(Un)Working Binaries, (Un)Doing Privilege: Narratives of Teachers Who Make Safe Spaces for LGBTQ Students

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Jill M. Smith

Graduate Program in Education

The Ohio State University
2012

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Caroline T. Clark, co-advisor

Dr. Mollie V. Blackburn, co-advisor

Dr. George Newell
Copyrighted

by Jill M. Smith

2012
Abstract

Research about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth reveals that the presence of supportive staff contributes to the comfort and success of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) students. LGBTQ students who do not have this kind of support are more likely to miss school, get lower grades, and experience depression. School safety and anti-bullying programs that are used to inform staff about how to be supportive, however, are often generic and do not name or address issues of heteronormative privilege in schools. In an effort to fill this gap, this study looks closely at the life story narratives of three high school teachers who were nominated by student members of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) as creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students and my life story narrative as a teacher-researcher. These narratives offered insights into ways that straight teacher allies identified themselves and were identified by students in a large suburban school. Findings of this study reveal three major categories of ally approaches: pedagogical, narrative, and collegial. Results indicated that all of these approaches had both strengths and limitations. In addition, findings indicated that institutionally supported binaries including art/athletics and protect/punish were reflected in the ways participants performed ally work. Further, data revealed that these binaries were linked to heteronormative privilege. Explicit conversations about teachers who do ally work and the heteronormativity of hegemonic power structures in schools increases our understanding of how to better support LGBTQ students in order to develop authentically supportive curricula, policies, and practices.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the GSA students. Thank you for your patience.
Abstract

Research about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth reveals that the presence of supportive staff contributes to the comfort and success of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) students. LGBTQ students who do not have this kind of support are more likely to miss school, get lower grades, and experience depression. School safety and anti-bullying programs that are used to inform staff about how to be supportive, however, are often generic and do not name or address issues of heteronormative privilege in schools. In an effort to fill this gap, this study looks closely at the life story narratives of three high school teachers who were nominated by student members of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) as creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students and my life story narrative as a teacher-researcher. These narratives offered insights into ways straight teacher allies identified themselves and were identified by students in a large suburban school. Findings of this study reveal three major categories of ally approaches: pedagogical, narrative, and collegial. Results indicated that all approaches had both strengths and limitations. Findings indicated that institutionally supported binaries including art/athletics and protect/punish were reflected in the ways participants performed ally work. Further, data revealed that these binaries were linked to heteronormative privilege. Explicit conversations about teachers who do ally work and the heteronormativity of hegemonic power structures in schools increases our understanding of how to better support LGBTQ students in order to develop
authentically supportive curricula, policies, and practices
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the GSA students. Thank you for your patience.
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my co-advisors, Drs. Caroline Clark and Mollie Blackburn, whose respective and collective knowledge, faith, and patience have made possible the writing and completion of this study. With all my heart, I thank you both for inspiring me daily and for being the best teachers ever. I also would like to thank former committee member, Dr. David Herman, who not only introduced me to exciting field of narrative study, but also offered a welcome invitation to learn more about it. Please know that your expertise, kindness, and generous, lightning-fast feedback have been integral to my transformation into a more thoughtful storyteller and, as importantly, a better listener. Also I would like to extend a big thank-you to Dr. George Newell, who has generously contributed his time and energy to helping me over the span of nearly a decade of inquiry.

I also would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Dr. Patti Lather and Dr. Anna Soter. Both have showed me times when its possible to have your cake and eat it too. I am thankful their sublime philosophies.

It is impossible to fully express my thanks for the incredible amount of support my family has provided. Often times it felt more like we were all going to graduate school together. First, I would like to thank my grandmother Helen, who I knew only through stories, but who has been a great inspiration. Mom, I thank you for the unconditional backing you have given me over the past 41 years. You have
been my best friend since day one. I would also like to thank my sister, Jen, who is the shortest, wisest, and most supportive person I know. I appreciate your love, proofreading skills and tomato soup—all are second to none. Thank you, as well, to my brother-in-law Scott, whose humor and care help keep me calm no matter what I have pursued. And last but not least, thank you to my father, John Williams, who has kept me in supplies and always said I could tackle big things, no matter how scary they look. Thanks, Dad, for all of your love and encouragement.

I also want to acknowledge the Pink TIGers who have supported me like a second family during the course of this study and beyond: Lauren, Anette, Mindy, Ryan, Ariel, Jeane, Maree, Noah, Dana, and, of course, Mollie and Caroline. Thanks to each of you for listening and for sharing your own stories. I am very happy to know such kind, smart people.

