queer subject as impossible for composition since a polished and composed text assumes a polished and composed subject/author. Their most recent project is the formidable edited collection Sexual Rhetorics, which concludes with an essay from Malinowitz. It is these three voices that echo loudest throughout my own research and scholarship: Malinowitz, Alexander and Rhodes. Even though Malinowitz’s name appears less and less in scholars’ works cited lists as time goes on, it is fairly easy to trace her conceptual footprints throughout their work integrating sexuality into writing studies.
Malinowitz, as an Origin

My own research stems from Malinowitz’s work because it serves as a significant landmark for and launch pad into what is now known as queer composition. I’m particularly interested in her work because it focuses on writing classes where “sexual identity emerged […] as an important epistemological context and social location in which writing acts were situated” (Malinowitz 23). Most of my scholarship and the courses I teach center on the relationship between sexuality and writing, so I value Malinowitz’s theoretical and pedagogical approaches, which work in concert to position sexuality as a generative space for making meaning. Despite Malinowitz only using the term *queercentric* twice in *Textual Orientations*, the concept has left an enormous impression on me, and I have since wondered how queercentric courses might impact both LGBTQ teachers and students, and how courses that work to center LGBTQ lived experience can undo hegemonic practices in writing classes. It is my sense, that these environments create an ideal situation where students and teachers can explore the rhetorical impacts of both heteronormativity and queerness. Queercentric environments provide a unique space to consider audience awareness on a completely different level, in terms of hetero and homonormativity. What better time to discuss the problematic assimilationist literacy practices and policies than in the writing classroom? All students – LGBTQ and straight – can benefit from examining how, why, and when they feel the need to silence their sexual identities, desires, and practices.

Specifically I am most drawn to a writing classroom where the majority of students and the teacher are out LGBTQ individuals. In this way, the discussions tend to
focus on LGBTQ lived experience and the ways we have been represented and self-represent. Tying this representation to rhetoric is fascinating. Rather than simply considering how LGBTQ people are written, we also are able to consider why we have been written in these ways; additionally, the class members explore how we have been individually and collectively affected by these representations.
CHAPTER 2: MALINOWITZ, A RETROSPECTIVE

“I can’t begin to know, until the point of utterance, what the initiation of this discourse will mean”

– Harriet Malinowitz

Because I am a queer compositionist (in terms of my area of interest), and a queer compositionist (in practice, an identity), my intention is to trace the conversation regarding sexuality and writing studies since Malinowitz’s 1995 utterance. Looking at twenty years of scholarship, I hope to learn the different ways sexuality has “found its way into” the writing classroom. How has this curricular and pedagogical move affected queer subjects in the writing classroom? (How) Has the field answered Malinowitz’s call? What aspects of Malinowitz’s work in Textual Orientations have not been (adequately) taken up by scholars in the field? In what ways has the field aimed to learn about its LGBTQ student writers? Have we explored the queer discourse community formations that are possible in these spaces? What is innovative and advantageous in the scholarship? The main purpose of this retrospective is to get a better sense of what the field has done with, and for, LGBTQ students, their writing and literacy learning since Malinowitz’s text was published. This retrospective considers the implicit traces of Malinowitz’s impact. It is firstly thematic, then chronological in order to identify the different avenues the field’s thinking has taken over time, since Malinowitz first argued for using the writing classroom as a site to explore LGBTQ identities and experiences.
Queer Theory, Queer(ing) Pedagogies, and Sexuality in the Writing Classroom

Since the early ‘90s, and especially after *Textual Orientations* was published, numerous scholars have considered how queer theory might inform composition. Particularly throughout the past decade, queer theoretical applications in the writing classroom have become more common, boasting several critical objectives: exposing heteronormativity and unseating larger systematic power relations behind its perpetuation; critically analyzing the ways in which we write ourselves into being based on larger surrounding social discourses; and establishing visibility and agency to those who have been ignored and silenced because of their sexuality and sexual identity. Few deny the importance of these goals, particularly in the service of combating homophobia, moving toward equality and equity, and depathologizing nonnormative sexualities, yet many queer scholars call for much more, understanding these moves as first steps rather than ultimate achievements.

Building from Malinowitz’s early work, numerous predominant journals in the field (*Computers and Composition; College English, and JAC*) have offered special issues on acknowledging and including sexuality, sexual identity, and LGBTQ experience in the writing classroom. These special issues make invaluable contributions because they offer practical ways of applying queer theory to the composition classroom as well as exploring the “sexuality, technology, and writing nexus” (Alexander and Banks “Sexualities” 290). Queer theoretical applications and multiculturalism, diversity, and

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inclusion efforts tend to subsume most of the field’s scholarship between 1995 and 2005, which explains what I would say is a lull in the conversation. An example of this is that there are no book length publications on sexuality and writing between Malinowitz’s 1995 *Textual Orientations* and Gonçalves 2005 *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classrooms*. Once it became more acceptable and common to employ more substantial foci on LGBTQ identities, the field’s scholarship grew much more generative in terms of queer(ing) composition, a conversation very much shaped by Jonathan Alexander and Jackie Rhodes.

2004 proved to be one of the most promising years for scholarship that integrated sexuality and queer theory into the writing classroom. In addition to *JAC*’s Special Cluster on Queer Theory (featuring five articles), edited by Jonathan Alexander and Michelle Gibson, *Computers and Composition* published a special issue entitled “Sexuality, Technology, and the Teaching of Writing” (featuring five articles and the transcript of an online discussion), edited by Jonathan Alexander and Will Banks. These collections were invaluable contributions because they offered practical ways of applying queer theory to the composition classroom and explored the fruitful “sexuality, technology, and writing nexus” (Alexander and Banks “Sexualities” 290), respectively. The so-called ‘queer turn’ in composition gained significant ground with the publication of these special issues and the innovation of LGBTQ scholars who invited queer theory to inform their writing and teaching.

Alexander and Gibson frame the urge to apply queer theory to the writing classroom as an organic offshoot of composition’s social turn and social constructionism.
Queer theory exploded into the academy in the ‘90s, fueled by Judith Butler’s groundbreaking *Gender Trouble*, which argues identity and gender are socially constructed and performative. It didn’t take long for composition and rhetoric to consider the potential impact of queer theory, especially for out and closeted LGBTQ composition teacher-scholars since – like identity and writing – queer theory isn’t just political; it’s *rhetorical* (Alexander and Gibson 7). More specifically, in their 2009 survey of queer composition scholarship, David Wallace and Jonathan Alexander describe how queer theory has led to a, “‘queering’ that interrogates our sexualities and their construction from the inside out” – in, and through, the writing classroom, a move that benefits LGBTQ and straight students (W314). In “Out in the Academy,” Wallace builds from Judith Butler’s work, considering the performativity of discourse and outness alongside queer theory’s efforts to unsettle notions of heterosexuality’s “presumed naturalness” (53). He points to the ways in which an LGBTQ faculty member can strategically out themselves in response to every day instances of heteronormativity, treating them as teachable moments – as *interventions*.

In their 2009 literature review of queer composition scholarship, Alexander and Wallace identify three trends in the field’s application of queer theory: “confronting homophobia, becoming inclusive, and queering the homo/hetero binary” (“Queer Turn” W300). Though these three moves are necessary and important, scholars identify a larger gap waiting to be addressed: rather than simply acknowledging the existence and experience of Others and Othering, the field – particularly because of its allegiance with literacy and literacy practices – must push even further to disrupt and unseat the dominant
heteronormative social discourses that produce Others in the first place. The connection between literacy practices and sexuality, which I explore more fully in Chapter 3, is fruitful for both the field at large and for the LGBTQ bodies in writing classrooms. In their survey, Alexander and Wallace describe how queer applications have been more successful in literature courses than in composition, and when marginalization is addressed in English classrooms, it is generally limited to critical race theory, feminism, and class. They conclude by asking, “has such work on queerness and composition had an effect on composition pedagogies, at least in ways comparable to feminism or race studies? Has the emerging scholarship significantly or broadly informed how compositionists do their work? We suspect the answer to both questions is no” (Alexander and Wallace “Queer Turn” W315). Seven years later, I find myself asking the same questions.

This lack of attention is especially glaring in The Norton Book of Composition Studies (also published in 2009), the textbook used in my PhD program’s Histories and Theories of Composition class. As a queer graduate student, it didn’t take long for me to notice the anthology contains no articles from rhetoric and composition scholars who write from, or about, LGBT and/or queer subject positions. Voices of scholars in Rhetoric and Composition Studies from gay and queer subject positions are completely absent, despite a “Revisions and Differences” subject heading. In fact, the terms queer, gay, lesbian, and sexuality never appear in the book’s Index, and the only two related offerings out of all 1760 pages, are two paragraphs, both from Russel K. Durst’s article.

30 The instructor provided supplemental reading material and made specific recommendations to me to help fill that gap because they knew of me identify as queer. But I wonder how might when this gap is filled for graduate students who are either not out or enrolled in more conservative programs.
“Writing at the Postsecondary Level.” Durst presents a summary of “scholarship on gender concerns in the composition class,” but it offers a binarized approach, focusing on male/female writing differences and feminism. His second paragraph, “Sexual Orientation,” explains most scholarship on sexual orientation “has focused either on queer theory and gay and lesbian studies as subject matter for or a way of conceptualizing the classroom […] or on issues concerning the gay and lesbian instructor” (1665). Despite citing eight articles covering/discussing sexual orientation in some capacity, none of those are included in Susan Miller-Cochran’s anthology.31

And so, while some solid work has been done in peppering rhetoric and composition with queer theory in the past ten years, many scholars feel there is still much more work to be done. In Compelled to Write (2011), David Wallace concurs: “our field, even in its most informed and progressive work on difference, has not paid sufficient attention to the queer” (19). Alexander and Wallace call for composition to do more in order to rectify that. They emphasize the importance of exposing students to heteronormative cultural scripts and the false male/female and hetero/homo binaries, and also suggest a heavier focus on intersectionality and the implications of the multiple identities individuals must negotiate. And like Malinowitz, Wallace and Alexander encourage teachers to push students’ critical capacity in a queer vein, which provides a more nuanced understanding of queer(ness) and the narratives surrounding certain subject positions. This push for a more critical and disruptive angle to queer and composition comes from queer pedagogues.

31 Durst taught in the department of English with queer composition scholars Jonathan Alexander and Michelle Gibson at the University of Cincinnati, which could be one reason he was compelled to include a paragraph on sexual orientation in the essay at all; perhaps he was influenced by his colleagues’ work.
In addition to incorporating LGBTQ texts and remaining aware of the LGBTQ writerly personas and literacy practices, queer composition theorists imagine and utilize queer(ing) pedagogies, in their efforts to “queer the brew,” in English classrooms, departments, and conferences, as Malinowitz suggests. In 2002, William Spurlin (without mentioning Malinowitz) describes the basis of queer pedagogy and the possibilities queer theory offers English studies:

In one sense, a ‘queer’ pedagogy would imply not only an analysis of (sexual) difference(s) in the classroom but of interrelated, broad-based pedagogical commitments to free inquiry and expression, social equity, the development of more democratic institutional and pedagogical practices, and the broadening of dialogical spheres of public exchange within and beyond the classroom as sites for engaged analyses of social issues and collective struggles. Indeed, the intersections of queer theory and critical pedagogy are filled with numerous and exciting possibilities for productive classroom inquiry, cultural analysis, public deliberation, and social (ex)change. (10)

Even though Spurlin never mentions Malinowitz’s early influence on queer pedagogy in the writing classroom, his work is clearly tied to hers. Like Malinowitz, Spurlin advocates for a pedagogy that provides inquiry-based learning and a sustained analysis of the nexus of institutionalized power structures, dominant discourse, and (sexual) identity. These are the goals guiding queer pedagogues and pedagogies.

Queer pedagogy’s advantages reach beyond writing tasks and the classroom; they extend to agency, voice, public discourse, and civic engagement and participation. It is
critical in design: rather than introduce sex into the classroom, queer pedagogues, inspired by Malinowitz, ask students to contemplate the ways in which the classroom (and academia itself) is already heterosexed. Alexander and Wallace call for field to pay more attention to the ways it might perpetuate heterosexist ideologies and practices. They declare, “as a discipline, rhetoric and composition needs a better understanding of how heteronormativity operates in society at large, in our classrooms, and in the pages of our books and journals” (Alexander and Wallace “Queer” W301). Therefore, examining and understanding invisible privilege is another key component guiding queer pedagogies. Queer pedagogues work tirelessly to resist the institutional urge to mainstream and discipline their students (and their various subjectivities), and they also work to disband the systemic power that asks them to do so in the name of normativity. Queer theory is just one methodology for queer pedagogues and students to examine their constructed identities and the constant regulation of sex, sexuality, sexual identity, and gender identity. It can lead to a better understanding of how and why we are subjected to directives in the first place. And it provides tools to ultimately unseat the power structures that produce and promote these directives. Additionally, in terms of intersectionality, these methods help teachers and students recognize and challenge privilege when they have it, even if — and particularly when — privilege occurs alongside marginalization.

Rhetorical Agency and Ethos for LGBTQ Subjects

Historically, LGBTQ voices have been intentionally silenced and ignored; and, from a very young age, LGBTQ people receive many messages arguing against their full
participation in the public realm. Heteronormative culture provides a constant stream of propaganda, displaying and propagating hetero love and family structures as legitimate, and, in contrast, homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. As Wallace and Alexander explain, queer rhetorical agency works not just to reveal, but also combat these heterosexual institutions and power structures. They also argue, “heteronormativity [is] not only a social domain of power but as a rhetorical domain of power” as well (Wallace and Alexander “Queer Rhetorical” 794). In other words, heteronormativity sets out social expectations as well as certain rhetorical expectations: credibility and respect are bestowed more regularly and inherently upon straight, white, English-speaking, male speakers. So how do LGBTQ and other marginalized subjects claim ethos and the authority to speak on their own behalf?

In *Reclaiming Queer*, Erin Rand describes agency as being contextual, community-based, and collaborative. She argues, “agency, in other words, is not a property that a rhetor can possess or that arises from within an individual but rather it is something that one might exercise within a set of conditions that exceed one’s control” (12). In other words, rhetorical agency is inseparable from the system in which it exists. Early work centered on LGBTQ subjects’ rhetorical agency came from Gonçalves’ *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom*, published in 2005.

Gonçalves provides rhetorical analyses of numerous speeches given by a handful of LGBTQ students in the Speakers Bureau, an on campus group that works to combat homophobia through storytelling and the sharing of their “outlaw truths.” Building from Kenneth Burke’s ideas regarding *identification* (Gonçalves 8), “connect[ing] with and
moving audiences” (5), members of the Speakers Bureau are encouraged to demonstrate how LGBTQ people are similar to non-LGBTQ people, and that they are also human (31). While Gonçalves covers the strategic ways LGBTQ students can and do make to claim ethos and name their identity within the constraints of dominant heterosexual discourse, Alexander and Wallace encourage LGBTQ rhetors to move away from such palatable approaches (Alexander and Rhodes push even harder and discuss the importance of queer rhetors defining their own rhetorical terms for even more agency).

As the LGBTQ students in Gonçalves’ book work to gain ethos with their straight audiences, the reader gets the sense that difference based on sexual orientation is not something to be announced and celebrated; rather it is something to be carefully situated and smoothed over. Most of the Speakers Bureau students Gonçalves describes spend time “carefully cultivating shared values [,] focusing on how GLBT folks are simply ‘not so far from you’” (35). While this is both an exercise in what Malinowitz calls “rhetorical knowledge” and an understandable approach to combating homophobia with heteronormative audiences, I would argue it is not necessarily productive in the long run – especially for LGBTQ people and their rhetorical agency.

By mentoring LGBTQ students to accommodate their audience’s comfort level, perhaps even over their own, the Speaker’s Bureau stunts the students’ potential agency and works to sanitize their queerness. Rhetorical savvy is important for speakers to learn, and audiences that could be considered hostile should be accommodated to some extent, but Gonçalves’ approach becomes too soft and homonormative. As an example, one student, Katie, asks, “How am I going to try to educate people, not scare people by being
too weird or too angry?” (my emphasis Gonçalves 35). While Katie is right to consider how she might be received by her audience, she does not consider how their assumptions change her behavior and, by association, her sexual identity. Gonçalves admits, “by positioning themselves as heroic and unusual, these speakers created a new and static identity for ‘good gays’ that are ‘just like us.’ This notion is an appealing one and, indeed, appeals to audiences” (52). In encouraging speakers to fix their identity, sanitize their Otherness, and quiet potential rage, it could be argued the Speakers Bureau (and Gonçalves, herself) endorses the “good gay” rather than the “bad queer.” How might these measures to normalize LGBTQ speakers reduce their queer rhetorical agency? For a text that argues for LGBTQ individuals sharing their “outlaw truths,” queerness feels somewhat watered down, which limits the range, and affect, of queer rhetorical agency.

In Compelled to Write, where Wallace argues for alternative rhetorics and queer agency, advocates for rhetorical agency but frames it more generally as authorship: the right to write ourselves into culture. Arguing for a reimagining composition, he explains how we must “recast the college composition course as an introduction to authorship – as a course that focuses on helping students understand what it means for them to take voice in culture and that seeks to expand their repertoires of discourse strategies as opposed to preparing them to participate within the discourses of power” (Wallace 229). Some scholars working at the intersection of queer composition and digital composition32 have considered the ways LGBTQ students author themselves in online spaces and computer-
mediated classrooms, which are sometimes safer and more enabling of nonnormative identities and agency. Ultimately, whatever the venue, rather than learning to participate within discourses of power, queer compositionists and rhetors seek to write and exist against discourses of power.

Queer, as a political stance and rhetorical positioning – much different from applications of queer theory, adds yet another critical (and often hostile) lens to composition and agency. This line of queer critique in the writing classroom draws attention to the ways identity vis-à-vis content and form is heavily controlled and regulated in efforts to silence and delegitimize full citizenship and reduce participation. Following in the footsteps of resistant rhetors like Gloria Anzaldúa, Hélène Cixous, and Geneva Smitherman, queer rhetoricians seek to unpack, unsettle, and disempower narrow academic rules and conventions that work to contain and deny certain marginalized subjectivities. Alexander and Rhodes explain,

Queer rhetoric works to unseat the rhetorical and material tyranny of the normal itself. Queer rhetoric thus relies on (1) a recognition of the dense and complicated ways in which sexuality, à la Foucault, constitutes a nexus of power, a conduit through which identities are created, categorized, and rendered as subjects constituted by and subject to power; and (2) a reworking of those identifications to disrupt and reroute the flows of power, particularly discursive power (“Introduction”).

Calling attention to the ways people are regulated and policed sexual beings provides a better sense of ourselves as regulated and policed subjects and, consequently, writer-
rhetors. Queer composition and queer rhetoric unmask larger power systems at work and provide a potent methodology for unseating them and reclaiming and articulating previously ignored and erased writerly subject positions. Exposing covert systemic oppression in hopes of empowering marginalized populations to better their lives is the foundation of conscious-raising critical pedagogies.