Thanks to my friends and colleagues for their invaluable insights as well as supplying me with peace, Kleenex, coffee, Schneider’s, walks, and happy hour beers when I needed these things most: Lydia, Michelle, Jen, Andrea, Jim, Amy, Katie, Deb, Susannah, Kyle, Pam, Deanna, Anne, Keith, and Jill.

Also, a very special thanks to Kyle, my favorite coach, for countless hours of listening, for always holding my hand, and for letting me paint whatever I wanted. And finally, a tremendous thank-you to the participants in this study: Katie, Derrick, and Jason. Without your trust, professionalism, and interest this study would not have been possible.
Vita

June 18, 1970..........................Born—Columbus, Ohio

1992......................................B.A. in Education
          Ohio University
          Athens, Ohio

2003......................................M.A. in Education
          The Ohio State University
          Columbus, Ohio

1997-2011..............................Educator, Secondary Education
          Westerville City Schools
          Westerville, Ohio

2011-present............................Program Co-Manager, Middle
          Childhood and Instructor,
          The Ohio State University
          Columbus, Ohio
Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Education

Cognate Areas: Queer Theory
Narrative
Reader Response
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication ............................................................................................................. iv

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................ v

Vita ....................................................................................................................... vi

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study .............................................................. 1

  Statement of the Problem ............................................................................. 4

  Research Questions ..................................................................................... 5

  Background of the Statement of the Problem ................................................. 6

  Organization of the Dissertation ................................................................. 11

Chapter 2: Literature Review ........................................................................ 13

  LGBTQ Acronym ....................................................................................... 13

  Ally Work and Allies ................................................................................ 14

  Resources and Materials ......................................................................... 16

  Defining Space .......................................................................................... 20

  Defining Safety .......................................................................................... 22

  Narrative Studies ....................................................................................... 23

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods ......................................................... 27

  Qualitative Research ................................................................................. 28

  Narrative Inquiry ....................................................................................... 29
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Issues and Representation</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges and Struggles</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Findings</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Profiles</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories in Contact</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binaries within Ally Work</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Approaches</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Approaches</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Approaches</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Discussion</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Life Story Interview Questions</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Consent for Participation in Research</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Teacher Letter</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Participant Stories</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Tables

Table 1: Research Timeline..............................................146

Table 2: Framework for Collaborative Life Story Research.............................................147

References.............................................................................................................150
Chapter 1

Introduction

“[As teachers] we’d want our students to feel open and welcome. We would encourage them to say how they feel and not just what we want to hear. Depending on the topic, we would even share our opinions as teachers, too.”

-Richard & Renee, grade 11

“...forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?”

-bell hooks

As a straight ally who also taught English classes and was the school’s Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) advisor, making our school safer for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students was important to me. I noticed that it was important to other staff members in the building as well. Ally work, however, was done largely in isolation. We shared little about what we did. Further, conversations tended to be obfuscated by actual or perceived differences of what the work looked like and who was doing it. This dissertation is an inquiry into narratives told by teachers—myself included—who were nominated by student members of our GSA for creating safe spaces in the school where we worked. Inquiry into these narratives entailed looking closely at the stories we shared with our students and one another.

As nominated teachers, the participants in this study and I are constrained in that we are held accountable to district and state content standards and community expectations. To a large degree, however, we also are empowered to decide not only
which texts we do or do not include in our classes, but to also at least have a say in the perspective(s) from which texts are presented. One of the things that always surprises me is when people talk about teaching as an objective practice, as though objectivity while teaching is desirable, or even possible. Teaching is one of the least neutral endeavors one could pursue. I remember being first aware of the subjectivity at the start of my teaching career when I was faced with having to decide which of the dozens of stories in our ninth-grade Language Arts textbook I would use in my classes. Which were my favorites? Which ones would the students connect best with? As I was working on my master’s degree, I also became aware of canonical issues: which kinds of stories had been excluded from the textbook? Fortunately, in our school swapping out Shakespeare’s Act III of *Romeo and Juliet* for excerpts from Sharon Draper’s *Romiette and Julio*, for example, was supported. Many of us ran with it. For me, curricular tinkering worked wonders for supporting a more interesting, culturally rich, and inclusive classroom. Administrators and most parents supported this kind of differentiation: one size was not supposed to fit all. Arguably, all teachers use differentiation in their work to meet academic benchmarks. At the same time, they often times use it for the purpose of maintaining and upholding components of mandated school policies such as “respect” or “diversity.” This is where it can get tricky. The myth of teacher objectivity is one of the complexities of ally work. As a teacher, when I talk explicitly about the ways I differentiate curricula and assessments to also maintain and uphold school policies when does my work for meeting benchmarks and supporting students become
promoting an agenda? In the words of my students, it depends.