Yet one of the most difficult challenges in bringing queer and composition together is their seemingly incongruent nature. Many queer composition scholars describe the reasons queer and composition are incommensurable and even paradoxical. Queer is brazen, resistant, fluid, unstable and messy; on the other hand, composition is clear, shaped by disciplinary conventions and well-established rules of successful academic writing, and answers to an administration that perceives it to be a skills-based service course. In this way, composition hasn’t historically considered the queer subject, or even LGBTQ writers, until very recently, despite being influenced by queer theory. Therefore, numerous tensions arise for those working at the intersection of queer and composition. As we strive for visibility and social justice, do we want queer(ness) to become more ‘mainstream’ in hopes of changing the world one composition class at a time, or is centering queer(ness) a contradictory move?

The Paradox of Queer (and) Composition

Robert McRuer first alerted the field’s attention to the paradox of queer and other nonnormative subjects and composure in 2004. His article, “Composing Bodies; or, Decomposition: Queer Theory, Disability Studies, and Alternative Corporealities,” updated and republished in his book *Crip Theory* as “Composing Queerness and Disability,” was
originally published in *JAC*’s Special Cluster on Queer Theory. He argues the field should position queer at the center of composition, but as Malinowitz points out (ten years prior), queer resists the interior, valuing asymmetry and indispensable insight it gains from remaining on the margins. As she argues in 2003, “one cannot enjoy the pleasures of the comfortable center and exciting visions of the enlightening margins all at one and the same time” (“Business” 313). In support of his argument, McRuer traces the crux back to Kenneth Burke, who “more than fifty years ago […] argued that composition is a cultural practice that would seem to be inescapably – even inevitably – connected to order” (McRuer “Composing” 48). Linearity, clarity, and structure are all implied with order; appropriateness, discipline, and “good” behavior are also implied. So what does this mean for queer subjects who compose within the context of a discipline that cannot resist “the seductions of order” (Goshert 12)? McRuer writes,

> Interrogating but not resolving one of the paradoxes at the heart of composition (whereby composing is defined as the production of order and experienced as the opposite), I argue for the desirability of a loss of composure, since it is only in such a state that heteronormativity might be questioned or resisted and that new (queer/disabled) identities and communities might be imagined. (*Crip* 149)

Composure of texts implies composure of writers; composure of writers implies composure of subjectivities – both assumptions depend on a fixed, controlled process/experience. Instead, composition teachers must invite students to write from “subject-in-process” positions, defined by Moya Lloyd as a “subjectivity [that] is constituted (by language, discourse, or power), inessential, and thus perpetually open to
transformation” (1). Resisting compulsory composure opens generative spaces for new subject positions, lived experiences, and rhetorics, since identity and agency are so intimately bound together. Instructors (and their students) must ask themselves the following questions: what does it mean to be composed (both to be orderly and to be written)? And, “how does one compose oneself or become composed as a ‘straight’ person?” (Alexander and Rhodes “Queer:”; Alexander Literacy 106).

Alexander and Rhodes agree with Malinowitz and McRuer, stating, “we can claim to move composition by re-centering it on theories of the margins, but our sense is that what is ultimately moved is the ‘subject’ or ‘topic’ into a classroom that in turn disciplines it into a docile body” (“Queer:” 189). Here within lies another great tension: the notion of composure. Inviting fragmented and unstable writerly subjectivities is challenging when the point of a composition course is to analyze and produce clear, polished compositions. Queer composition scholars have taken up this dilemma and challenge the values that expect writers to be composed subjects – docile bodies. Additionally, Connie Monson and Jacqueline Rhodes also discuss the problem with one of first-year composition’s goals: molding and “shaping ‘appropriate’ writerly personas” (81). In their view, appropriate means normative, fixed identities that do what they should, when they are instructed to do so.

Queer compositionists ground much of their work as a struggle against expectation of composure and traditional academic writing conventions. The field’s conflation with products and composure – along with heterosexuality – is a location for creative inquiry, especially in a composition course that welcomes “alternative, and
multiple, corporealities” (McRuer “Composing” 50), queer(ness) itself, the subject-in-process, and alternative texts and composing practices, something I take up more fully in Chapter 4. Calling attention to the reasons behind the regulation fostered vis-à-vis academic writing is an essential component of queer composition, but it still is not enough considering how far removed the classroom is from larger institutional practices and policies. As McRuer points out, despite the field’s best liberatory intentions, “composition programs are currently heavily-policied locations and that the demand for order and efficiency remains pronounced” (“Composing” 69). Queer theory’s integration into composition studies provides an anchor for an investigation into the field’s widespread value of order and efficiency.

Drawing on the aforementioned paradoxes, in 2011, Alexander and Rhodes published their decisive “Queer: An Impossible Subject for Composition.” With a title that functions on two levels – queer as an impossible topic and queer as an impossible subjectivity – the authors argue queer and composition can never settle their score: one aims for composure and clarity while the other unravels and relishes in excess. Additionally, composition is situated in a formal academic setting that erases sex/uality and desire – particularly for LGBTQ students and those with nonnormative sexualities. Alexander and Rhodes’ aim to “juxtapose and improvise to enact and embody both the possibility of speaking queerly to composition and the impossibility of composing queerness” is wildly successful (“Queer:” 177). The essay is refreshing, taking liberties few academic articles risk: overt remarks and sexual innuendos, suggestive and playful images, personal narratives about queer subjectivity, a refusal to conclude, and a
segmented organizational structure; in other words, the text itself is queerly composed. Their project is as much about de-/re-/mis-composing as it is about composing. In addition to arguing the queer turn in composition studies “never actually happened, despite the work of several scholars over several decades” (“Queer:” 178), they also point out how problematic it is to idealize queer in attempts to move queer(ness) from the margins to the center of composition (Alexander and Rhodes “Queer:” 179). Going back to Malinowitz, they argue for the heteroglossic knowledge of the margins; by their nature, composition’s goals dilute queerness. We might even say queer refuses composition.

Sexuality and Literacy

In addition to bringing LGBTQ content into the classroom and calling attention to a history full of systematic abuse and oppressions certain identities endure, composition teacher-scholars like Malinowitz, Banks, and Alexander focus on the literacy stories and practices behind those marginalized identities. In the wake of cultural studies, new literacy studies calls attention to the contingent relationship between subjectivity, access, and literacy practices. Drawing from social constructivism, subjects are encouraged “to see themselves as socially, culturally, and historically constructed [and situated] subjects who write and are written by linguistic tools that are themselves imbued with meaning from previous discourse” (Wallace and Alexander “Queer Rhetorical” 798). Alexander, more than any other scholar working at the intersection of queer and composition, points out how cultural messages and dominant ideologies teach us a lot about our selves, our sexualities, and identities.
Taking up the movement’s work for composition, he claims, “the time has come when it is imperative both to understand the interrelationship of sexuality and literacy and to think more fully and critically about how we as literacy specialists can – and should – address this relationship in our composition class” (Alexander Literacy 5). In an earlier publication, Wallace and Alexander discuss the ways queer theory, specifically, offers a direction for learning “how the most seemingly personal parts of our lives are densely and intimately wrapped up in larger sociocultural and political narratives that organize desire and condition how we think of ourselves. Queerness helps us to see important connections between our personal stories and the stories that our culture tells about intimacy, identity, and connection” (Alexander and Wallace “The Queer Turn” W303). In other words, sexual identity and our perceptions of our sexual-selves shape – and are shaped by – literary practices.

Wallace and Alexander, among others (including Malinowitz), consider how normative literacy and learning practices – in and out of the classroom – limit and even negate LGBTQ voices and truths. They argue, “when we cannot speak our truths, our sense of agency is restricted” (Wallace and Alexander “Queer Turn” W304). The result is fewer LGBTQ-based literacy practices available within normative, hetero-dominant discourse. Deborah Brandt effectively demonstrates the ways in which literacy learning is imbued with culture and politics, read: power. She explains that literacy, like language, is not simply a neutral tool. It is embedded with power because it is mediated by others who sponsor us into knowledge, and with sponsorship comes heavy “ideological freight” (335). What she means is that whoever is sponsoring literacy, is also sponsoring a value
system as well, whether directly or indirectly. Specifically, she declares, “sponsors are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at minimum, contact with existing trade routes” (my emphasis Brandt 334).

From children’s books to canonical texts, control and morality are towering giants shadowing literacy learning. And, as Alexander asserts, “sexuality and literacy are densely connected in contemporary Anglo-American culture” (Literacy 4). Heternormativity is sponsored both directly and indirectly throughout most children’s books, so as they read stories of love and adventure, they also receive imbedded messages that love and adventure happen to clearly defined men who love clearly defined women. And so, any book that offers an LGBTQ character becomes an LGBTQ text, which schools then must decided whether or not they want to “condone.” In this way heteronormativity becomes one of the most blatant, yet invisible, ideological deliveries that literacy, at every level and in every sphere, offers. Understandably so, the impact for students is astounding. Both straight-identified and LGBTQ individuals come to learn something about heterosexuality without even consciously trying. What this means, of course, is they also learn plenty about homosexuality and other non-normative sexualities along the way. Tuning all students into these subliminal and blatant messages is one objective for those working at the intersection of literacy studies and sexuality studies, both of which nestle nicely into the writing classroom, an argument I develop more fully in Chapter 3.
Dominant heteronormative discourse excludes LGBTQ identities and experiences, which negates the very agency and full participation necessary to undo future damage. Composition studies should include analyses of such discourses of power, in and outside the academy, considering not just over-simplified gay marriage debates and coming out stories, but also the grim material consequences of such matrices of power (the relationship between capitalism and homonormativity, for example). Getting students to see how they invest in these heteronormative social discourses and their embedded ideologies is one thing; getting them to see how they co-construct and continue them is another. Equipping students with insight and access to counterpublics helps them evaluate and understand their primary and home discourses, which are often overtly and subtly heterosexist and heteronormative (Wallace and Alexander “Queer Rhetorical” 801). It is also important that teachers of writing and rhetoric help students understand how their sense of authority functions both in and outside the classroom – specifically the writing classroom, where they are expected to (re)present themselves in specific and sanctioned modes, if at all.

Wallace and Alexander “acknowledge the work in ‘queer composition’ that has attempted to interrogate how the literacy needs and potential contributions of LGBT students have – and have not – been acknowledged in composition studies and in composition practice” (795). But, as I see it, more work remains. The work of queer compositionists seeks to not only welcome LGBTQ writers who are present, but also to create a space for them in the classroom even when they are not present. The field has most certainly included critiques of homophobia and heteronormativity – easily fostered
through queer theory, but what kind of work have we done to focus writing courses on and around LGBTQ identities and queer ethos? After considering the ways the field has taken up Malinowitz’s work, on both individual and collective levels, it is Malinowitz’s call to learn more about our LGBTQ students, her notion of the queercentric writing environment, and the practice of literacy sponsorship among LGBTQ people that have been overlooked or remain unexplored. It is these ideas from which my own work, research, and the following chapters grow.
INTERLUDE, PART 1: A QUEER LITERACY NARRATIVE

I easily recall the impact of having a visible LGBTQ body at the front of the English classroom. When I began my undergraduate English courses at Michigan State University (MSU), I was sheltered and had a pretty limited worldview; to be fair, I still am and still do. At twenty, I wasn’t really thinking about my own identity, let alone others’. I wrote papers on texts and topics that interested me, but my work remained largely uncritical of identity, particularly my own. As a white, upper-middle class, cisgender United States-born citizen, I (thought I) had no identity-based pressing issues to consider. I embodied naivety, ignorance, and privilege. I was also a product of a largely heteronormative social and cultural environment. It took many years for my own non-normative sexual identity to (re)surface thanks to myriad factors, one of which was reading LGBTQ books. From the first LGBTQ book I read up until to the point of this particular iteration, some twenty years later, my understanding of the role of queer literacy learning and literacy sponsorship has absolutely exploded, with more and more LGBTQ texts, authors, and resources available each year.

Over the course of my time at MSU I had a lot of wonderful English teachers, but one in particular stands out – because I knew she was a lesbian, and even though I wasn’t open to my own non-normative sexuality yet, it felt very important to me that she was open to hers. There was something really comforting about sitting in a classroom with a visible lesbian at the front. She wrote poetry, she was Canadian, and she always wore light, muted colors. She spoke softly and wrote, always, with a blue felt tip pen. Her handwriting was distinct. Even after 18 years, I’d recognize it instantly if I saw it. In fact,
I loved her handwriting so much – or was it something else I loved about her? – I kept my reading journal from the first class I took with her: women and writing. After that class, I took more classes with her, and I watched her move quietly across the front of the room in Berkey Hall. For some reason, I was spellbound by her presence and her voice. Occasionally, I would find myself standing outside her closed office door, staring at the collage of cartoons, postcards, and pictures displayed there to get a sense of who she was, to confirm what I already knew. The internet existed at the time, but there was no Google, no faculty pages, no way to easily learn more about her. Now, I see she has long had a partner who is also in academia; they’ve even written an article together about being an academic lesbian couple.

All these years later, I still think of her often. Not only did she mentor me through queer texts, she also served as one singular example of how an LGTBQ teacher might exist and perform in the space of the English classroom – and beyond that, in the hearts and minds of the material LGBTQ students enrolled in the class, whether out or not. Even though she never directly referenced her lesbian identity in discussion, myself and other students felt her lesbian presence. And when I think back to the types of texts we read, most of them were about women who loved women. Over the course of my post-secondary academic career, which has spanned over two decades, I have contemplated contacting her to tell her how important her sexuality was to me. But then I wonder if that’s inappropriate (then I wonder, does that even matter, considering?). It may seem silly that simply knowing – feeling, really – that my teacher was a lesbian was just that powerful, but it was and it still is. In my first course with her, I recall feeling
uncomfortable when reading about women kissing in Audre Lorde’s *Zami*. I wrote about it in my reading journal and said I felt it wasn’t necessary. She wrote, in that distinct script, “what is it about two women kissing that makes you uncomfortable?” My intrigue was sparked, and when I took my next course with her, I found myself drawn to the texts where women expressed their love and admiration for one another.

The first was *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf – the first of many queer texts I would devour, assigned by her, my very first visible lesbian teacher. I was initially charmed by the idea of a character that defied and resisted traditional gender roles and stable categorization. Orlando was the first gender bending/blending character I recall, at once both/neither male and female, highly and playfully attuned to the way gender performativity results in material consequences. Orlando’s heteroglossic knowledge had a significant impact on my understanding of sexuality and gender performances. Analyzing the text through a Gender Studies lens, I began to read Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and found myself paying much more attention to the ways heterosexuality insecurely repeated and reinforced itself, as well as the way gender performances are constantly and vigorously policed and regulated in various sites and public and private spaces.

Previously, my thinking about a link between identity and writing was narrow. Before Woolf, I hadn’t ever really considered how authors could bring so much of themselves to their texts, or use texts to enact agency, resistance, or refusal, despite having read things by Audre Lorde, Amiri Baraka, and Allen Ginsberg. I’m not saying it wasn’t offered to me to learn; I’m saying it wasn’t on my radar because I wasn’t quite fully tuned in yet.
It was only after I began to select my own LGBTQ books that I began to realize how much writers’ identities compelled them to write. (The irony of being most affected by the books I came to on my own, rather than through my teachers, does not escape me here.) The first two LGBTQ books I read after coming out were *A Woman Like That*, edited by Joan Larkin (1999) and *Stone Butch Blues*, by Leslie Feinberg (1993). I came across Larkin’s collection of non-fiction essays in the Sexuality section at Barnes & Noble, an aisle that quickly became a place of comfort, excitement, and nervousness. One night after coming out to me, a bisexual friend suggested I read *Stone Butch Blues*. I read them both for the first time in 2000, and I read them still; for fifteen years they have shaped both my identity and my advocacy. Soon after and throughout my Masters program, my queer literacy was sponsored through academic texts about queer theory and queer lives; magazines like the *Advocate, Curve*, and *Girlfriends*; my newfound LGBTQ community in Toronto, Canada (where my girlfriend-at-the-time lived), its annual Pride Parades and sex shops. The first two theoretical books I read were *Gender Trouble*, by Judith Butler and *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, by Riki Wilchins. They sponsored me in theoretical and scholarly ways, providing insight into what it meant to fall outside the binary and to trouble the ways sex, gender, and sexuality are perceived and regulated. These books introduced me to an academy that acknowledged LGBTQ folx, welcomed queerness, and theorized its knowledge and experience. Although I did not have an LGBTQ mentor in my program, I had a few pivotal advisors who eagerly encouraged me to pursue my sexuality through theory, literature, and writing.
Each assignment became a reason to consume more LGBTQ narratives: in research methods, I again took up *Orlando* (this time through a queer theoretical lens); in poetry, I wrote about Mark Doty, Adrienne Rich, and Audre Lorde; in my James Joyce course, I focused on *Ulysses’ “Circe,”* which resulted in my Master’s Essay. Books were a way for me to find stories about myself; theory was a way for me to understand my lived experience as a white out femme queer lesbian academic, an identity that is simultaneously privileged and marginalized. Learning about these authors was a way for me to understand how one’s sexual identity can motivate their writing, stifle their voice, and build connections between generations. These sponsors have worked in concert to provide me with an LGBTQ sexual literacy, a community, and a lens for understanding my experience as a queer living in a heteronormative world. They also stirred pride and resistance in me.

Therefore, when I interviewed for my first full time teaching position, after graduating with my Master’s in 2005, I knew I would *be* – rather than *come* – out in my application, interview and campus visit. It did not take me long to realize that I wasn’t interested in working anywhere where my sexuality was expected, or even somewhat encouraged, to be closeted. The same was true when I went back to school in 2011 for my PhD: I would be out so I didn’t have to come out. Whereas some people might call me naïve or too brash in light of the tight job market, my experience has been that the majority of students, faculty, and administrators have been, or seemed to have been, quite happy to have an out, queer-identified colleague. In fact, my openness about my own sexuality on committees and with my colleagues has fostered some pretty amazing
courses, collaborations, workshops, and presentations. And I think it has encouraged other queer academics I have worked with to be or come out, in their classes and departments. With each academic appointment and college/university I teach for, I feel more and more secure in my decision to be so out, in my courses and even, and especially, in my research and scholarship.

More recently, my PhD advisor has consistently and continually pushed the limits of my understanding of queer(ness) and its politics since I started my PhD program, especially within LGBTQ and queer communities. I’ll never forget my campus visit: I approached her in her office and almost immediately she handed me a copy of Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes’ “Queer: An Impossible Subject for Composition” (jac 2011). My intention was to discuss my future academic work with queer composition, and here I was, met with an article claiming that queer and composition were incompatible. This scenario is representative of the type of queer sponsorship I have received from her: just when I think I have something figured out, she reminds me to take a step back and listen, to reexamine and reimagine. Having a critical queer sponsor at such a late stage in my education (and identity formation) has held me more accountable, forcing me to question my own blind spots and misconceptions.

For example, when taking a graduate seminar on Queer Rhetorics and Composition, we were asked to read an article about a lesbian whose partner fell ill and required at-home care. The writer refused to leave her partner, and she brought another woman she was involved with into their home and relationship. Initially, I felt slightly unnerved because I read this as the writer “replacing” or “supplementing” her partnership
with her ill partner with a healthier, newer, more able-bodied lover. The arrangement was clear; all three women consented, but my own deeply embedded ideologies about monogamy limited my understanding, despite my own experiences with polyamory. When I expressed the betrayal I felt for the writer’s sick partner, my advisor responded, “that’s because your perspective is homonormative, Hillery, not queer.” In that moment, as a self-identified queer, I felt both attacked and enlightened. Even when it hurts my ego or knocks me down a few pegs, having my advisor continually challenge my perspective has ultimately transformed and opened it.