What my students picked up on was that for teachers, what is shared in our classes often depends on the topic. I would argue, additionally, that it also depends on how identities of teachers are positioned and how we position ourselves within those roles. Exploring the identities of teacher allies through life stories has helped me take a closer look at how we are positioned in the school as well as how we position ourselves. In my reflections during and after this study, I thought many times about hooks’ words linking accountability and compassion. Because of the emotional nature of the work and the seriousness of its implications, holding myself and other participants accountable for decisions we made as allies felt critically important. One of the things I struggled with most was looking for ways we could help one another with this accountability without reifying the ways we saw ourselves and our students. The story presented here suggests a story that is imaginative, compassionate, and holds great possibilities for breaking free of reification. One of the things that emerged was that even though what we shared with one another and our students did “depend” on how we saw ourselves, there was also plenty of room for seeing ourselves in ways that far exceeded the identities we held before the study.

For this study I was interested in exploring the life stories of high school teachers who created and maintained safe spaces in school for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) students. As an educator who was the advisor of our school’s Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), and who also is a
member of an inquiry group called the Pink TIGers\(^1\), this question was important to me. I wanted to explore how and why my colleagues created and maintained these kinds of spaces, and I wanted to learn more about how and why I did it, too.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is strong evidence that safety for LGBTQ individuals cannot be assumed; support for these particular safety measures in schools, when provided at all, is often unreliable and incomplete. This can be seen when words like “Tolerance,” for example, are advertised on school walls while specifically protective language for LGBTQ students and staff is notably absent from school policies and handbooks.

Further, at the site where this study was conducted there was little time dedicated to supporting teachers who take up the work of creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students. The participants and I who were nominated for doing this work often did it independently and with little sense of community.

Certainly, historical events such as the Stonewall Riots of 1969 and the murder of Harvey Milk in 1978 have helped to raise teacher awareness of issues of the civil rights, safety and well being specific to LGBTQ individuals; however, schools too often do not recognize these events as being part of the “multicultural” movement in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Although some activists, such as Bayard Rustin, advocated for civil rights based on both race and sexuality, racial identities were often prioritized in support of larger movements that were specific to racism (Kates & Singer, 2002). Issues having to do with race (DuBois, 1973), gender (Sadker,

---

\(^1\)I am a member of the Pink TIGers, a teacher inquiry group has been meeting since 2004. The group's
Pollack, & Miller, 1979), and socioeconomic status (Kozol, 1991) are more visible in school conversations about multiculturalism than are issues of sexuality. This omission is also rooted in the ways laws and policies have developed: those related to gender discrimination came later than those having to do with race, and those around sexuality followed even more slowly or not at all (Laws Overview).

Regardless of positive and hopeful language to the effect that schools do want equal rights for other marginalized groups such as women and girls, people of color, and those belonging to a low socioeconomic status, voices and rights of LGBTQ individuals continue to be pushed to the margins. Over the past fifty years, public demand for increased protection for and inclusion of LGBTQ individuals has been met with silence, ridicule, or violence (Moser, 2003).

**Research Questions**

The following question was developed in pursuit of this inquiry: **What do narratives of teachers who create safe spaces for LGBTQ students reveal about the work they do in schools?** As a high school teacher who was also nominated as someone who created safe spaces for LGBTQ students, my role was that of a researcher-participant. In that role, I developed these follow-up questions:

- How did we use narrative to express why we choose to do ally work?
- What did our narratives reveal about why we created these spaces?
- What kinds of experiences did we choose to represent in our narratives and how did our experiences shape our commitment to LGBTQ youth?
- What did narratives that came in contact with each other look like?
This study gives community members, educational policy makers, and educators an opportunity to acknowledge and examine the work of teachers who are valued by LGBTQ students and allies. Looking carefully at the narratives of high school teachers allows us to see what kind of ally work we are doing and what we can do to improve it. The sooner we move further along in our efforts—wherever they may start—toward safe, supported, and authentic inclusion of LGBTQ students and staff the more effective our pedagogy is likely to be, and, for that matter, the safer our world will be.

**Background of the Statement of the Problem**

This section discusses the background of the statement of the problem. It is divided into four sub-sections. First, political discourses are discussed. The section that follows examines media, youth, and violence. The final two sections explore school and university discourses.

**Political Discourses.** Although the 1980’s and 1990’s reflected a massive rally of support for multicultural and character education programs in schools (Banks, 1994; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997; Sleeter, 1992; Sleeter & Grant, 1993), and, philosophically, these programs did include language around sexual orientation (Sleeter, 1992), political conversations have been against providing and protecting the civil rights of LGBTQ individuals. Arguably, homophobia in schools is supported by the “big D” (Gee, 2008) homophobic Discourses of federal, state, and local laws, policies, and practices. This distinction from “little d” discourses is important in that it acknowledges the ways that big D language used to talk about bullying in schools
is ideologically rooted, certainly related to the hierarchy of heteronormativity, and supports “concepts, viewpoints and values at the expense of others” (p. 144-145). In this case, anti-bullying work that includes questioning how schools and society at large support marginalization and even violence against LGBTQ students and staff. In 2004, for example, President George W. Bush’s campaign expressly supported a U.S. amendment for a national ban on gay marriage (Smith, DeSantis, & Kassel, 2006), and, more directly, he aligned himself with homophobic views of conservative Christian groups. Another example from the larger homophobic Discourse perpetuated by public authority figures was when in 2008 Oklahoma State Representative Sally Kern characterized “[Homosexuality as] the biggest threat...our nation has, even more so than terrorism” (Fritz, 2008). Even closer to home, Ohio’s House Bill 276, an anti-bullying/harassment bill addressing protective language in schools was passed only after language specific to sexual orientation and gender expression was taken out. This Discourse makes it more difficult for schools to initiate and enforce inclusion and safety measures for LGBTQ students and staff. Although not all violence against LGBTQ individuals is reported, sustained promotions of homophobia are clearly evidenced by crimes such as the murder of Matthew Shepard, a young man who was killed by a group of homophobic men in Laramie, Wyoming; Sakia Gunn, a 15-year-old in Newark, New Jersey, who was stabbed to death in 2003 by a man after she told him that she would not go out with him because she was a lesbian; and Lawrence King, a 15-year-old who was killed in Oxnard, California, in 2008 because of his non-conformity to traditional gender
roles. In 2010 and 2011 alone there were 12 reported suicides that received high-profile media coverage connected to homophobic harassment. Tragically, the number was likely even higher.

Certainly, there has been some encouragement in recent years. Namely, 2010 saw the repeal of the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy and in 2009 there was the appointment of The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) founder Kevin Jennings to Assistant Deputy Secretary for Safe and Drug-Free Schools. In general, however, over the past fifty years, too little progress has been made with and for LGBTQ individuals (Unks, 1995), particularly in school settings. Homophobic political discourse is one of the things that makes it harder for schools to create and maintain safe spaces for LGBTQ youth.

**Media, youth, and violence.** Another issue that has contributed to the difficulties of creating and maintaining safe spaces for LGBTQ youth is the kind of media attention paid to the teenage Columbine shooters in 1999. While the widespread news coverage of Columbine rightly called into question the effectiveness of school safety measures (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003), its coverage also promoted homophobia in that the two shooters were characterized as members of “The Trench Coat Mafia.” Media narratives about the shooters described them as using homophobic slurs during the shooting, but also noted that they themselves had been victims of such slurs prior to the shooting (“Media [Mis]Coverage,” 1999). As a result, school officials began a panicked dialogue about general bullying in schools, but did not directly address homophobia that was implicit in some of the
portrayals of The Trench Coat Mafia. Safety measures for LGBTQ students and staff did not significantly increase and most new safety measures did not specifically address homophobia or heterosexism in schools. The homophobia and heterosexism reflected in the history, politics, and media around LGBTQ individuals and issues have negatively impacted conditions for LGBTQ safety for students in the building and district where this study was conducted. Through inquiry into participants’ life stories this study seeks to work against this impact in order to make schools safer for these students.

**School Discourses.** Since the Columbine shootings in 1999, school communities have been bombarded with mixed signals: “multiculturalism,” “tolerance,” and “no bullying” are common mandates for safety in schools, while safety measures particular to LGBTQ students, such as adding enumerated language to school policies or initiating a Gay Straight Alliance, for example, are often labeled—either explicitly or implicitly as incongruous or obstructive to these same mandates. As mentioned in the previous section, Ohio House Bill 276 evidences the ways schools are viewed as compliant with safety measures even when they refuse to include enumerating protective language for LGBTQ students. Even as popularized, school funded community-building events such as “Challenge Day,” where students convene to share issues with marginalized students, and “Mix It Up” lunch days, where students eat with peers they consider outside their immediate group of friends, find consistent if not enthusiastic support, LGBTQ associated events such as Day of Silence are regularly met with school and community protest
(L. Thompson, 2008), further evidencing the way inequitable laws and policies affect the ways that safety is defined and supported in schools.