I also recognize myself as a queer literacy sponsor to other LGBTQ folx and straight people too. The more affected I have been by my own queer literacy learning, the more willing I am to mentor other LGTBQ people, whether it be youth, undergraduates, graduate students, teaching associates, or colleagues. I have found that my desire and ability to foster literacies of difference with LGBTQ students often extend to students who are (also) women, people of color, transnational, and/or indigenous. It is this affect, and effect, that drives my current inquiry into the power of queer literacy sponsorship.
The pilot study, “Answering Malinowitz’s Call: Finding Out About Rhetoric & Composition’s LGBTQ Students,” received IRB approval and was conducted Fall semester 2015 at a mid-sized public research institution with 29,000 students, located on the fringes of Appalachia in Ohio. The target population was current students at that institution, 18 and over, who identify as LGBTQ. An online 26-question survey, consisting of both multiple choice and short answer questions, was emailed to undergraduate and graduate students through various targeted networks: the LGBT and Women’s Centers; current English faculty and graduate assistants teaching English courses; the researcher’s current and previous classes; the Women, Gender, and Sexuality
Studies program and courses; etc. (The survey is available in Appendix A.) Participants had an opportunity to provide an email address if they were willing to participate in a follow up interview, but those have not yet been arranged. I plan on continuing with the study in the future in order to increase the sample size and diversify participants in order to grow the project further; follow up interviews will be conducted at that point (to date, 34 participants provided their email address for follow up interviews).

Sixty-three participants started the survey and 27 participants completed it. One participant (4%) described their racial identity as Black; two participants (7%) described themselves as Blended/Other; and 23 participants (85%) described themselves as White. Six respondents (22%) identified as graduate students; 21 identified as undergraduate students (78%). Four participants (15%) listed English studies majors (including creative writing, literature, linguistics, and rhetoric and composition); five (19%) listed education majors; four (15%) listed communication studies majors (including media arts, integrated media, and journalism); two (7%) listed Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; four (15%) listed health sciences and professions majors (including social work and health service administration) and two (7%) listed STEM majors. Other majors listed include film studies; cultural anthropology; psychology; music therapy; and law, justice, and culture.

In terms of sexual identity, all participants identified as LGBTQ in order to qualify for the pilot study. So to learn more about how these LGBTQ individuals identified within that community, I asked how they identify beyond LGBTQ, as an umbrella term. Eight (38%) identified as bisexual; seven (26%) as gay; six (22%) as
lesbian; two (7%) as genderqueer; and one (4%) as asexual. Furthermore, four (15%) identified as “other,” and out of four write-ins, three list pansexual and one lists, “transmasculine agender polysexual.” Additionally, thirteen (48%) – almost half – identified as queer, and out of the thirteen participants who identified as queer, two (7%) identified only as queer. In fact, eight (30%) of those who selected queer also selected one other term (with queer and bisexual being the most common combination). And, finally, three (11%) identified as queer, bisexual, and something else (like asexual or pansexual).

For the purposes of the dissertation, I focus my attention primarily on the responses to a few specific questions beyond demographics to remain close to Malinowitz’s research questions (as cited in the Introduction), queercentric classrooms, and queer literacy sponsorship. Generally speaking, preliminary findings showed that ten (37%) participants reported that they had experienced homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism in their writing classes, from their instructors, course materials, and classmates. Additionally, twelve (44%) reported experiencing homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism in their writing classes from their peers. Additionally, when asked if they felt sexuality had intentionally been avoided or left out of writing instruction, thirteen (48%) participants agreed, while eight (30%) reported never having thought about it before they were asked the question in the pilot study. When asked about the emotions they associated with coming/being out, participants identified possible risks, such as to their grades and perceived ethos, associated with doing LGBTQ-focused research and writing and when faced with asserting/claiming an LGBTQ identity. For
example, one respondent said, “It’s a really awkward thing because your profs control your grades.” Another described, “Nervousness – I’m afraid of backlash from peers and professors, I’m afraid I won’t be taken seriously because I don’t ‘look like a lesbian’.”

Participants were also asked about their interest in enrolling in queercentric courses. Twenty-five (93%) said they would take a queercentric class if one were offered. In fact, twenty (74%) reported already having had a class that affirmed and acknowledged their sexuality. When asked how this experience affected them, many participants described positive experiences in these classes. For example, one participant wrote, “it was an incredibly inclusive and relaxing atmosphere that made me fully enjoy the course to an extent that I don’t normally.” Another explained, “it’s very validating! And very important since I am studying education.” In the following Chapter, I periodically draw from these preliminary findings to consider what LGBTQ student writers might stand to gain in queercentric classes, and how those spaces might foster queer literacy sponsorship.
CHAPTER 3: QUEER(ING) LITERACY, WRITING PRACTICES, AND ETHOS:
QUEER LITERACY SPONSORSHIP AND THE WORK OF QUEERCENTRIC
WRITING ENVIRONMENTS

Historically, dominant discourse and culture has worked diligently to refuse ethos and viability for LGBTQ people, leaving them out of the decisions and debates that directly impact their lives. Rather than feeling completely in control of our lives and the significant choices that affect them (such as those related to marriage, health care, family planning, etc.), LGBTQ folx are left feeling like crucial parts of our lives and citizenship are left in the hands of mainstream, heterosexual voters. In the same way that it is unjust and illogical to allow highly educated, upper class, privileged (mostly white and Christian) men to make legislative decisions at both state and federal levels that concern women’s bodies and health care, it is unacceptable for decisions that impact the lives of LGBTQ people (such as those regarding marriage equality and/or same-sex adoption) to be determined by mostly privileged, heterosexual people.

As I have discussed throughout earlier chapters of the dissertation, the silencing of non-normative sexualities and their corresponding non-normative (sexual) identities has serious material implications for those who are culturally marginalized. Countless members of the LGBTQ community have been constructed by dominant discourse as deviant, lesser, and illegitimate: lesbians depicted as angry, mannish, feminists out to destroy the traditional family; gays presented as contaminated and promiscuous; bisexuals thought to be experiencing a phase rather than an having actual identity; trans* individuals openly discredited and mocked (currently still occurring in mainstream
media), painted as mentally unstable sexual predators and untrustworthy tricksters (which has directly lead to recent legislation\(^{33}\) at the state level barring trans* individuals from using bathrooms that align with their gender identities). Large institutions of power, from schools to the government itself, work strategically to bar the LGBTQ community from information, access, and full citizenship, which negatively impacts quality of life and physical and emotional well-being, forcing many LGBTQ people to constantly navigate hostile socio-emotional and political environments with limited support and resources.

More specifically, LGBTQ youth, like much of the youth of the nation, are kept in the dark regarding safe and informed sexual practices, sexual politics, and the rewards and repercussions of certain sexualities and sexual identities. In *Literacy, Sexuality, and Pedagogy*, Jonathan Alexander positions “sexuality and literacy [as] densely connected,” arguing that sexual literacy functions as a “locus of social control” (4, 62). He explains how countless young people are repeatedly put at serious risk because of the sexual illiteracy propagated and encouraged by conservative institutions and many public school systems that rely heavily on federal funding. He explains, “when sex is taboo, as this author suggests, ignorance about sex and sexuality keeps people afraid, sometimes unwilling to ask for information. People are kept illiterate about some of the most powerful emotions, experiences, and intimacies they are capable of having” (188). Alexander poignantly captures the weight of this neglect on *all* young people. Although heterosexual students do not face the same silencing and erasure LGBTQ youth face, they are similarly left in the dark regarding the role sexuality and sexual identity play in every

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\(^{33}\) Just this week (May 9, 2016), the United States Dept. of Justice has filed a lawsuit against North Carolina for passing HB2, which targets trans folx use of public restrooms.
aspect of their lives. Sexual health is often reduced to teen pregnancy (framed mostly as an issue only for young girls), STD fear-mongering, and abstinence-only approaches, while discussions centered on imperative issues like consent, sexual assault, and reproductive justice are squelched. It is no surprise then that LGBTQ youth are even more at risk because the limited information they do receive is mainly heteronormative in nature. When dominant heteronormative discourse excludes LGBTQ identities and non-normative lived experiences in these ways, the agency and full participation necessary to undo current ramifications and future damage is negated.

These are just some of the material consequences LGBTQ people experience in the margins. Drawing from these realities, this chapter considers the connection between heteronormativity and literacy learning, in and outside of school environments, which leaves LGBTQ youth isolated – underrepresented and misrepresented, causing them to seek out alternative literacy sponsors to gain access to critical gay cultural knowledge. Therefore, drawing from Deborah Brandt’s concept of literacy sponsorship, Jonathan Alexander’s sexual literacy, and Will Banks’ work with critical literacy and sexuality, I argue for what I call queer literacy sponsorship: the people, texts, resources, and institutions that work in concert to foster LGBTQ-specific literacies, widening and deepening people’s knowledge of the LGBTQ communities, queer identities and politics. Next, I explore queer literacy mentoring practices, returning to Harriet Malinowitz’s notions of queercentric environments and queer discourse community formations in order to demonstrate how queercentric writing classes – those that center LGBTQ experience,

34 In “Reproductions of “(Il)Literacy: Gay Cultural Knowledge and First-Year Composition Pedagogy,” John Goshert discusses how FYW classrooms can be sites for sharing gay cultural knowledge.
writing, and literacy practices – might provide generative spaces for queer enculturation through mentorship, queer literacy sponsorship and the transmission of critical LGBTQ cultural knowledge, both between LGBTQ teachers and students and among students themselves (both LGBTQ and straight). I imagine queer literacy sponsorship as a way of merging sexual literacy with queercentric learning, so that the sponsored gain critical “insider” access to knowledge about sexualities and better understand their associated implications and privileges.

As discussed in Chapter 2, while there is much of Harriet Malinowitz’s work queer composition scholars have taken up, none closely consider queercentric environments or queer discourse community formations. Furthermore, while scholars like Jonathan Alexander and Will Banks have argued for connecting literacy studies and sexual literacy to writing studies, they do not mention Brandt nor apply her notions of literacy sponsorship directly to sexuality or the LGBTQ community. It is Zan Meyer Gonçalves, in *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom* (2005), who speaks most directly, from a writing studies perspective, about the power of LBGTQ literacy sponsorship for LGBTQ individuals. Specifically, she explores the Speaker’s Bureau – a group where LGBTQ students share personal stories with mainstream audiences – as a sponsoring institution for both herself and its LGBTQ student participants. She explores the connection between literacy development and identity performances through an analysis of LGBTQ students’ participation in the Speaker’s Bureau and the stories they tell. Since the premise of the Speaker’s Bureau is for students

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35 For a more in depth discussion on the history and function of Speakers’ Bureaus, see Alicia Lucksted’s “Sexual Orientation Speakers Bureaus,” in *Working With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students*, edited by Ronni Sanlo.
to learn about difference by bearing witness to LGBTQ students’ experiences through storytelling, there is a certain amount of pressure on the Speaker’s Bureau students’ “construct[ion] and perform[ance of] a complex public ethos” (xv). The only issue with Gonçalves’ approach to ethos is that it tends to be contingent upon being read as a “safe” and “human” subject by a normative audience, which causes her points to feel more homonormative than queer.

Too often LGBTQ individuals are expected to remain quiet and passive, politely asking for recognition and equality. The temptation and convenience of homonormativity, paired with a drive for acceptance, eradicates the opportunity for queer resistance. Despite being a pivotal text about how LGBTQ students present themselves to public audiences, *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom* regularly encourages and expects the students highlighted to soften their image as LGBTQ people for better audience reception. In this way, Gonçalves’ text highlights the tension early queer composition scholars dealt with: LGBTQ people desperately want to be recognized and heard, but they are also unashamed, pissed off, and tired of asking for respect, a movement pioneered by the resistant activist ‘90s group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). Throughout the text, Gonçalves describes how student speakers are coached as they compose and deliver their stories. It is suggested speakers, “offer a positive subject position, a ‘down-to-earth’ social identity for those identified as gay” (Gonçalves 19). The Speaker’s Bureau, which functions as a sponsoring institution to LGBTQ rhetors, promoting a “positive,” “humorous,” and “down to earth” image of gayness for public consumption is risky because it fails to interrogate heteronormative
culture. It seems LGBTQ student-writers and rhetors would instead benefit from embracing their identities with “pride and strength and militancy” (Ibid.).

Therefore, it is this homonormative space queer literacy sponsorship emerges from and responds to; if ethos is “the creation of personas that appear to possess and are regarded as possessing genuine wisdom and excellence of character” (Gonçalves 8), what would a queer ethos entail? Can the character of a resistant queer subject ever be considered excellent, especially to a normative audience? My guess is no. Rather than “honoring and naming […] those values their audience holds” (13), queer literacy sponsorship troubles and interrogates the values their audience holds. Rather than seeking “to facilitate rhetorical growth” (Gonçalves xii), queer literacy sponsorship facilitates queer rhetorical growth. Rather than creating safety through rhetoric, as Gonçalves suggests (xiv), queer literacy sponsorship disrupts safety, and the need for that safety, through queer rhetoric and queer rhetorical constructions and performances (xiv).

Ultimately, the concept of queer literacy sponsorship provides us with a better understanding of the types of mentoring connections that are formed between LGBTQ persons in an academic setting, like the composition classroom, where LGBTQ existence is acknowledged and affirmed. Additionally, queer literacy sponsorship captures the ways in which precious queer cultural knowledge – such as history, LGBTQ-specific sexual and health literacies, resources and support networks, ways around discriminatory policies and regulations, etc. – is transmitted between and among LGBTQ people. I’m interested in how queer literacy sponsorship might account for how queer rhetorical knowledge and queer ethos might be transmitted between and among LGBTQ writers,
specifically in queercentric environments. What political and rhetorical work does queer literacy sponsorship do?

**Literacy Sponsorship + Sexual Literacy → Queer Literacy Sponsorship**

One of the main concepts this chapter draws from is Deborah Brandt’s *literacy sponsors*, which she defines as, “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way” (166). In her 1998 *CCC’s* article, “Sponsors of Literacy,” she considers how people’s literacies are impacted by access, “ideological freight,” changing standards, and (mis/re) appropriation. For Brandt, literacies are social rather than individual, they accumulate – “piling up, extending out”³⁶ – and become hybridized. Most importantly, they provide “social viability” and social mobility. But, as Brandt reminds us, the institutions or individuals doing the sponsoring can directly influence the transmission of these various literacies, whether it be positively or negatively. In other words, it isn’t just the literate skill set that is shared with the sponsored; values and beliefs are also shared.

So literacy sponsorship can be understood as a sort of gate keeping, tied up in power and economic differentials with people’s agency and success at stake. Brandt explains, “the concept of sponsors helps to explain, then, a range of human relationships and ideological pressures that turn up at the scenes of literacy learning – from benign sharing between adults and youths, to euphemized coercions in schools and workplaces, to the most notorious impositions and deprivations by church or state” (168). For these

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reasons, she frames teachers of writing and communication as, “conflicted brokers between literacy’s buyers and sellers” (183), often feeling ambivalent about our discipline’s history. We pass down long held – and sometimes problematic – literacy practices to our students, but, as critical pedagogues argue, we can also provide students with critical lenses to examine those fraught literacy transmissions. Beth Daniell agrees, describing the “conflicted politics of composition[:] One grand narrative expresses a conservative view of literacy, based on elitist notions of reading and writing and protecting the status quo. The other is leftist, ranging from mildly reformative to radically revolutionary” (406). So what is my own ideological freight: what do I transfer, and why do I transfer it? What are my interests for the students I sponsor? Where does my pedagogy fall on Daniell’s spectrum?

As James Berlin explains in “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” the composition classroom has long served as a “public arena for considering such strongly contested issues as Vietnam, civil rights, and economic equality” (667). It makes sense sexuality and other social justice issues would find their way into today’s composition courses. At the same time, according to Berlin, “a rhetoric can never be innocent” (ibid.); therefore, we must be transparent with our own ideological frameworks, which situate us and orient our teaching and research, that’s what social-epistemic rhetoric does.

Following is my attempt to lay out my own subjectivities, simultaneously privileged and marginalized, which influence my day to day life and experiences:

Firstly, I am ridiculously privileged: I am a citizen of the United States; I speak Standard (Academic) English; I was raised in an upper middle class home; I
attended both private and public schools with no issues and feel I received a decent education, without ever feeling intentionally held back; I’ve never had to deal with law enforcement in a negative way; I didn’t experience food or housing insecurity before graduating from college, and I am white and cisgender. I am also an out queer femme lesbian feminist who currently makes under $20,000 a year as a graduate student ($3,600 of which went back to the university in fees and insurance costs), while administrators and coaches at my university make hundreds of thousands of dollars. I carry student loan debt. My partner and I had a marriage ceremony when it was not yet legalized nation-wide; we have not yet legally married and have no immediate plans to do so. I experience homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism regularly. I was born in Detroit, raised in Flint, worked as an adult both on Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribal land in mid-Michigan and in Saginaw. I currently reside in Athens County, the second poorest county in all of Ohio. I see social and economic injustice all around me and have my entire life.

It is the latter that has mostly shaped my ideological framework, my queer, feminist, anti-racist, anti-kyriarchy knowledge.

I like to use my positionality of material queer feminist in the classroom to disrupt students’ thinking about normative writing and literacy practices, identities, and sexualities. I utilize my queer identity subversively at first to unsettle students’ assumptions of queer materiality, since I am cis and femme – thus read “normal.” While students might initially perceive me as a typical heterosexual cisgender white female,
they quickly come to know that I am an out queer lesbian feminist and anti-racist (generally within 10 minutes of the first class). I don’t know that they expect such radical queer politics to flow from my femme mouth. In this way, I use my queer identity to (re)orient the classroom around queerness, the course description and myself functioning as the initial vessels. For me, this means presenting a queer body and identity at the onset, and I use “we” when referring to the LGBTQ community. In this way, queer being (myself and the other LGBTQ bodies in the room) and queer doing (the conceptual and literal work of the course) converge to, hopefully, produce both affect and effect.

I also see myself as an encourager of those “individual acts of appropriation [which] can divert and subvert the course of [heterosexist, racist, classist, ableist] literacy’s history” in students’ minds and actions Brandt mentions (182). More specifically, I use my own queerness and queer(ed) rhetorical practices as launch pads to share with students how authors and texts can (re/mis)appropriate genre conventions and normative practices in favor of more subversive and playful rhetorical approaches, in the vein of honoring lived experience, in(ter)vention, and social justice. Brandt says, “the ideological pressure of sponsors affects many private aspects of writing processes as well as public aspects of (un)finished texts” (183). While it is most certainly true that the education system, as a sponsor of Standard Written English, reinforces and perpetuates normative and exclusionary genres, methods, and formats in negative and impotent ways, it is also possible for intentionally resistant sponsors to alter and/or inspire the private composing practices of non-normative writers in positive and provoking ways, thus producing counter-public aspects of (un)finished texts.
Ultimately, my intention is to subvert the academy and its exclusionary (hetero)norms, while inspiring marginalized students to do the same to better understand the ways they shape and are shaped by their worlds; because writing isn’t just for the academy – it belongs also, mostly, to its writers. According to Ira Shor, as Berlin reminds his readers,

Students must be taught to identify the ways in which control over their own lives has been denied them, and denied in such a way that they have blamed themselves for their powerlessness. Shor thus situates the individual within social processes, examining in detail the interferences to critical thought that would enable “students to be their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture” (48). (680)

The goal then, for Shor, is equipping students with a new critical lens in which to reassess their world and experiences. Queer literacy sponsorship offers such a lens, a queer lens for reconsidering how and why LGBTQ and other marginalized people have been cast in unjust ways. Therefore, it is Brandt’s third issue that resonates most with me, as she points out, “how encounters with literacy sponsors, especially as they are configured at the end of the 20th century, can be sites for the innovative rerouting of resources into projects of self-development and social change” (169).

I wonder how queer literacy sponsorship might help students to reframe ethos, notions of identity and its impact on writing, and students’ sense of their queer selves. If LGBTQ and other marginalized students can rewrite, or sift through, the various ways they’ve been previously cast and come to understand their difference as a source of pride
and orientation, the impact could be significant and long-term. Extending Brandt’s issue to sexuality in the writing classroom, I wonder how this kind of queer literacy mentoring fosters students’ and sponsors’, self-development and motivation for social change? Through the lens of full participation and citizenship for sexual minorities, paired with critical literacy studies, Alexander (in 2008) and Will Banks (in 2009) provide further support for students’ access to this kind of sponsorship.

In Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy, published ten years after Brandt’s article on literacy sponsorship, Jonathan Alexander offers the field a distinctive critical pedagogy focused on critical sexual literacy, which he defines as “an intimate understanding of the ways in which sexuality is constructed in language and the ways in which our language and meaning-making systems are always already sexualized” (18). Or, what might be understood to be a critical lens intended to interrogate the privilege certain sexualities and identities are afforded, as well as recognizing those that are stigmatized in the process of producing such standards. Alexander argues, “the time has come when it is imperative both to understand the interrelationship of sexuality and literacy and to think more fully and critically about how we as literacy specialists can – and should – address this relationship in our composition classes” (5). The pedagogical objective here is to ask all students to interrogate the “sociopolitical dimensions” of sexuality and the ways sexuality and literacy are interrelated, which means “critically engag[ing] the stories we tell about sex and sexuality to probe them for controlling values and for ways to resist, when necessary, constraining norms” (5). The result is an open and empowering space for students to explore the ways we define and are defined by sex and sexuality in terms of
our agency (or lack thereof), our perception of what is considered (un)acceptable, our sexual health, and “our experience of justice and citizenship” and participation in society (2). Ultimately, running concurrent to the need for sexual literacy in composition, Alexander argues for pedagogies rooted in inquiry that probe the ways ideology, sexuality, and language intersect, overlap, and (re)construct our subjectivity and personal and political lives. Banks also supports these aims, situating critical literacies as an ideal place to do so.

Banks explains, in “Literacy, Sexuality, and the Value(s) of Queer Young Adult Literatures,” when LGBTQ students have access to LGBTQ coming out stories and those about LGBTQ experiences in texts, “young readers can see the possibilities available to them” (34). He writes, from first-hand experience, about what it is like for LGBTQ youth who lack access to stories and resources specific to their lives and identities. He argues, “one way to approach this work involves critical literacy, helping students recognize that the texts that surround us actively shape our lives” (Banks 34). For Banks, critical literacy is both a productive site for connections and empathy training, but also a powerful way to get students to investigate the ideologies, structures, and reasoning embedded in the LGBTQ experiences they witness through text. So when they read a story about a genderqueer person who experiences gender-related violence, they won’t just meet a non-binary character, who is complex and more dimensional than media representations; they will also hopefully ask important genealogical questions like: Why does violence against trans and gender non-conforming folx happen in the first place? Why do law enforcement, the medical community, and schools handle trans and gender non-
conforming cases the way they do? Why do newspapers sometimes use the wrong name and pronouns when referring to the victim? What prompted the emergence of “genderqueer” as an identity?

On a basic level, combining Brandt’s literacy sponsorship with Alexander’s sexual literacy could potentially produce the concept of sexual literacy sponsorship, where sponsors transmit their (ideologically-freighted) understandings of sex(uality)-based knowledge, identities, participation, and politics with the sponsored. Adding queer takes this sponsorship equation a step further into an inquiry-based, investigative mode that is more in line with critical literacies. A critical queer literacy, particularly for LGBTQ student-writer-rhetors, offers a critical – *radical* – lens through which to view things like transmisogyny, institutionalized racism and homophobia, and current national issues like marriage equality. Therefore, critical queer literacy is inherently political. Additionally, critical queer literacy is rhetorical. For literacy is never limited to just to the stories told – the content; embedded also are writing and reading – the form and practice. Remaining rooted in rhetoric and writing, queer literacy sponsorship transmits knowledge about resistant rhetorical practices, (re)orientations of ethos, and queer theoretical underpinnings. Queerness is the ideology; queer phenomenology and queer methodologies deliver and substantiate the freight.

In this space, (LGBTQ) students are asked not only how their sexuality is tied to their experience of participation, but also how their sexuality is tied to their writing, speaking, and thinking practices as well – all of which impact participation and can empower agency. How do they understand themselves as (LGBTQ) subjects, and how
might they re-compose and (re)present themselves as (LGBTQ) subjects after experiencing queer literacy sponsorship? What can folx – LGBTQ and otherwise – learn from each other in the space of a queercentric writing classroom? Even more specifically, what can LGBTQ people foster in one another in these critical moments of queer mentoring? To explore the answers to these questions, I return to Malinowitz and again draw inspiration from her. In the following sections, I first explore the importance of *queer literacies*. Then, I turn to some initial findings from the pilot study I began to “find out more about our [LGBTQ] students,” to learn about their experiences with homophobia, to ascertain the range of emotions they associate with coming and being out in the classroom, and to discover how participants’ LGBTQ identities impact their writing and literacy practices, if at all.

**(Accessing) Queer Literacies**

As Brandt points out, access to critical literacies is contingent upon certain factors like geographic location, socio-economic status, racial identity, and even sexuality. Drawing on Paulo Freire, Beth Daniell explains, in “Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture,” “literacy can be a tool for liberating people from political and economic oppression […] restricting access to literacy is an effective way to deprive particular groups of power” (399). Like Brandt, Daniell recognizes how sanctioning certain groups’ access to literacy can be used as a tool of oppression by dominant (i.e. privileged) groups and institutions (this is not a new concept since the primary reason slaves were not allowed to read or write was to keep them silenced and disempowered). Daniell reminds readers that literacy has the power to make people’s lives more
meaningful (404). While this is true for the privileged, it is even truer for the marginalized and disenfranchised. Barring already-marginalized people’s access to literacy, whether it be sexual literacy, health literacy, or basic reading and writing, is an effective way to maintain power over them. What is even more powerful is connecting fringe subjectivities to literacies, drawing attention to how it functions to (de)legitimize them in public and private spaces.

Queer literacies are crucial because they not only fill the gaps heteronormative culture creates, they also provide the information, inspiration, and community necessary to find, join, and/or create new/alternative (counter) cultures. But how do LGBTQ students acquire these literacies? Who, or what, sponsors queer literacies? And what kind of work do queer literacies do? Similar to my own experience, and the experiences of countless other LGBTQ folx, LGBTQ participants who responded to my pilot study piece their queer knowledge together from various places, but mostly from LGBTQ texts and other LGBTQ people. When asked how they had learned about LGBTQ identities, persons, and culture, they reported learning about being LGBTQ primarily from the following sources, listed in order of most common to least common: the Internet (23 or 85%); LGBTQ friends/peers (22 or 81%); LGBTQ authors, books, and articles (also 22 or 81%); LGBTQ themed/related courses (14 or 52%); student groups (13 or 48%); and the campus LGBT Center (12 or 44%). I would suggest their experiences are common for young LGBTQ people. When young people feel or know they are LGBTQ, they will seek out these resources to learn more about other LGBTQ people, and, in doing so, themselves.
For example, in his “Queer Literacy Narrative,” Brett Shingledecker reminisces about his copy of *Rubyfruit Jungle* ending up in the family’s trashcan. Realizing someone didn’t want him to read the book, he says he understood for the first time that, “there’s a power in denying somebody access to information.” As an adult, he owned an LGBTQ bookstore, which became a way for him to provide previously denied literacies to other LGBTQ people. And in fostering others’ queer literacies, he describes having been fostered as well. Poignantly, Shingledecker frames the experience as both a way to learn about and educate the LGBTQ community. My experience has been that no LGBTQ person forgets the first few LGBTQ texts they read, or the first out LGBTQ person who served as a role model, because these sponsors become a formative component of our queer literacies. Therefore, Shingledecker’s experience rings true for many of us: we tend to want to foster others in the same transformative ways we experience. We do it to offer the support we needed and/or received at a critical juncture. For some, queer literacy sponsorship is a means to surviving a heteronormative world.

In particular, Stacey Waite frames queer literacies as a method toward metaphorical, and literal, survival, arguing that the world becomes a safer, “more bearable” place for queers as more people access and learn from queer literacies. Waite explains, “as I grew up and left home it became kind of mission to illuminate its queerness to others, to ask that others see the queerness in this world, and even imagine the possibilities of queerer worlds. So I became a teacher of writing” (113). For Waite, queer literacy means examining the world through a queer lens, one that exposes the danger of “binary, one-dimensional interpretations,” revealing how those rigid
heteronormative notions can make life less “livable” for queers (114). For Eric Darnell Pritchard, literacy practices establish a sort of ancestral lineage between generations. They are embedded with rhetorical maps and inheritances – what he calls “signposts” in homage to Audre Lorde, and they contain the power to help form and affirm one’s identity (29). The first-hand accounts Pritchard includes from sixty older black queers attest to the importance of using literacy in order to connect with others’ experiences with discrimination as black LGBTQ folx.

Similar to Waite’s understanding, Pritchard frames queer black literacies as “survival techniques,” passed down from one generation to the next (30). He argues, “historical rootedness is a key ingredient to Black LGBTQ identity construction, affirmation, values, ways of knowing, and ways of being” (31). Furthermore, using Brandt, he explains how marginalized people can and do appropriate literacy to “identify and explicate historical erasure: what it is, what its effects are, how it happens, and how to challenge it” (32). In other words, literacy is a way for marginalized groups to locate, understand, and affirm their identities from those who have come before them; it is an empowering mechanism of social change and world-making; and it curates a precedence of reading, speaking, and writing practices for that particular group, articulating and perpetuating the forces of literacy where identity is concerned. Whereas literacy was withheld from blacks (and LGBTQ people) previously, as a method of control and oppression, it too can be reclaimed, appropriated, and disseminated to imagine and create large-scale and individual-level change.
Mollie V. Blackburn also sees enormous potential for social change in the literacy performances and practices of LGBTQ youth. She argues, “it is in the series of performances that literacy has the opportunity to reinforce and interrupt power dynamics. It is in this conception of literacy performances that I see hope for reading and writing for social change” (Blackburn “Losing”). Blackburn details her three-year ethnographic study of an urban, Midwest LGBTQ youth center, The Loft, and the Speaker’s Bureau, a youth outreach program focused on LGBTQ education, paying attention to the connection between literacy performances and identity formation and affirmation. Drawing from Dorothy Holland’s four contexts of identity, she champions a person’s “repeated opportunity to author herself into the world as empowered, which may result in her making of new worlds. It is in this notion of identity work that I find the hope of social change” (Ibid.). As an example, Blackburn details how Kira, her primary case study, uses her literacy performances at the Loft and through the Speaker’s Bureau to “make space for herself in the LGBTQ community” and “remake her world” in spite of – and to spite – heteronormative culture. Using her identity as both a reason and subject to study, Kira also turns to LGBTQ books to self-sponsor a lesbian literacy, “selecting texts just because they were about lesbians” (Blackburn “Losing”). Kira’s hunger for books about lesbian experience reminds me of one of my own pilot study participants, who, when asked how her lesbian sexuality impacts her reading and writing, explains, “It’s definitely made my writing more a quest for understanding about lesbian identity.” In these cases, the relationship between literacy and sexuality is reciprocal and dynamic in

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37 These include: the figured world, positionality, space of authoring, and making worlds (Blackburn “Losing”).
that identity both shapes and in turn becomes shaped by these queer literacies. It is both cause and effect.

Numerous scholars see the benefits of queer literacies in the writing classroom. Recently, SJ Miller argues, in *College English*, for a *queer literacy framework*, a way for “teachers [to] support students to understand and read (a)gender and (a)sexuality through a queer lens; how to rework social and classroom norms where bodies with differential realities in classrooms are legitimated and made legible to self and other; how to shift classroom contexts for reading (a)gender and (a)sexuality; and how to support classroom students toward personal, educational, and social legitimacy though understanding the value of (a)gender and (a)sexuality self-determination and (a) and (a)sexuality justice” (37). For practical application, Miller provides 10 Principles and accompanying educator commitments based on queer theoretical applications in the classroom (such as the understanding that sex and gender are fluid and socially constructed). Miller argues that teachers who take up a queer literacy framework can be “agents for social, political, and personal transformations” (38); I would add that students within this framework can too.

This change is fueled by the power that comes with literacy, particularly for marginalized populations who can use literacy and its knowledge to enact social justice. In this vein, Beth Daniell not only discusses, “the power of institutions to control people by controlling their literacy [but she also points to] the power of individuals and groups to use literacy to act either in concert with or in opposition to this power” (406). In what Brandt would classify as misappropriation, queer literacy sponsorship in the composition classroom – at least for this researcher and other pedagogues enacting queer
methodologies and queer multimodal composing – involves cluing students into how rhetoric can be used to resist and/or undermine normative values. This means drawing attention to the assimilative and normative disciplinary conventions as we teach them. These strategies can be especially effective when ethos is at stake, something that has historically been denied to LGBTQ rhetors (Alexander and Rhodes Queered). Rather than waiting for authorization from dominant culture, queer sponsorship allows for and utilizes alternative modes of providing proof, establishing credibility, and trust building. It is subversive because it runs against and alongside heteronormative culture and all that is considered “appropriate” and “acceptable.” It introduces, demonstrates, enacts, and disperses work that exists in opposition to the status quo, all the while pointing to the farcical nature of such fixed pinnacles of convention.

Queer literacy sponsorship, in comparison to more mainstream literacy sponsorship, does not “align” itself with traditional literacy values and practices. It does not treat sexuality with silences. It is unique in that the sponsored are often eager to consume as many LGBTQ texts as possible, feeling isolated from normative culture. Upon coming out, we suddenly become oriented toward the stories of others like (and unlike) us and we begin to form alternative networks and families. As Ahmed explains, “it is a familiar story, but familiarity is worth telling. When I ‘became a lesbian’ I began reading avidly. I read all the novels I could get my hands on” (104). She frames coming out as lesbian as both a lonely and social experience. One of my pilot study participants seems to agree, as she explains,”[being LGBTQ] makes me feel disconnected from others at time but also intensely connected at times where I’m with people who understand me
and my perspective.” As we turn away from hetero desire, we exist apart from, no longer “in line” with the others. And then, according to Ahmed, we find ourselves slanted because same sex desire, “reaches objects that are not continuous with the line of normal sexual subjectivity” (71). After having refused the “inheritance” of heteronormativity, queer literacy sponsorship can provide tips and strategies for navigating the new, unfamiliar spaces of being LGBTQ and creating new connections in new worlds.

Mentorship: A Queer Practice

At its core, queer literacy sponsorship entails mentorship; historically, it has been the elders of the LGBTQ community that have helped nurture young members. As an illustration, I turn to Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, a text that enculturated me in significant ways. Twenty-three years later, the book remains a timeless and pivotal resource for LGBTQ and other marginalized folx. Without a biological family and home discourse with which to navigate neither adolescence nor adulthood, main character Jess Goldberg forms a queer family that provides her with affirmation, acknowledgement, and support. Jess is fostered into numerous physical spaces: the homes of the Dineh women, the gay bar scene, the homes of a few lesbian couples she lives with, and multiple factories. The butch community fosters her queer sexual literacy generally, and specific elders and pros teach her the value and vulnerability of queer sex. Under their influence, Jess becomes a sensitive lover despite being hardened after suffering incredible loss and trauma. In a more traditional sense, Ed, a black butch heavily affected by racism and the war in Vietnam, serves as an intersectional literacy sponsor for Jess. She and Duffy, a communist union organizer and Jess’ only male, heterosexual friend, foster her literacy
and understanding of injustice by gifting her books by W.E.B. DuBois and Mother Jones, respectively. Through years of queer literacy sponsorship, after years of being silent and ashamed, Jess becomes a proud young queer committed to solidarity and coalition building.

In a sense, this mentorship is akin to James Paul Gee’s work with discourse, literacy, apprenticeship and enculturation. Queer literacies, easily understood as a critical lens, provide a secondary discourse of sorts for the LGBTQ subject, one that provides insightful perspective on the home discourse of heteronormativity, a Dominant discourse. Like discourse, queer too can be understood as “a way of being in the world,” and like discourse, it can also serve as an “identity kit.” For Gee, “‘literacy’ [i]s the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse” (9).

So queer literacies might be understood as a mastery of or fluent control over queer(ness), queer identities, queer thinking, and queer politics. They are also liberating, since they offer spaces for critical reflection and meaningful meta-knowledge about conventional Dominant literacies and discourses. As Malinowitz points out, the queercentric course becomes more than just a discourse community – it becomes a queer discourse community. In these spaces, the purpose shifts from educating straight audiences to sharing and building community knowledge, transmitting and participating in LGBTQ culture, and writing to and for each other within a queercentric context.

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38 As Gee explains, primary Discourses provide “social goods” like money and status, whereas secondary discourses provide “solidarity with a particular social network” (8).
Queercentric Environments

Malinowitz’s emphasis is on courses that are *queercentric*, those that focus on queer experience, taught by LGBTQ teachers for LGBTQ and straight students. What is most significant about these environments is that they place queerness and queer experience, along with material LGBTQ lives, bodies, and voices, at the center, rather than using the authority of the center to include marginalized voices. When mainstream courses are inclusive, well intentioned toward more complex notions of multiculturalism and diversification of curriculum, heteronormativity still lingers, leaving cracks and spaces where homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexism creep in. Even though this can happen, too, in classrooms with LGBTQ teachers and students, it is less likely to go collectively unnoticed. Heteronormativity and homophobia are much more apparent to LGBTQ persons than they are to mainstream groups of people. We find ourselves on edge often, just waiting for the next homophobic comment or heteronormative assumption.

Simply put, the queercentric classroom is framed as, “a place where we didn’t have to explain to anyone ‘who we are’” (Cohen qtd in Malinowitz 16). In other words, when an LGBTQ student is in a course with other LGBTQ persons, reading and writing about LGBTQ experience, they are less likely to have to explain and defend their sexuality to others. As some scholars have pointed out, these tend to be better (and truly safer) environments for self disclosure, increased self esteem, and access to positive role models (Chesnut 227). After calling for more schools to provide LGBTQ-centered and specialty courses, Saralyn Chesnut explains, ‘Besides meeting students’ needs more
effectively, working together just makes good sense for LGBT people; it creates community among people who may otherwise rarely come into contact with one another; and it brings to bear diverse skills, experiences, and points of view” (228). In this way, understanding, solidarity, and connection become key, and invaluable, components to queercentric writing environments.

Drawing from Malinowitz, Jennifer DiGrazia and Michael Boucher discuss the shadow heteronormativity casts over the mainstream writing classroom. They explain, “to some extent, the presence of heteronormativity excludes queer students from the safe community many mainstream writing teachers attempt to create” (DiGrazia and Boucher 34). When teachers opt for the class’ general comfort level, it tends to be heteronormative in nature, even if so unintentionally. So while the majority finds comfort in complicity, marginalized students are further disenfranchised and silenced. Like Malinowitz, and DiGrazia and Boucher, I wonder how marginalized students feel in those “safe,” conflict-avoidant classroom environments. What emotions do LGBTQ students associate with coming/being out in academic settings? Do LGBTQ students experience homophobia in the mainstream writing classroom? These are just some of the questions that motivated my pilot study.

Initial findings from the pilot study indicate that a good number (ten participants or 37%) of participants report experiencing homophobia from their instructors and their course materials; and even more (twelve participants or 44%) report experiencing homophobia from their classmates. This is most certainly an important observation, but what struck me most was how generous and forgiving participants were in their
explanations of these incidents, blaming them on “unknown” ignorance and homophobia. For example, one participant explains, “it was more ignorance than outright homophobia. My Women’s Writing prof did not know who Audre Lorde was, and generally assigned all hetero readings.” Similar to David Wallace’s points, in “Out in the Academy,” about using his sexuality to intervene in others’ heteronormative thinking, another participant writes,

It is unknown homophobia. People operate in the mentality that “most” couples are a boy and a girl. I am often given the opportunity to choose to go with this teacher's assumption or come out in class by using my experience to show that not all couples are the same (or that not everyone has a monogamous two-some). It is exhausting coming out (and BEING THAT GIRL) in multiple classes throughout the day. I have never felt unsafe just disgusted with the level of ignorance that persists even in an academic setting.

Despite framing these instances of heteronormativity as ignorance or a lack of attention, this participant is clearly frustrated and dismayed. There is most certainly some aspect of tension that weighs heavily on LGTBQ students in classrooms where they experience homophobia, between letting homophobic instances go or putting themselves in a risky position to intervene and object. In other words, rather than being the teacher’s responsibility, some LGBTQ students may feel they must decide whether they will let the

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39 Campus climate reports, like Susan Rankin’s 2005 study, tend to focus on sexual minorities’ experience of harassment and physical safety. Rankin describes that reports of such homophobic incidents usually go unacknowledged or unresolved due to lack of support from instructors and more so from administrators (19).
heteronormative teachers’ assumptions slide or use their own sexuality to prove a point as Wallace suggests.

Other participants reported perceived ignorance from their instructors regarding LGBTQ identities and existence. For example, one student reports, “Professor used gender and sex interchangeably, and used a slur in their powerpoint.” Another explains, “my poetry professor has been sexist before and one of my ethnic lit professors made rude comments about lesbian characters.” It seems these instances have stayed with these students, yet they report them without seeming to pass judgment or react emotionally.

Similarly, when asked whether or not they felt if sexuality had intentionally been avoided or left out of writing instruction, one participant responds, “it has been left out but I don’t think it was out of intent or malice but rather it just never crossed the instructor’s mind.”

Participants also explain experiencing homophobia from classmates. One participant writes, “the few times I can think of are very rare and mostly involve ignorant comments, not necessarily meant to be malicious.” Another, says, “biphobia and homophobia have been prevalent when discussing ‘controversial issues,’ and I’ve heard a guy in my class make slurs against trans people in my freshman comp class.” Although I do not wish to over-generalize the experiences of LGBTQ students, I can say from first-hand experience that it is not largely uncommon to overhear discriminatory comments about LGBTQ people or to experience “well-meaning” micro-aggressions that stem from heteronormativity in both public and academic spaces.

Based on my own experience in both taking and teaching queercentric writing classes, it is my belief that instances of discrimination and micro-aggression that stem
from homophobia and ignorance are less likely to occur in queercentric environments for two reasons:

- Homophobic and LGBTQ-ignorant instances are less likely to occur because the space is queercentric. When LGBTQ experience is centered, it is more likely to be understood and valued; therefore, members in these communities tend to be more aware of how hurtful and silencing heteronormative thinking and comments can be. The result is a greater sensitivity to language and thinking that is hurtful and degrading to LGBTQ folx.

- When/if homophobic and LGBTQ-ignorant instances do occur in queercentric spaces, they are more likely to be directly and effectively addressed. Because LGBTQ lives are understood and valued, members in these communities are more likely to feel empowered and confident; therefore, they may be more willing to directly address ignorance tied to homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism (both in queercentric and mainstream spaces). The likelihood that community members provide a reserved space to discuss and address these issues is also higher in queercentric courses.

I have experienced numerous occasions where LGBTQ and other marginalized students felt empowered to speak out against micro-aggressions, monogamous-driven thinking, systematic oppressions, and individual comments that they found to be problematic or offensive. Most of the time, they were generous in addressing them, saying things like, “I just want to point out that we cannot assume citizens of one particular country support the homophobic policies of their nation-state, particularly when they are LGBTQ” or “People
have actually moved away from using *transgendered*; let’s talk about why.” These aren’t moments of “calling someone out”; rather they are conversation starters, coming from students who wish to address the tension they feel in academic environments.

There are countless other advantages for LGBTQ students in queercentric academic environments. Scholars have pointed to the benefits of acknowledgement, agency, and solidarity. For instance, SJ Miller claims,

For students to experience (a)gender and (a)sexuality self-determination, two conditions must be present: they must be afforded favorable social contexts and have authentic identity-affirming choices. In the classroom, optimal conditions that make self-determination possible include activities that foster independence, agency, integrity, an adequate range of options, and that authenticate cultural identity (Moses). (40)

It makes sense to rhetoric and composition instructors that validating lived experience, cultural identity, and oppression can do wonders for marginalized students. But do students, or those who are being sponsored, realize how powerful acknowledgement and agency can be? I’m encouraged that may be the case, based on the responses from these LGBTQ pilot study participants. The majority of them (twenty or 74%) report having taken a class that has acknowledged or affirmed LGBTQ identities, and they describe these classes having a positive impact on them. Specifically, in a writing class, one respondent seems to have felt the empowerment translate from self-determination of LGBTQ identity to their actual writing practices. They say the course, “allowed me to
realize my sexuality/identity.” Another writes, that in the course, “I felt free to be and write how I want to.”

LGBTQ students also face an obvious power differential in mainstream courses, and they are well aware of the potential consequences of outing themselves either directly or indirectly. For instance, one pilot study participant says, of coming/being out, “it’s a really awkward thing because your profs control your grades.” Another responds, “I’m afraid of backlash from peers and professors. I’m afraid I won’t be taken seriously because ‘I don’t look like a lesbian’.” The respondent discusses feeling fear when naming her lesbian identity in the classroom space. The fact that this participant writes, “I don’t look like a lesbian” in scare quotes suggests that this might be a typical response to her outing herself in public spaces, something that might be less likely to occur in a queercentric environment.

In the same way Malinowitz’s case studies demonstrate how much more comfortable and generative LGTBQ students’ experiences are in the context of queer discourse communities, one participant explains how much more rewarding she felt the course was: “It was an incredibly inclusive and relaxing atmosphere that made me fully enjoy the course to an extent that I don’t normally.” Another describes, “The experience was extremely meaningful for me. It really helped me feel more connected to other LGBTQ people, which was instrumental to my development personally and academically.” Another student linked the queercentric environment to their coming out: “I had a queer composition course which was the first classroom experience where LGBTQ lives and identities were acknowledged. Not surprisingly, this was the first class
I came out in.” In each of these cases, respondents reported a change in their feelings about their sexual identities, their willingness to come/be out, and a direct impact on their writing practices. SJ Miller explains, “as adolescents come to see their realities reflected, affirmed, and made legible both through literacy practices in the classroom and society writ large, self-determination and, hence, a queer autonomy can be realized” (38). Similarly, in queercentric environments, LGBTQ students have the opportunity to see themselves as (in)credible subjects, which is empowering. Rather than situating their identities in response to mainstream, heteronormative spaces, they are able to explore and articulate their identities in concert with other LGBTQ folx.

When asked if they would take a queercentric writing course if one were offered40, participants responded:

- “It provides a necessary perspective which is rarely found in standard course.”
- “There is a lack of LGBTQ representation in writing. If there is representation, it usually comes from an outside point of view from a straight instructor.”
- “It would be easier for me to write and involve myself and identity in my writing.”
- “They can have different opinions on topics that heterosexual instructors might not have. They are also more willing to talk about subjects that other instructors might not be willing to talk about.”
- (my personal favorite) “It takes one to truly know one.”

40 Only two participants say they would not take a queercentric course; their reasons include time constrictions and an assumption that these courses involve creative writing.
Although these are preliminary observations from a pilot study, these statements seem to suggest that students value their identities being understood by someone within the LGBTQ community, someone with “firsthand knowledge” of being LGBTQ41. They also might illustrate how accustomed LGBTQ students are to concealing or distancing their sexuality from their classroom identity and their coursework.

In the queercentric writing classroom, LGBTQ students benefit from being reoriented in terms of writing and rhetoric’s dialogic relationship with sexuality and identity, queer rhetorical strategies, and queer methodologies. Rather than understanding identity and ethos as separate from sexuality, they see these elements as being contingent. As Ahmed points out, “institutions also involve orientation devices that keep things in place,” mostly for comfort’s sake (134). When students become attuned to this, and begin to realize that these devices function to regulate and silence fringe identities, they better understand how queer rhetorical practices work against the normative machinery. And they begin to see “possibilities rather than requirements” (Ahmed 99). Queercentric writing courses, along with the queer literacy sponsorship bound to be embedded within those communities, allow for a proliferation of queer identities in a way mainstream classes seldom achieve. They foster breadth and depth in terms of what queer(ness) and queer identities entail.

Because I am queer, I understand that identifying as LGBTQ isn’t enough; it’s just a start to how we understand and classify ourselves: personally, I identify most

41 Some participants say that taking a queercentric course would be a good way to connect with other LGBTQ individuals, since “it’s difficult to meet LGBT peers here.” Others feel it would be a safer, more comfortable space in which to be out, without the risk of “having it feel like I am constantly coming out only to be a token.”
simply as queer. With more time and space, within an LGBTQ context, I identify as an out queer femme lesbian. Each word – each identity – means something significant to me. (Gloria Anzaldúa identified as “chicana dyke-feminist, tejana patlache poet, writer, and cultural theorist.”) (Hetero)Normative research and forms, at best, provide one non-straight option (mostly, just “LGBT” or “same sex”). LGBTQ driven research provides a large range of boxes to check, and most also include a comment box so participants can name their own identity. This is how queercentric work changes the game and expands spaces for others to join and participate, on their own terms.

Queer Selves and Writing

Besides offering understanding and solidarity, queercentric writing environments and queer literacy sponsorship connect LGBTQ people to their identities. They engage what normative approaches deny: subjectivity and the meaning behind that positionality. As John Goshert explains, “students are either invited into or further distanced from the challenges and complexities of their critical histories” (11); queercentric writing classrooms and queer literacy sponsorship invites students to investigate and embrace the challenges and complexities of their critical histories and lived experiences. Chances are that our LGBTQ student-writers already have somewhat of a handle on their own complicated subjectivities and would benefit from being in a classroom of like-minded people, without having to waste time explaining entry-level LGBTQ material to their readers, as Malinowitz points out. Instead of having to explain the acronym LGBTQ or what it means to be asexual or queer (and that, yes, it’s okay to say that word), LGBTQ folx might spend time explaining what identifying as an aromantic ace entails or how
Black culture largely neglects gayness and mocks the trans community. It might mean a black bisexual female and an Asian-American gay male learning about culture-specific heterosexism from each others’ experiences of discrimination. I would argue that these deeper investigations into myriad queer identities leads to more generative and worthwhile research and writing for LGBTQ students, particularly in the context of queercentric writing environments.

Additionally, they connect LGBTQ people to one another, offer support, and provide avenues toward establishing and (re)claiming a queer ethos. For example, one of my pilot study participants writes, “[Being LGBTQ means] being a part of a group of people that understand and are compassionate/empathetic to what struggles I have gone through because of my identity.” Students with common goals and objectives establish communities of discourse, practice, and/or action; doing so with others who identify as LGBTQ can offer a unique discourse community experience for students, especially when these communities form in classrooms rather than in social or activist spaces (like gay bars, LGBTQ group meetings or organizations, through existing LGBTQ networks, etc.). Additionally, queer becomes a secondary discourse and critical lens for students. It starts to mean more than just non-normative sexualities; it becomes a set a politics that aims for the destruction of oppressive structures and regimes of power, in and outside of the academy, to grant all human beings justice, dignity, physical safety, and sovereignty. In addition to paying attention to the laws, policies, and injustices threatening the
LGBTQ community, students with queer politics begin to see all oppressions as being connected\(^{42}\).

My own lived experience as an out queer academic has shown me that we queers have different ways of connecting with and learning from our queer mentors, role models, and literacy sponsors: we are drawn to them because we see ourselves in them, or perhaps because we \textit{want} to see ourselves in them. They encourage us to be visible to someone else, to create an academic culture of outness, empowerment, and queer agency despite and in spite of homophobic and exclusionary academic conventions and practices.

\(^{42}\) It is common to know queer scholars who also advocate for the equity and justice of others, like Harriet Malinowitz, who left her tenured position of nearly two decades to research Zionism and face the realities Palestine suffers, and has long suffered, on Israel’s behalf.
CHAPTER 4: MAKING IT QUEER, NOT CLEAR: QUEER METHODOLOGIES OF EXCESS, FAILURE, AND AMBIVALENCE

As a queer rhetor, I myself often feel like my identity is limited on the proverbial academic page. When I compose zines and multimodal and digital texts, and invoke narrative and queer rhetoric, I come through in the text in ways I cannot on standard, MLA-formatted 8.5 x 11 sheets of paper (whether tangible or digital). My thoughts – and the meaning I make – are contained by these parameters. Similarly, my thinking is somewhat restricted when I am asked to take a firm stance; I prefer to take my time, write through things, and play around in the messy stuff. That’s where my best writing comes from. It’s the kind of work that not only speaks to the kind of rhetor and thinker I am, but also to my experiences. I’ve engaged and explored my own ambivalence through/with/in numerous writing tasks: regarding my feelings about growing up with Barbie dolls; getting married despite my queer politics; and using silence to enact (usually very loud) queer activism on National Day of Silence. Exploring contradictions and tension helps me understand why it isn’t always easy to come to a conclusion, and it helps me to feel a little more comfortable-being-uncomfortable. (And although it will bother my mom and some others to read this in print:) I really just like to use my writing to fuck shit up. And I like to teach my writing students how to use some of the same queer rhetorical strategies in their writing. Witnessing them experience, for themselves, where the compulsion to fuck shit up comes from is exciting and can even be transformative. The following chapter centers on a few queer pedagogies, methodologies, and practices that move writers closer to that kind of work.
Most academic writing tasks ask writers to take a stand, to clearly articulate a position in order to persuade their audiences. Then, using logic and sound evidence, develop and execute a clear argument. Logic, linearity, clarity and coherence are typically considered strengths – even mandatory in academic writing; as a result, polished products become “fetishized” in the writing classroom (McRuer). Finished, “clean” drafts erase the messy process behind themselves – and, as Robert McRuer points out, isn’t that what writing and composition are about in the first place, a messy process rather than a tidy endpoint? So what happens when a messy, marginalized subject is compelled to write? What tone and tenor do these voices invoke? For marginalized writers, illogic, love, ambivalence, and excess can be more organic and generative strategies. The academic research-based essay, a genre that often upholds tightly controlled academic conventions, has little room for these non-normative strategies, though. The narrow, and often binarized, spaces writers are typically permitted to write from and within, serve as a way to not only regulate and normalize texts, but also persons and their identities.

Academic writing can feel rigid, exclusionary, and uninspiring for authors that write from disenfranchised subject positions, particularly so for those of color and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer+ (LGBTQ) individuals.

Similar to the academic writing it grows and supports, research is expected to be sound, ethical, and distanced from the researcher in order to be taken seriously. Standard research methodologies are tightly regulated and authorized by a larger, trusted governing body, known as the Institutional Review Board (IRB). By IRB’s standards, all approved
research is to take place under expert supervision, using tried-and-tested measurements in order to demonstrate or prove a point of value. More specifically, empirical research, which carries its own problematic epistemology, has historically been used to establish credibility, scientific knowledge, and even governing Truths. Yet, IRB is also an important step in assuring the protection and safety of all participants, including those from vulnerable populations like the LGBTQ community. Generally speaking, these normative strictures, however, don’t always feel accurate or appropriate for people who exist on the margins.

For this reason, in this chapter, I consider the potential of ambivalence and rhetorical resistance writing as queer methodologies; furthermore, I argue for ambivalence and excess as generative sites for meaning making, particularly for queer subjects. Furthermore, I consider how students can employ queer rhetoric and queer failure to upset rigid academic conventions. Using a multimodal course project I assign as an illustration, I consider how these queer methodologies might trouble the (field’s) valorization of normativity, firm stances, and conventional ethos. The chapter is guided by the following research questions: What happens when writing teachers encourage student-writers, particularly those that are LGBTQ or otherwise marginalized, to resist and refuse the compulsion to compose coherent, cohesive and polished products (Alexander and Rhodes “Queer:”)? What if, instead, we asked writers to muddle or reposition the argument(s) at hand? In other words, what if composition functioned as a disordering agent (McRuer)? What do subversive composing practices offer marginalized people?

43 Empirical research and its research practices can be troublesome, particularly for colonized subjects and peoples, because of historical aims to make and disseminate knowledge from an outside perspective, sometimes with little to no interest in the impact on the research’s subjects or their communities.
students, and what happens when they learn about and deploy subversive composing practices with *rhetorical* and *political* intention?

**Queer(ing) Methodologies**

“The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence”

– Jack Halberstam

Fringe subjects, those marked by difference – women; LGBTQ individuals; persons of color; non-citizens – already-always lack credibility in Dominant discourse, which prizes normativity and male hetero-whiteness. Non-standard language use, alternative ways of knowing, different types of evidence, and unconventional rhetorical appeals can further complicate these authors’ ethos. But marginal subjectivities offer unique insight because of the knowledge gained through lived experience. This is just one reason queer methodologies are – dare I say – more appropriate for queer subjects: they allow for alternative identities and experiences.

As Kath Browne and Catherine Nash point out, in the Introduction to *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, it doesn’t feel right to attach fixed, secure, stable data to unfixed, unstable, disruptive subjects (1). And so, queer methodologies have emerged as ways to honor the fluidity and instability of queerness and queer knowledge. I understand *queer methodologies* to be anti-normative approaches to knowledge and meaning that are unconventional in their form, content, authorization, and/or applications. And while they may or may not be directly tied to sexual identity and sexuality, it seems important these methodologies remain connected to a queer socio-political context in order to be
successful. Subjectivity is a remarkable indicator of context, for it captures the ways in which the various facets of our identity are assigned meaning and, with that meaning, how that meaning impacts lived experience. In *Compelled to Write*, David L. Wallace argues, “rhetoric becomes alternative when it engages the individual’s subjectivity rather than attempting to erase it and accounts for the positioning of that subjectivity within the discourse of power that enfranchise some and marginalize others” (5). Wallace advocates for rhetoric that not only acknowledges non-normative subjectivity, but also understands and learns from its positioning as non-normative to learn more about how normal(izing) Dominant discourse produces normal and abnormal subjects in the first place.

Drawing from Wallace’s logic, it would seem that methodologies also then become alternative when they “engage the individual’s subjectivity rather than attempting to erase it and account for the positioning of that subjectivity within the discourse of power” (Ibid.) Subjectivity, in general, is typically considered “too personal” or “inappropriate; moreover, certain subjectivities remain just plain unallowable as a result of not being recognized by the government, institutions, or organizations collecting research, queer research methodologies recognize and make meaning based on these subjectivities (such as those tied to sexuality). As Jacqueline Jones Royster advocates, in “When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own,” “‘subject’ position really is everything” (1117). She explains, “subjectivity as a defining value pays attention dynamically to context, ways of knowing, language abilities, and experience, and by doing so it has a consequent potential to deepen, broaden, and enrich our interpretive views in dynamic ways as well” (Ibid.). Like Royster, queer methodologies admit and
validate that subjectivities, such as those related to sexual identity, can affect and contextualize a research subject’s experience and responses. And these queer methods go a step further by drawing attention to the damage conventional methodologies and their underlying ideologies can cause.

The socio-political realities of LGBTQ people have long been unaccounted for in conventional research. How many of us have been unable to select a box on a form, application, or survey because our identities and relationships were not listed as ‘legitimate’ options? For example, most forms conflate sex and gender; “male” and “female” are often the only options for gender identity; and before the national marriage equality ruling, those of us who are married, but not legally, were forced to check “single.” Queer methodologies seek to expand not only representation for non-normative individuals, but also ways for representing them and their complexities and paradoxes. Drawing from feminist and queer theories, these methodologies work to identify and combat homophobia, resist and challenge the status quo, and reveal and dismantle oppressive institutions. For this reason, they can be particularly useful in writing classrooms that seek to explore, challenge, and/or disrupt dominant culture; furthermore, they can be productive sites for subjects-in-process, fluid subjects, and those with hybrid and intersectional identities who find academic conventions narrow and inadequate.

Disciplinary Normativity

“Who gave us the permission to perform the act of writing?” – Gloria Anzaldúa

“We need not to restrict but expand” – Joseph Harris
All of the aforementioned shifts and measures have a history of functioning through, as well as perpetuating, normativity. As many scholars have pointed out, writing students were long presumed to be mostly single, stable identities: white, Christian, heterosexual, monolingual, middle or upper class, able-bodied (and for a long time, just male). Because the students were predominantly privileged and monocultural, these normative measures became mainstays. Thankfully, over time, cultural identity work and cultural rhetorics have become more central to the field, and the field’s leading organization, NCTE/CCCC, has issued numerous statements aimed at honoring students’ home discourses and identities (from 1974’s Students Rights to Their Own Language to the more recent #blacklivesmatter movement). But, unfortunately, the long-term impact has not fundamentally upset the discipline’s emphasis on mainstream and Dominant discourses and identities, proper usage, or clear, polished texts.

Like education at large, writing classrooms have a long history as sites of regulation, correction, and order. Early on, before open enrollments changed the university and nature of composition courses, students’ themes were meticulously gone over and harshly graded. Multiple scholars discuss how, and why, the focus of student response has long been tied to discipline. In 1977, in Errors and Expectations, Mina Shaughnessy begins a conversation about basic writing and the discipline’s growing “obsession with error” (392). She explains,

44 While these identities were assumed and tended to be dominant, I do not mean to erase or disrespect those closeted individuals, who were either compelled or expected to conceal their queerness, disabilities, accents and/or dialects, etc. in order to safely maintain employment.
When one considers the damage that has been done to students in the name of correct writing, this effort to redefine error so as to exclude most of the forms that give students trouble in school and to assert the legitimacy of other kinds of English is understandable. Doubtless it is part of a much vaster thrust within this society not only to reduce the penalties for being culturally different but to be enriched by that diversity. (Shaughnessy 393)

Shaughnessy makes the connection between error correction and language difference, arguing that such an emphasis on correctness has consequences because it implies that non-standard/dominant language usage is “incorrect,” “bad,” and “wrong.” Shaughnessy details how basic writers often internalize the stigma of error and incorrectness—believing they are “bad writers,” which can result in deflated confidence and an increased hesitancy to put too much into their writing because of the scrutiny they face. In numerous articles, Mike Rose confirms these sentiments are common among writers who are classified as “basic,” forced to take “remedial” courses, which deem them as problems to be fixed.

Others extend this conversation by inquiring further into the ways in which the field, and academic writing in general, disciplines students and their writing on a much more insidious level, in terms of home identity and language—what John Trimbur classifies as, “linguistic and cultural homogeneity” (144). Rhetoric and composition scholars Victor Villanueva, Richard Scott Lyons, and Geneva Smitherman all focus on linguistic and rhetorical discrimination, writing from first-hand experience. They

poignantly detail the painful process of linguistic assimilation and the subsequent loss and identity crises experienced when non-dominant speakers take on academic English. In “Maybe a Colony: And Still Another Critique of the Comp Community,” Villanueva, a Puerto Rican American, argues, “the demand for linguistic and rhetorical compliance still smacks of colonialism” (992). He continues, “I want us to consider the possibility that traditional ways of teaching literacy have not only forced particular languages and dialects upon America’s people of color, but have forced particular ways with language – rhetorical patterns – patterns that help to maintain American racial, ethnic, and cultural stratification, as well as gender and class” (Ibid.). When students are expected to assimilate their language, their culture and identity are assimilated as a consequence. The result is not only hybrid language, but also hybrid and “split” identities⁴⁶.

Lyons, a Native American rhetor who also frames the composition classroom as a site of colonization, responds by arguing for rhetorical sovereignty, the right of a people to determine their own standards of communication, meant to spare them the “cultural violence” of “rhetorical imperialism” (1132). Similarly, Smitherman enacts hybridity and linguistic resistance as she code-meshes throughout her infamous 1973 article, “‘God Don’t Never Change’: Black English from a Black Perspective.” She cites the following as both symptoms of and motivations for Standard English’s regime in the academy at large and in individual composition classrooms: “substituting one linguistic authority for another”; “attempts to make ‘outsiders’ talk like the ‘insiders’”; and “racism in the area of linguistics” (829-30). She argues the (white) linguistic norm is silencing and bleaches

⁴⁶Trinh Minh-ha describes this nervous condition as being “elsewhere, within here.” As she explains, “the tale of hyphenated reality continues its hybridizing process. It mutates in the repercussive course of its reproduction as it multiplies and displaces itself from one context to another” (Trinh 34).
the cultural diversity students bring to the classroom: “Methinks there is some insidious design afoot to cut off Black students from their cultural roots” (833). In *Interests and Opportunities*, Steve Lamos agrees that composition programs – their emphasis on Standard English – have a history of “reify[ing] a racist status quo” in their denial of the pluralism of World Englishes. He argues, “I embrace the pursuit of worthwhile standards, but I also seek to identify and critique those problematic standards that promote an unfair social and racial status quo under the guise of serving students’ needs” (Lamos 5, 6). Thus, the conversation about disciplining students turns toward not only linguistic, but also racial justice.

Forty years after Shaughnessy, after decades of the diversification and being motivated by social justice issues, composition, as a field and writing course, still tends to perpetuate the oppression of the students it aims to educate and empower. Like Lamos, Lyons, and Trimbur, bell hooks also accuses the very curriculum and pedagogues who seek to embrace liberation, marginality, and difference of being unable “to break with behavior patterns that reinforce and perpetuate domination” (53). Along the same lines, numerous scholars working with feminism, queer identities, and writing (including) describe how traditional writing conventions reflect and perpetuate capitalist, heterosexist, and racist ideologies that alienate and discipline writers. These scholars frame the writing classroom not only as regulatory, obsessed with order and clarity (Alexander and Rhodes *Queered*; Alexander and Rhodes “Queer:”), but also as homophobic. For instance, in *Textual Orientations*, Harriet Malinowitz was one of the first writing scholars (since Anon. in *College English*) to point to the “[systematic]
institutionalized homophobia” that seeps into writing classroom and writing instruction (23). As she explains, this systematic homophobia happens on multiple levels and from different sources: among classmates, from instructors, through selected readings, oversights in discussions, regulations regarding research and writing topics, narrow curriculums, and from the structures and strictures of the institutions themselves. Zan Meyer Gonçalves, too, points to the ways education in general “disallow[s] certain topics” (28).

But, as Alexander describes in *Literacy, Sexuality, and Pedagogy*, composition classrooms and universities do not just ignore the sexualities of LGBTQ students; they tend to neglect the sexualities of straight students too. More specifically, Alexander accuses composition programs of being “infantilizing,” treating student writers as sexually immature rather than as adults with complex sexual identities, whether LGBTQ or straight. This sexual infantilizing, too, is systemic and institutionalized, as school has always been a place that has been unwelcoming – even afraid – of students’ sexualities. From a young age, students learn schoolwork is one of the last places to discuss sex, sexuality, and sexual identity. In fact, it is well known that institutions, like school and church, have always stripped out anything having to do with sex beyond health class units and sex education, which has a history of being judgmental, inadequate, heterosexist, outdated, and (often intentionally) misinformed47.

Scholars have also drawn connections between the control the composition classroom – and the field itself, by its nature – exerts over students. For instance, in *Crip

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47 See Chapter 3 for more on Alexander’s ideas about sexual literacy and Deborah Brandt’s literacy sponsorship, which always entails a “delivery of ideological freight.”
Theory, McRuer calls the contemporary neoliberal university “literally disciplining,” focused on efficiency, with a “slick, corporate feel” (166). He draws literal and metaphorical connections between the normalizing practices of writing instruction and the dictionary definition of composition, “a process that reduces difference, forms many ingredients into one substance, or even calms, settles, or frees from agitation” (147). Composition and composure, after all, share the same root: composure means “being calm or in control”; composition is defined as “the act of pulling things together.” But what does that imply for subjects? In response, Alexander questions, “how does one compose oneself or become composed as a ‘straight’ person?” (Literacy 106). What does the discipline ask of writers when it asks them to “pull themselves together”? Drawing from Michel Foucault’s work in Discipline and Punish, Jonathan Alexander and Jackie Rhodes argue such a request “disciplines it [the subject] into a docile body” (“Queer:” 189). By this logic, docile bodies are “possible” subjects, while noncompliant bodies are “impossible” subjects, thus their argument that queer, because of its deviation from the status quo, is an impossible subject/“subject” for composition.

In resistance, they decry the field’s reliance upon and perpetuation of the status quo. They explain, “We do feel a status quo at work in our field – the status quo of the composed text, of the drive toward polished writing, of using even the messy genres of digitally enabled communication for the generation of finished texts” (Alexander and Rhodes “Queer:” 194). Troubling the field means “troubling” its histories, values and practices. In a queer move, McRuer troubles the very definition of our field and its reinforcement of “safe, contained, composed” authors and texts, and asks, “What would
happen if, true to our experiences in and out of the classroom, we continually attempted
to reconceive *composing as that which produced agitation* – to reconceive it,
paradoxically, as what it is? In what ways might that agitation be generative?” (168, my
emphasis 148). Feminist and queer pedagogies and methodologies promote the kinds of
agitation McRuer speaks of, and in doing so, they open up and expand rhetoric for non-
normative subjects, which allows them to push back against mainstream ideologies, ways
of knowing, and composing practices.

Feminist and Queer Methodologies: Passing, Excess, and Failure

“Pedagogy becomes both the site of and a figure for the failure of control that writing
promises”

– Pamela Caughie

In response, teachers of writing are constantly imagining new ways to invoke
critical pedagogies in service of social justice, guided by an elastic and fluid sense of both
writing and rhetoric, from the integration of sexuality to multimodal writing tasks. As
Laura Micciche explains, feminist and queer pedagogies in particular are continually
changing the landscape of Writing Studies, “creat[ing] spaces for marginalized voices
and resist[ing] the constraints of academic discourse” (113). We all know there are rules
and conventions to follow, and we also know their underlying values do not usually stem
from marginalized groups or minority discourses; rather they are passed down from, and
function in the service of, those in power and the normative. According to Teresa Ebert,
mainstream writing and its conventions benefit a particular class; they value the status
quo rather than the marginalized. She explores the manifesto and polemic as powerful
genres for resisting those values. Feminist and queer – both resistant frameworks –
provide emergent strategies to interrogate these hierarchies of discourse, from the outside in. They welcome and honor marginalized subjectivities and the lived experience that would normally be ignored, silenced, or excluded. When these subjectivities, and their complications, are invited to the table, the game changes. Rather than being spoken about, these subjects speak and advocate for themselves, on their own terms and even amongst themselves. As an illustration for the queer issues I am interested in, such a paradigm shift might mean moving away from (mostly) straight people debating gay marriage toward a heated discussion among LGBTQ people about the dangers, privileges, and homonormative inflections of marriage and the wedding industrial complex (WID). Queer methodologies and pedagogies seek to explore spaces of tension and conflict like this, seeking to unravel rather than close and engage discomfort rather than avoid it.

Rather than easing discomfort by smoothing over conflicts during (queer) contact zone incidents in the classroom, whether in writing or during discussions, queer pedagogies invite contradictions and are content with students feeling ill at ease. As Alexander explains,

Indeed, as we work with students on developing an appreciation for and understanding of how writing moves in the world, we should not eschew texts that are difficult and challenging in favor of texts that replicate ‘safe’ norms or tolerable differences. Doing so robs students of developing a strong critical sense of the power of writing to challenge, to unsettle, to change us…To create opportunities to understand one another… may require that we risk substantive
discomfort. And I would argue that such discomfort itself may be the proper subject of student compositions as they grapple with the queer other. (“Queer Pedagogy”)

Queer is, at its so-called core, about disruption and resistance. When teachers of English experience contact zone moments in the classroom, they might try to smooth over rifts to keep students comfortable rather than dig deeper into their value systems. Yet, we know public discourse isn’t always comfortable and safe; it is agonistic and tense, and there are often serious material consequences, like rights and federal protections, at stake because it also tends to be heteronormative. Students are generally more comfortable with stable, binarized identity categories, and even when they accept difference, it tends to fit somewhere into a (homo)normative framework. This temptation toward fixed knowledge and security can put teachers and students in compromising positions.

Pamela Caughie describes risky pedagogical moments like these as *slippage* and *passing*, the “appropriate figure[s] for the anxiety of having no secure position,” along with the allowance of disconcerting moments to remain, making the moment dynamic (13). She explains, “‘passing’ necessarily figures that always slippery difference between standing for something (having a firm position) and passing as something (having no position or a fraudulent one)” (Caughie 25). Rather than tie up loose ends and make everything neat and tidy – polished and sanitized, passing invites an ethical and performative unraveling of sorts that is intended to produce new (un)knowledge. When students are allowed to remain de/uncomposed, uncertain, messy, and in-process, they are more likely to tap into possibility, potential, and a performative passing of their own.
Queer methodologies, like passing, “mean learning to live and act without such guarantees” (Caughie 24). In resisting the urge to concretely know the answers, passing instead invites a sense of discomfort and unknowing, which in turn becomes its own site of meaning. Moving students away from Truth and absolute knowledge toward inquiry and exploration is a cornerstone of queer theory and queer pedagogy. Doing so disrupts traditional objectives of writing courses where students are asked to produce “original” thought and sound evidence-based arguments. But moves like these might create a sense of anxiety for composition students (and teachers) looking for certainty and answers. As Alexander acknowledges, “certainly, some will argue that it is perhaps impossible to construct writing assignments based on what is impossible to know—on incommensurability, or unknowability. But I maintain that that unknowability is the proper subject of writing itself” (“Queer Pedagogy”). This unknowability, the incommensurability Caughie and Alexander refer to and encourage in writing classrooms, is what McRuer labels excess: “the sweetness of critique that finds the remainder, the forgotten, the hidden” (155). Although these scholars’ discussions center on more abstract notions of excess, for the queer purposes I’m interested in, I understand it to be a space of (im)possibility – one that cannot be expected, anticipated, articulated, or regulated. It is something more emergent and unpredictable, like queer itself.

In 2011 Alexander and Rhodes reprise McRuer’s notions of excess in the queer composition conversation in “Queer: An Impossible Subject for Composition,” arguing “a queer tradition of texts suggests to us that we need excess in order to produce texts that perform complicated critical work” (196). They view excess as a means to a more
complicated place rather than a clear end point. The field calls for conclusions and polished products, whereas queer scholars seek what’s left on “the cutting room floor” (Alexander and Rhodes “Queer:”), that is: that which fails to (make it to the) finish. I cannot speak to what others might leave on the cutting room floor, but for me personally, it usually means personal narratives, stories or mentions of my lesbian and queer identities, mentions of my partner (I find it difficult to write her out of my life…), anger, risky words or ideas, etc. It also means writing about things I don’t know how to write about (yet), perhaps even writing myself into an argument rather than writing from a position.

Wallace also makes a similar case for queer pedagogies and methodologies like excess that reach toward the unfinished and unknown, yet he draws from Butler’s notion of opacity. He explains opacity as the “fundamental incompleteness of knowledge of both the self and the other – [it] is the foundation for a new approach to rhetoric that seeks not to minimize or eliminate this basic incompleteness but to embrace it” (Wallace 6). Rather than look for similarities between the self and the other to negate tension, queer opens itself up to the startling differences and to the politics of that difference. This excess also allows for incommensurability within difference – what José Esteban Muñoz dubs disidentifications, which resist seamless, inclusive, and static identity categories for the marginalized. Disidentification is the space of unknowing between the Self and Other; another’s difference and oppression can never fully be known. Similarly, Karen Kopelson identifies excess as a “recurrent theme” that provokes complexity, intersectionality and hybridity – all decisive components of queer(ness). For Kopelson, excess allows for what
static identity shuts down: fluidity, flexibility, hybridity. She explains, “perhaps the most common critique of identity politics, of course, is that it forecloses this possibility of excess; that is, as marginalized groups organize to rectify their outsider status, they create a falsely unified front that itself becomes exclusionary in its disavowal of multiplicity within the group, in its failure to make spaces for differences within difference” (my emphasis 24). But how do we foster those spaces?

As discussed in Chapter 3, queercentric discourse communities offer a promising site for this kind of transformative work. They espouse a particular kind of comradery between members, but they should also (ideally) provide a space for dissension and deconstruction among participants and their beliefs and values. Like the four students Malinowitz describes in Textual Orientations, LGBTQ people find themselves more interested and engaged when they experience an LGBTQ context, as opposed to a normative one. When marginalized populations are repositioned closer to the center, positioned to critique from the outside-in, their thinking takes new directions. These new contexts allow for generative (dis)identifications with other LGBTQ people and allow for (re)imaginings of the queer self, particularly in public and academic spaces. Rather than simply creating a site where LGBTQ students can articulate and express their sexual identities, these classrooms and strategies provide a space where LGBTQ identity categories can be further destabilized, troubled and considered. LGBTQ students, and other students with marginalized and/or fractured subjectivities, have much to gain in paying close, critical attention to the “disruptive voices at [the] margins,” rather than to ignore, condense, or collapse them (Malinowitz 19). LGBTQ voices might already be
interpreted as disruptive voices in a mainstream writing classroom; in a queercentric writing environment, students begin to see shades of disruption *within and between* the LGBTQ community and can then better analyze and understand how those disturbances manifest *vis-à-vis* the failure of normative rhetorical practices.

As Jack Halberstam explains, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, societal notions of success tend to be both (hetero)normative and capitalistic. The ideology of success drives and supports labor, spending, marriage, procreation, and conventional familial structures. Therefore, if queer wants to resist the status quo, it aims for failure of those modes of normative success. They encourage, “think[ing] about ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success. I argue that success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulations” (2). Rather than subjecting oneself to others’ expectations and norms, there is power and agency in investigating and critiquing normative success and in failing to be successful on one’s own terms. There is also a sense of relief and freedom, since the subject’s goal is not mandated nor governed by another. As Halberstam points out, drawing from Foucault, we move ourselves to power when we flip the script of normative success to instead embrace that which is unknown, messy, and silly.

In their discussions on failure and, more specifically, queer negativity, Halberstam engages Lee Edelman’s *No Future*, a text published seven years earlier. Throughout the text, Edelman critiques dominant culture’s reliance upon, and strategic use of, children and procreation as vehicles toward a hopeful future, what he calls
reproductive futurism. This bend toward futurity, a regard for future times rather than present conditions, is at its core a normative expression of hope that “attempt[s] to produce a more desirable social order” (2). Framing queerness as literal and conceptual threat to children and social order, he argues, “queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure” (3). In other words, queerness is all that order is not, and it feasts upon the problems social order and social structures reinforce, solidify, and perpetuate. Queerness cannot, will not make promises in the same ways hegemonic culture does. It resists futurity and success and turns instead toward death and failure.

“The queer art of failure,” as Halberstam explains, “turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being. Failure can be counted within that set of oppositional tools that James C. Scott called ‘the weapons of the weak’” (88). It is this description of failure I connect with my research, which, admittedly, leans toward the more positive connotations of failure that Halberstam discusses. Although my deployment of failure might be understood as being more generative and positive than Halberstam or Edelman intend (since generation and positivity imply futurity), my use of failure certainly also always welcomes and fosters those “darker territories of failure associated with futility, sterility, emptiness, loss, negative affect in general, and modes of unbecoming” (Halberstam 23). Drawing from both Halberstam’s work with failure and Edelman’s work with the death drive, it is apparent that queer seeks to destroy notions of
a secure, stable future – something conventions work so hard to uphold. Invoking queer rhetorical strategies in the composition classroom is one way to push for the failure of these normative writing conventions and disrupt the ties the field has with composure and order. In this way, according to Halberstam, failure constitutes a refusal, while still remaining an ongoing site for renewal and the existence of queer(ness).

Queer Rhetorical Strategies: Pushing for the Failure of Normative Conventions

Jonathan Alexander and Jackie Rhodes explain queer rhetorical practices as those “that recognize the necessity sometimes of saying ‘No,’ of saying ‘Fuck, no,’ of offering an impassioned, embodied, and visceral reaction to the practices of normalization that limit not just freedom, but the imagination of possibility, of potential” (“Queer:” 193).

Narrow academic conventions are colonizing forces that linger in the writing classroom. Writers of difference sense, and ultimately internalize, that they are not “right.” In “A Letter to 3rd World Women,” mestiza-rhetor, Gloria Anzaldúa, says the white man tells her, and those like her, “Don’t cultivate your colored skins nor tongues of fire if you want to make it in a right-handed world” (164). Those marked by difference are expected to reduce that difference, and remain distanced from it, throughout education, and those expectations carry over into the writing classroom. Emotional appeals and the personal are deemed weak and too informal; logos and form remain king; according to Anzaldúa, we are expected to “bow down to the sacred bull, form” (165). As Victor Villanueva explains, “academic discourse tries, after all, to reach the Aristotelian ideal of being completely logocentric” (“Memoria” 12), but logos is often inadequate. He argues, “personal discourse, the narrative, the auto/biography, helps in that effort, is a necessary
adjunct to the academic” (Villanueva “Memoria” 17). He also calls for the literal and metaphorical inclusion of memoria/memory, for it not only links authors to their own experiences, but also connects them with the experiences of Others like themselves. As Villanueva understands, from personal experience as an assimilated subject of the academy, “memory simply cannot be adequately portrayed in the conventional discourse of the academy” (“Memoria” 12). While some conventional strategies are inadequate, others feel hostile to those who are/have been oppressed.

Similarly, in her Hello, Cruel World Lite: Beta 1.0.1: the Mini Guide, in a section inspired by Audre Lorde’s point that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” Kate Bornstein provides examples of oppressive tools used by mainstream discourse: force, either/or, intimidation, capitalism, blame, etc. (4). Bornstein challenges readers to avoid these more aggressive and orthodox measures. She then introduces alternatives – what she calls the “wrong tools for the job”: magic, love, patience, illogic, culture-jamming, paradox, riddles, and so on (4). Bornstein’s alternatives can also function as subversive rhetorical techniques for LGBTQ writers who find the master’s tools as counter-productive for their aims. Alternative rhetorics (like feminist, queer, and Other rhetorics; digital rhetorics and multimodal and DIY composing) provide marginalized writers with a space to exist and explore, offering more expansive approaches to representation and ethos. Specifically, as Alexander and Rhodes’ body of work demonstrates, queer rhetoric reclaims and asserts a dissident ethos. It is strategic in that it breaks away from, and even completely avoids, heteronormative, heterosexist, and conventional composing practices that are praised for being safe and legitimate.
Queer rhetorical strategies are avenues of healing for those who find themselves, their voices, and their experiences lost to regulation. As Anzaldúa encourages third world women of color, like herself, to write, she decries the academy. She says, “I have not yet unlearned the esoteric bullshit and pseudo-intellectualizing that school brainwashed into my writing” (163). In resistance to the academy’s uptight approach to writing, Anzaluda is rhetorically resistant, and her intention is about justice and sovereignty. In her discussion of third-space zines, Adela Licona argues for the use of Anzaldúaian practices, which she describes as, “rhetorical and material practices that allow people to reimagine and to reinsert themselves into processes of transformation, both of their own subjectivities and of the world in which those subjectivities may be called forth, ignored, or rejected” (101). As a result, a third rhetorical space is created, where the subject’s experience is welcome and centered. In a move Caughie would classify as passing, Anzaldúa occupies “the space of an authority that is not authorized” (Caughie 181). In doing so, Anzaldúa gives the following advice to those who struggle to author-ize themselves to write: “throw away abstraction and the academic learning, the rules, the map and compass. Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked – not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat” (171). Anzaldúa finds potential in reality rather than convention, arguing for third world and other marginalized women to write themselves – their experiences and corporeal bodies – into existence. This advice has guided me, not only as a writer but also as a teacher of writing. But how does this kind of writing (de/re)materialize in the writing classroom?
Ambivalence and the Failure of “Firm Stances” and Clarity:

Writing Back, Writing Against, and Writing Through

“Survival is not an academic skill […] It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths”

– Audre Lorde

Like the subversion and resistance from which queer rhetorical strategies draw their strength, ambivalence too constitutes and unsettles writerly subjects, their contexts and (queer) ethos. As scholars like Anzaldúa, Smitherman, Alexander, and Rhodes have discussed and demonstrated, enacting the very rhetorical moves mainstream discourse discourages can be powerful reclamation projects. And as feminist, queer, postcolonial and transnational scholars have demonstrated, marginalized writers access incredible possibilities when they engage and create texts that write back to the forces that mark, misrepresent, and/or control them (Bhabha)48. Writing against and writing through can be equally provocative and meaningful methods. Generally a marker of distress, ambivalence is normally understood as something to be avoided rather than desired. Most scholarship considers ambivalence a side effect, or a symptom, rather than a process or methodology.

More recently, in “Reading Lauren Berlant Writing,” Gregory Seigworth discusses the metaphorical excess of Berlant’s writing, particularly her sentence structure. Like her long-winded, tangential sentences, there is much to be learned from the

48 For instance, drawing from colonization, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha situates ambivalence as hybridization – both colonized and colonizer, “being split,” and experiencing “the presence of authority” (150). He explains, “It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power – hierarchy, normalization, marginalization, and so forth. For domination is achieved through a process of disavowal that denies the differance of colonial power” (153).
“affective/sensorial natures of incoherence and ambivalence” (Seigworth 351). In other words, we ought to pay attention to the unfolding messiness rather than hesitate to approach. He explains how, for Berlant, ambivalence represents “a damp, tangled clot of incoherences. An unresolvable clog of curly ambiguities. Surplusage” (Seigworth 347). Tangled, clot, clog, curly: non-linear, messy, overlapping, blurred boundaries of where something begins and another ends. Here, ambivalence draws its energy from being a state of unresolved, enmeshment, and disorientated. Robert Yagelski, also, but from a different perspective (as he is outside the queer composition conversation yet writes of identity), defines ambivalence in similar terms. He describes ambivalence as, “a troubling space between doubt and committed action […] a space of both possibility and paralysis” (32). These authors position ambivalence as something that is at once generative and degenerative.

Rather than being perceived as a state that (further) diminishes authority, ambivalence – as a rhetorical move – can authorize the marginalized subject vis-à-vis negotiation of their identities and lived experience. This is the heteroglossic knowledge that the oppressed, rather than the oppressor, hold. Writing back, according to Bhabha, is made possible by the experience of multiple and contesting epistemologies. He explains, Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumptions of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformations and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its
identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (my emphasis 154).

Therefore, the goal of ambivalence-driven writing is simultaneously directed both outwardly (at the oppressor) and inwardly (at the oppressed): write yourself so Others might know the Self. This can be critical self-care work since difference becomes internalized over time. For Anzaldúa, writing back functions to “reconcile this other within us” (167). Facing and deepening difference can take the non-normative writer to a provocative place, a place of resistance (writing back), a place of failure and refusal (writing against), and a place of ambivalence (writing through).

Putting Queer Methodologies into Practice: The Project

These theories and methodologies have coalesced to inspire “Writing Back | Writing Against | Writing Through,” a multimodal project49 I developed for LGBTQ Identities and Writing, a junior level composition class I designed to teach at a mid-size public research institution in Appalachia. The course is a special theme within the Women and Writing strand of required junior composition class offerings, with an enrollment capped at 20. In addition to the institution’s general junior-level course outcomes (set by the composition committee, under the advisement of the Director of Composition), the course provides an investigation into the following specific threads:

49. The project’s process work (which is quite conventional) spans four and a half weeks and first asks students to write a proposal explaining how they will approach the following: their focus, audience, purpose, genre, research questions, research methodologies, project design, composing strategies, and rhetorical goals. After receiving feedback from their peers and myself, students dig more heavily into their research, chosen genre(s), and target rhetorical strategies. Once students submit an annotated bibliography and storyboard/working draft, I conference with them to touch base and trouble shoot, in terms of form and content. Process work closes with in-class workshop days, where students finalize their projects alongside their peers.
• The dynamic relationship between sexual identity, sexual politics, gender identity and writing;

• How who we are influences not only what we write, but also how we write and establish ethos for particular audiences;

• The potential of alternative and queer rhetorics and multimodal, visual, and digital composition;

• How nonnormative texts can challenge and subvert standardized genre conventions, as well as the ways they critique large systems of power, social institutions, and mainstream ideologies – specifically those that perpetuate normative sexual identities (Glasby)

Throughout the semester, students read texts from various LGBTQ and alternative rhetoric-writers that invoke queer rhetoric and non-normative composing practices. From foundational texts like Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*; Helene Cixous’ “The Laugh of the Medusa”; and manifestos from Riot Grrrl, Radicalesbians, Queer Nation, Julia Serano, and The Combahee River Collective to newer iterations from Roxane Gay and Alison Bechdel, the course texts examine how Others have been historically constructed, silenced, and erased by/through Dominant discourse. And in response, these authors plea for other marginalized subjects to speak up, to write, and to claim and articulate themselves through words.

In the same vein, in an attempt to take up those pleas, the project description on the assignment sheet reads, “This project provides you with a space to document and analyze the ways you have been erased, silenced, and written, along with the ways you
(re)present and (re)write yourself. In the spirit of Feinberg, Arenas, Gibson, Baggs, Cixous, and Anzaldúa, consider the ways others see, understand, and define you; then speak back” (Glasby). I also include advice from Jackie Rhodes, who has argued on numerous occasions, along with Alexander, that queer(ness) fails and is failed by conventional print texts, composition as a class and discipline, and the academy at large. She advises student-writers: “1. Resist mastery; 2. Challenge yourself to fail; 3. Compose as a composer, not as a critic; and 4. Trust me that play is okay.” The references to risk, failure, freedom from conventions, and play mesh well the queer methodologies students employ in their work for this project. When they are asked to write about how they have been written, and they begin to see the impact of those messages and limitations, students experience conflict – mostly within themselves. Rather than asking them to sort through and process these feelings of ambivalence, I invite them to engage them and to use them for momentum and insight. Of course, there are risks involved in asking students to do this work, for not only are they expected to understand normative conventions and approaches, but they are also being asked to explore resistant methods that question and trouble academic discourse and its power. It is not easy, but it can be incredibly rewarding, for both writers and their audiences.

Consistently, students use this project to (re)claim, explore, negotiate, represent and understand their ethos in relation to their identity, sexuality, literacy sponsorship, and writing. Using the queer methodologies I have discussed, their projects tend to center on significant sites of knowing and unknowing, being and unbeing:

- coming out – as feminist, LGBTQ, queer;
• reclaiming a non-standard dialect or language through and in their writing;
• negotiating hybrid and intersectional identities;
• coping with sexual assault, disclosure/not reporting, and rape culture
• processing mental illness, anxiety, and depression;
• writing from, with, and about the body;
• exploring the effects of, and reasons behind, oppressions like racism, ableism, sexism, hetero and homonormativity, (white) privilege, homophobia, and transphobia; and
• advocating for the inclusion of erased sexualities (like asexuality), identities (like third world, transnational, queer women of color), and experiences.

Exigencies like these, developed and explored through queer methodologies, are just one step in the right direction if the field values and works toward truly intersectional and queer classroom contexts, which understandably call for ambiguity rather than intelligibility.

An Unraveling

Rather than conclude, I return to the beginning; rather than answer, I ask: what if, as these scholars recommend, composition was motivated to explore ambivalence and tension? What is to be said for the deep ruptures and schisms between conflicting thoughts and ideas? What kind of meaning (and texts) can be made when writers are asked to engage unknowing and enact dissent, rather than produce clear and logical thought? What if we failed to make sense of things in, and through, our writing?
CONCLUSION: A QUEER ORIENTATION TOWARD SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

As the dissertation has shown throughout its chapters, *Textual Orientations* remains a pivotal resource for the field. In fact, twenty years later, it remains remarkably relevant and innovative in its approaches to LGBTQ students and acknowledging queer lives in the writing classroom. Malinowitz offers the field indispensable advice on how to imagine courses that foster supportive and provoking queer discourse communities among their members. In addition to heavily focusing on identifying and combating homophobia, she also calls on us to be intersectional in our approaches before “intersectionality” became an established lens. Malinowitz’s work is also critical to the field because its focus extends to the rhetorical knowledge LGBTQ students develop as they negotiate and hone their rhetorical strategies for different audiences and (per)form their identities, in and out of academic environments.

Chapter 1’s contextual approach provided significant background information on Malinowitz and *Textual Orientations*, which I position as an early origin to the current queer composition conversation. My aim in this section was to explore Malinowitz’s ideas and impact by tracing a selection of the field’s conversation surrounding sexuality and writing studies. The research in this chapter provides a better understand as to how scholars have addressed and integrated sexuality in the writing classroom in meaningful and critically queer ways. The Chapter argues Malinowitz herself as a politically-engaged teacher and scholar, who was willing to leave her long time position at Long Island University in order to pursue her controversial Zionism and propaganda research. She has
a history of considering the implications of sexuality on individuals, in and out of the classroom, in both academic and political contexts. Chapter 1 also presented bibliographic context for *Textual Orientations*, how other scholars in and beyond the field have taken up and drawn from her research. My research shows that although rhetoric and composition scholars cite her work most often (predominantly Jonathan Alexander), scholars working in fields such as education, psychology, and performance studies have cited her as well. Within the field, Malinowitz is directly used to establish and support conversations concerning the following topics: the power of being an out instructor; special topics courses that center LGBTQ experience (like those of Zan Meyer Gonçalves, Jennifer DiGrazia and Michael Boucher, Jonathan Alexander, Will Banks, as well as my own); identity-based and queer pedagogies; expanding LGBTQ students’ access to stories and writing about sexuality; combating institutionalized homophobia, rejecting inclusive or multicultural approaches; rhetorical knowledge that is specific to LGBTQ people; and the power of marginalized lived experience. By tracing the background, context, reception, and direct utilization of *Textual Orientations*, Chapter 1 speaks to the far-reaching power of her text.

Building from the foundational work in Chapter 1, Chapter 2’s retrospective approach reveals the more subtle traces of Malinowitz’s ideas within the field’s dominant conversations advocating for the integration of queer theory, sexuality, and queer pedagogies into writing studies. The retrospective details how scholars have picked up on the connection between literacy learning, heteronormativity, and sexuality, which provides a new literacy and rhetorical lens to this kind of queer work. The Chapter also
shows how the field’s growing emphasis on critical literacy as a lens is inherently connected with the ways LGBTQ bodies read, and are read, in public spaces.

Furthermore, as an organic offshoot from Malinowitz and Gonçalves work with rhetorical ethos and identity formation, I show how queer rhetors, like David Wallace, Jonathan Alexander and Jackie Rhodes, Karen Kopelson, and Erin Rand, argue for the rhetorical knowledge and agency queer(ness) offers to classes at the intersections of queer and composition. And, finally, speaking to the conversations Malinowitz starts about the disciplinary control and censorship our classrooms face, and tend to perpetuate, which presents a sort of identity crisis for those of us who are queer and teach composition.

Drawing from Robert McRuer’s work in *Crip Theory*, I trace the conversation regarding the field’s obsession with composure and “clean,” polished textual production. This section of the retrospective illustrates how much LGBTQ and Othered teachers struggle with rigid and exclusionary academic writing conventions, something taken up much more fully in Chapter 4. Ultimately, Chapter 2 argued that although many of Malinowitz’s groundbreaking ideas have been explicitly and implicitly taken up, there are a few concepts from *Textual Orientations* that remain under- or unexplored: the notion of LGBTQ sponsorship, queercentric writing environments, and her call for the field to “find out about its [LGBTQ] students.”

Drawing from these three underdeveloped threads, Chapter 3 argued for “gay positive discourse,” rather than a hollow multicultural approach. Situated in an environment that emphasizes LGBTQ experience, gay positive discourse works to acknowledge and affirm that experience. The shift means class members learn and write
alongside, through, and with LGBTQ persons and queerness rather than just learning and writing about them. Like Malinowitz, I argue that queercentric courses can use writing to help students understand what it means to be LGBTQ, from various situated perspectives. As a tenet, rather than presenting stable and acceptable representations of these sexualities, queercentric courses ask students to consider the rich nuances of queerness and its myriad expressions. In support of these aims, to enrich the field’s engagement with sexuality and LGBTQ students, and to attempt to begin to answer Malinowitz’s twenty-year-old call to learn more about our LGBTQ students, Chapter 3 also provided some observations from a pilot study I began and plan to return to in order to learn more.

I also consider the homophobic moments LGBTQ students experience in academic spaces, and how they might feel unauthorized and fearful to address them. I have discussed how, in these tense situations, LGBTQ students are left to negotiate not only the heteronormative and/or homophobic incident or assumption, they are also left to (re)negotiate their own identity in the context of that moment. Too often we feel we are at risk if we speak up and out, while at the same time somehow feeling responsible for fostering or missing a teachable moment. The queer literacy sponsorship I argue for throughout Chapter 3 offers support and strategies for dealing with these moments and queer feelings. Drawing from Deborah Brandt’s notions of literacy sponsorship alongside Zan Meyer Gonçalves’ points about LGBTQ sponsorship and Jonathan Alexander’s case for including critical sexual literacy in the composition classroom, I describe and advocate for queer literacy sponsorship, the transmittance of LGBTQ cultural knowledge – such as history, LGBTQ-specific sexual and health literacies, resources and support
networks, ways around discriminatory policies and regulations, etc. – between and among LGBTQ people. Ultimately, this chapter (and the research study) concluded that LGBTQ show high interest in taking queercentric courses and find the courses that acknowledge and affirm LGBTQ existence to be significant sites for transformative and freeing learning and writing.

Drawing from the generative and resistant nature of both queercentric writing environments and queer literacy sponsorship, Chapter 4 argued that queer methodologies are more effective ways into knowledge-making and composing practices for LGBTQ and other marginalized and underrepresented students. Drawing from the conversations laid out in earlier chapters, this argument comes in response to the tightly controlled and historically alienating academic conventions often valorized and perpetuated in and through the discipline’s work. I return to Mina Shaughnessy, another luminary in the field, who argues that correction of error is often more about correction of identity. Arguing for linguistic and rhetorical justice, the chapter draws from the work of non-normative rhetor-scholars like Victor Villaneuva, Geneva Smitherman, and Scott Richard Lyons. Their respective visions of *memoria*, code-meshing, and sovereignty help to establish actual classroom practices queer pedagogues can employ to help their students learn and write in ways that are more organic and authentic, ways that honor not only their various cultures, but also their cultural rhetorics. In response, the chapter focuses specifically on ambivalence, excess, and failure as generative queer methodologies for LGBTQ and other marginalized student writers and rhetors. My intention in choosing this selection of methodologies is driven by the dissertation’s earlier work, so they represent
writing spaces that create and/or embrace agitation, unknowing, troubling, liminality, and messiness – all that is queer, essentially. In this chapter, I also discussed a queercentric course of my own and its multimodal course project, both of which invite and engage LGBTQ subjectivity, creativity, inquiry, and rhetorical resistance and queer(ed) composing practices. I hope to have shown how these practical applications help push us closer to “queering the brew” and troubling the discipline and (hetero)normativity.

I see this dissertation as an extension of Malinowitz’s work in terms of rhetorical knowledge, as she dedicates only a few pages of her conclusion to the rhetorical knowledge students developed in these courses, and she speaks of it solely in terms of students’ sense of rhetorical knowledge of themselves as LGBTQ bodies in (sometimes hostile) public spaces. I would like to see more discussion of the rhetorical knowledge gained from considering queer texts and queer rhetorical contexts. How might students better position themselves rhetorically as out queer people through the texts they create and the queer discourse communities they form. I argue queercentric courses not only provide LGBTQ students with a queer critical consciousness, but that they also foster a strong rhetorical critical consciousness. Classes like these facilitate what Malinowitz calls “secure rhetorical footing” in spite of and hopefully because of their nonnormative sexuality (37). Rather than learn and write about the LGBTQ experience, as might happen in a mainstream classroom that integrates a section or unit on queer theory, LGBTQ students can better understand and contextualize their own individual lived experiences through the critical lens of rhetoric and composition. We need to consider more fully what can happen when students’ attention is called to the connection between
rhetoric and sexuality. I see the field’s work heading in an exciting direction, where we offer a queer approach to rhetoric and a rhetorical approach to queerness.

I would also like to see the field open itself up to queer rage, a space that denies false “safe” zones and classrooms and demands that LGBTQ lives matter. In my pilot study I was most captivated by one student’s response when asked how she feels in mainstream writing classes. She was clearly angry. She explains, “[I feel] isolation, annoyance with white men, annoyance with being asked how to [sic] lesbians have sex, annoyance with being asked by my spanish [sic] teacher if I have a boyfriend. NO I HAVE A NOVIA, NOT A NOVIO. Overall, tension in intrapersonal situations.” Her response excites me because she is pissed off. She uses repetition to emphasize how frustrated she is with privilege, racism, and heterosexism. She sums up her experience as an “overall tension” that pervades many of her interactions with people. Notice how she uses all caps to reiterate her sexuality to her professor. In this moment, she calls out her teacher for assuming that just because she is a woman, that she dates men. This is an example of what Gust Yep calls the violence of heteronormativity. She has been written as straight and her sexuality is erased. But she doesn’t make excuses for others’ homophobia or heteronormative assumptions; rather she calls it out and lets herself blow off some steam. I get it. I can imagine how she feels because that has happened to me in my Spanish classes; try coming out in a language that is not your own in the context of a language class; it’s not easy and it’s not comfortable. We need more of this rage to really get us thinking about how mainstream (writing) courses do violence to LGBTQ and other marginalized students. And the field’s best practices need to reflect that understanding to
better serve its students – all of them. Enacting pedagogies of rage, described by Kasia Marciniak; queer rage, described by Jack Halberstam; and bitch pedagogies, described by Andrea Greenbaum can take us closer to this kind of resistant work.

Limitations and Risks of This Work

There are inherent risks involved in these sorts of pedagogies simply because of the disproportionate amount of privileged folks in academia. Just because an instructor is LGBTQ does not mean they are comfortable with queer(ness), resistance, subversion, or alternative composing practices. In the same ways white feminists have been called out for erasing and even further silencing third world women and women of color, LGBTQ instructors who are of privilege are also at risk of erasing and further silencing more marginalized and intersectional members of the LGBTQ community. Even in queer contexts, there is a chance an LGBTQ instructor could embody all that is homonormative, failing to push their students forward in their critiques of institutionalized homophobia and (hetero)normativity. (Although, in queercentric courses students are often more empowered to address these pitfalls with the instructor, whereas in mainstream courses they tend not to.) We must also balance this abundance of privilege with the temptation to seek out the “right kind of” LGBTQ person to design and teach these courses. It is likely that certain institutions might be drawn, whether consciously or unconsciously, toward safer and more palatable LGBTQ instructors, who support rather than subvert normative disciplinary practices and curriculums. Even “inclusive” departments shy away from radical thinking, acting, and looking LGBTQ people. There are always risks with queer faculty; they could be disruptive or undermine
the institution’s authority or the department’s goals for composition classes. Students are not the only ones who benefit from the realization that queerness has endless shades and iterations; faculty, administrators, and institutions could stand to learn this too. One of the greatest points about queerness and LGBTQ identities is that they are prolific and endless, fluid and ever evolving. But one thing is for sure: we need instructors whose politics and practices are intersectional and global. We need more cultures, rhetorics, sexualities, subject positions, and lived experiences in our classrooms, and we need to expand – or destroy, perhaps – conventions and methodologies that alienate writers and researchers. And we need, at minimum, support from the field at large (rather than too-insular special interest groups), our institutions, our composition programs, administrators, and teachers to reach LGBTQ students on a meaningful level. Although, I want to clarify: I do not mean for these queer pedagogies and practices to become “mainstreamed” or “legitimized,” for that is when they lose their critical, marginal edge.

The more we integrate and apply queer theory, queer studies, and queer lenses, the more privileged and ordinary it risks becoming. How do we negotiate that conundrum? How do we affirm and acknowledge queerness and LGBTQ lives – make them the focus of our research and writing – without placing them at or too near to the center? No matter the context, continual interrogation and push back are steps toward maintaining Malinowitz’s “power of the margin.”

I would also like to take a moment to address not a limitation per se but more of a vexed spot in my own thinking at the current moment. Advocating for queer-centric courses and queer pedagogy because they also benefit straight students: this is currently a
space of ambivalence for me. It has been my tendency recently to react negatively toward composition scholars who advocate for these courses on the premise that heterosexual students will too benefit from them. On one hand, I agree: I have had numerous straight students tell me time and time again how meaningful learning about LGBTQ identities and culture was for their own self-development and drive for social justice. Many of them are astounded at the invisibility of heteronormativity, and more so at the poor treatment of LGBTQ folx today – especially trans and non-binary individuals. But, on the other hand, I feel myself more drawn to the transformative experiences of my LGBTQ students, some of them embracing queer(ness) and the LGBTQ community for the very first time. I have watched them form incredibly supportive and generous communities, and I have witnessed them work collaboratively and bravely on writing projects that have had significant internal and external impacts. Admittedly, I also struggle with this tension because I have found that for every queercentric course I have taught, there is at least one complaint in my course evaluation about the course marginalizing and excluding straight students and voices. I’m not sure how to respond to that, really, but my gut tells me it means I’m doing an effective job of dismantling hetero experience and straight lives to pay more critical attention to queer experience and LGBTQ lives.

Normative, heterosexual students have access to many literacy sponsors and mentors along the way; LGBTQ and other marginalized students don’t, and it can mean them feeling disengaged, alienated, and tempted to drop out of classes or school altogether. Sometimes it leads to worse: self-harm, mental illness, substance abuse, trauma, and too often suicide. Ultimately there is plenty of scholarship and common
sense supporting the gains heterosexual students make in queercentric courses. They too have sexualities, and a queer lens makes them more aware, more skeptical, of dominant discourse and its messages. And, as we would hope, like any writing course, queercentric courses too ultimately require deep analysis, rhetorical understanding, and critical thinking from their students. But it is the LGBTQ students who need those benefits more because sometimes their lives literally depend on it.

And So…

Temporally, my project reaches back to Anon’s 1974 letter describing the crushing homophobia and self-loathing he experiences a closeted gay academic and graduate student. He fears for his privacy, job security, safety, and emotional well-being. Earlier this year, states started passing legislation keeping trans and non-binary folx from using the bathroom of their choice. And just this week, on June 12, 2016, a horrific hate crime occurred and fifty LGBTQ people were killed at Pulse Nightclub – a gay club – in Orlando, FL. LGBTQ people still fear for those same things forty-two years later. I think Malinowicz is on to something when, early on in Textual Orientations, she mentions her struggle to keep up with the changing landscape of gay and lesbian studies and the community’s social and political movements. I feel the same way. If I track the field’s trajectory of queer studies since starting this project, it would be overwhelming and in tune with some of the most pressing current social injustices. The trajectory of the LGBTQ community’s social and political movements is also substantial and far-reaching, but it is marked with sadness, discriminatory and flat-out-mean policies, trauma, suicide, and death. Why does it feel as if the two paths rarely cross? Often, I am tempted to
separate the two spaces and buy into the narrative that positions activism against education.

I missed a vigil for Orlando sponsored by the campus LGBT Center because I was deep into my research and writing, approaching the end of this project. Being present among my community members during a time of collective LGBTQ loss somehow registers very differently than being present and engaged in my (seemingly insular) work to encourage LGTBQ self-development and social change. Why does one feel so much more like activism than the other? Am I not among my community members at this very moment, still-always lamenting LGBTQ loss? Does our work make us activists? I believe it does. Malinowitz feels like a queer hero to me – Alexander and my advisor, too. They are three of my most substantial queer (composition) literacy sponsors. Their work has changed my understanding of what it means to teach, learn, and write as an LGBTQ person and queer rhetor. Their ideas and dedication to transforming the academy from the classroom outward have empowered me to do the same. They helped carve out a space for a voice like mine, a subjectivity like mine. So I do the same for others; that’s how it works with queer literacy sponsorship. I have similar hopes for my students as Malinowitz does for hers. Like she explains, “I wanted them to have queer classmates, a queer teacher, a queer syllabus, queer textbooks, queer homework. And yes, I did hope that the course would make them activists, and if they were already activists, then better, more reflective activists. I wanted it to help them fight back” (Malinowitz 115).

Moving forward, we can learn a lot from queer. It is one of the most actual inclusive spaces, as it welcomes and cannibalizes almost everything in its critical path:
polygamous bodies, differently abled bodies, brown bodies, queer bodies, Muslim bodies, non-binary bodies, traumatized bodies, undocumented bodies, imprisoned bodies, countless mixtures of these bodies, and so on. It calls on us to see all subjectivities as sites for learning and composing. It legitimizes the illegitimate by its nature, while undercutting the very notion of legitimacy. It doesn’t ask for permission. It does not follow rules. It is never satisfied. Yes, we can learn a lot from queer. We must push back against the field’s obsession with safety and discipline, asking ourselves how and why we have come to value these things more than the alternatives.

Even if, and especially if, they say no, find a way to smuggle it in.


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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Please select your age range:
   18-20
   21-23
   24-26
   27-30
   over 30

2. What is your class standing?
   Freshman
   Sophomore
   Junior
   Senior
   Graduate Student (MA)
   Graduate Student (PhD)

3. What is your field of study?
   (Comment box)

4. How would you describe your racial identity:
   (Comment box)

5. Which of the following terms best describe you? How do you identify?
   (Please select all that apply.)
   Lesbian
   Gay
   Bisexual
   Trans*
   Queer
   Questioning
   Intersex
   Asexual
   Genderqueer
   Gender non-conforming
   Ally
   Straight (non-LGBTQ participants may exit the study at this point)
   Other:
   (Comment box)
   I am not comfortable answering this question

6. If you identify as LGBTQ, how would you rate your level of “outness”?
   Very out (to most or all family, friends, co-workers, in most spaces, environments, and situations)
Somewhat out (only to certain family, friends, co-workers, in certain spaces, environments, and situations)
Seldom out (to few family, friends, co-workers, in few spaces, environments, and situations)
I have not come out to more than one or two people, on one or more occasions
I have not come out yet to anyone

7. I have learned about LGBTQ identities, persons, and culture through the following resources (select all that apply):
   LGBTQ friends/peers
   LGBTQ authors, books and articles
   LGBTQ-themed/related courses
   Non LGBTQ-themed/related courses
   Local community groups
   Student groups
   Church/Faith-based groups
   Campus LGBT Center
   Instructors
   Library books and research
   Internet (research, gaming, online communities, etc.)
   Other:
   (comment box)

7. How would you rate your level of LGBTQ advocacy, engagement, and involvement (e.g. social media, activism, club/organization membership, public lectures, etc.)?
   Very high
   Somewhat high
   Only occasionally
   Somewhat minimal
   Very low
   (comment box)

8. Please say a few words about what being LGBTQ means to you:
   (comment box)

9. Please say a few words about how being LGBTQ impacts/has impacted your academic and professional pursuits:
   (comment box)

10. What emotions do you associate with coming out or being out in academic settings?
    (comment box)
11. I have felt ___________ sharing LGBTQ-related coursework and projects in academic settings.
   a. uncomfortable
   b. somewhat nervous
   c. somewhat comfortable
   d. confident
   e. I have not created LGBTQ-related coursework or projects.
   f. I have created LGBTQ-related coursework and projects, but I did not share this work with anyone in an academic setting.

12. How often have you experienced homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and/or sexism (toward you, someone else, or in general) from an instructor or their course materials (syllabus, writing prompts, discussion questions, textbooks, course readings, etc.) in a writing/composition course?
   Often
   Sometimes
   Rarely
   Never
If you have experienced homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and/or sexism from an instructor or their course materials, please explain the situation in the space below (without using names or any identifying information):

13. How often have you experienced homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and/or sexism (toward you, someone else, or in general) from fellow students in a writing/composition course?
   Often
   Sometimes
   Rarely
   Never
If you have experienced homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and/or sexism from fellow students, please explain the situation in the space below (without using names or any identifying information):

14. Do you feel your sexuality is/has been ignored, avoided, or intentionally left out of writing instruction and writing classes?
   Yes
   No
   I have never thought about it
   Other:
   (comment box)

15. Have you ever had a course that has acknowledged or affirmed LGBTQ identities?
   Yes (How did this experience affect you?)
16. How would you rate your level of confidence as a writer, in general?
5 – very high
4 – above average
3 – average
2 – below average
1 – very low

17. How would you rate your level of confidence as a writer, who writes as an LGBTQ person or about LGBTQ issues?
5 – very high
4 – above average
3 – average
2 – below average
1 – very low

18. I am ______ to address homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and/or sexism in a small group setting.
   Very likely
   Somewhat likely
   Rarely likely
   Not likely

19. I am ______ to address homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, and/or sexist language in a large group setting.
   Very likely
   Somewhat likely
   Rarely likely
   Not likely

20. I am ______ to address homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and/or sexism in a classroom or academic setting.
   Very likely
   Somewhat likely
   Rarely likely
   Not likely

21. I am ______ to come out, be out, and/or discuss my sexuality in a classroom or another academic setting.
   Very likely
   Somewhat likely
   Rarely likely
22. How has your sexual orientation, sexual identity, and/or sexual politics directly influenced your academic writing? (Please select all that apply.)
I have chosen an LGBTQ author
I have chosen an LGBTQ topic or issue to research and write about
I have written about LGBTQ topics or issues aimed toward a straight audience
I have written about LGBTQ topics or issues aimed toward an LGBTQ audience
I have written about my own sexuality and sexual identity
I have claimed or asserted my sexuality and/or sexual identity
I have used my experiences as an LGBTQ person in order to gain credibility with an audience
I have chosen classes on LGBTQ topics or issues so that I would have an opportunity to learn
and write about them
My sexual orientation has not influenced my writing
Other:
(Comment box)

23. In my writing projects, I have intentionally resisted mainstream writing conventions and rules by: (Please select all that apply.)
including personal stories about my LGBTQ lived experience in my writing projects
including non-traditional forms (poetry, marginal writing, storytelling, non-standard Englishes, other languages, etc.).
writing using a non-linear or incoherent organizational structure
ignoring specific formatting, font, color, and/or page size requests
taking an ambivalent or “messy” position, rather than making a clear-cut argument.
representing a hybridized or intersectional identity
writing specifically to an LGBTQ audience
I have not been intentionally resistant in my writing projects (although I may have done some of these things unintentionally)
Other:
(Comment box)

24. Please list a few words or concepts that you associate with queer(ness):
(comment box)

25. Would you be interested in taking a writing/composition course for LGBTQ students, taught by an LGBTQ instructor, if one was offered?
Yes
No
Why or why not?
(comment box)