**University Discourses.** This inequity is also evident at the university level. Tensions between the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) also reflect the paradox of embracing the rhetoric of safety while simultaneously working against LGBTQ inclusion in schools. In 2006, NCATE, responding to accusations that their use of the term “social justice” was a way to require teachers to accept “left-wing orthodoxies,” removed the phrase from its teacher-training assessment programs (Glenn, 2007). In response, in 2007 NCTE immediately expanded its 1999 Resolution on Diversity to include language specific to the work of providing support for LGBTQ educational issues (*Resolution on strengthening teacher knowledge of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues*, 2007). Some scholars view AERA’s support for LGBTQ issues, however, as ambiguous. Its refusal to take a stand publicly against NCATE for its decisions both to remove “social justice” and “not to include anti-gay bigotry in its new ‘diversity’ standards” was met by a “wear red” protest at the AERA 2007 Social Justice SIG business meeting. AERA’s research workshop on LGBTQ issues in education in 2010 also offered promising action in the direction of equity and inclusion in that it specifically supported “examin[ing] LGBTQ research as it relates to education, identify[ing] relevant research on LGBTQ issues in related fields of inquiry, assess[ing] gaps in the research, and consider[ing] opportunities and challenges in
building a future research agenda” (Levine, 2010, p. 600). Tensions around lack of support for LGBTQ issues from NCATE have been a hotly discussed issue among university faculty and students (Glenn, 2007).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 2 is the literature review of this study. Because the acronym LGBTQ can be complicated and mean different things in conversations about ally work, I address the acronym before addressing literature. In the sections that follow, I address two bodies of literature that have been influential and motivational for me as an ally: literature that supports ally work and literature that is about ally identities. Finally, I discuss literature around the concepts of space and safe space, and narrative as these informed and shaped the inquiry of this study.

In Chapter 3 I describe the methodology and methods used for this study. The chapter first discusses how the study was informed by qualitative and narrative approaches to inquiry. After that, the chapter discusses methods of the study. Within the methods section are sub-sections that describe the research site, gaining entrance, participants, data collection, interviews, transcripts, and researcher journals. Next, the chapter discusses ethical issues and representation. Finally, challenges and struggles are discussed.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to presenting the findings of this study. First, profiles of participants are presented. After that, I discuss what our stories looked like when they came in contact with each other at our roundtable discussion. After that I explore the binary that emerged between art and sports and present my and Katie's
stories. I also present three categories of approaches we used in our ally work: pedagogical, narrative, and collegial. Within these categories, strengths and weaknesses are also identified and discussed. The final section of the chapter is a conclusion.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of implications and limitations, then presents recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter begins by briefly discussing the acronym LGBTQ. Next, it addresses literature related to ally work. This literature falls into two main areas of study: ally work and ally identity development. The literature around of ally work is addressed first, followed by a discussion of literature about ally profiles, models, and identity development. This chapter also discusses scholarship around definitions of space and safety in schools. Finally, it addresses literature on narrative studies.

LGBTQ Acronym

The acronym LGBTQ can be both useful and problematic in discussions about ally work. Part of its usefulness is that the differentiation of letters draws attention to individuals within the group whereas the commonly used word “gay” does not. Another positive use for the acronym is in presenting a unified front when larger numbers are needed to provide leverage, such as when lobbying for funding for HIV and AIDS treatment (Stewart, 2009). On the other hand, listing “LGBTQ” is deceptively tidy because the list-like quality of it implies that sexual identities are fixed and can be inventoried. Prioritizing the order of the letters in the acronym (some preferring GLBTQ, for example) remains controversial, and the exclusion of transgendered individuals from lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual civil rights conversations,
despite their inclusion in the acronym, is highly problematic. As an ally who is working with straight ally participants, I include “T” in my use of the acronym in an effort to trouble a catchall usage of “gay” to mean anyone who isn’t “straight.” I include “Q” to represent either “queer” or “questioning.” I do not choose, as some do, to include “A” for “ally” in the acronym. Although as an ally I am valuable in that I can use heternormative privilege to gain audience and access in certain spaces, I am not faced with the same issues as those who identify as LGBTQ; therefore, representation does not feel appropriate to me within the acronym. My omission of “A,” however, is not meant to preclude others who are represented from working as allies to one another (Chase & Ressler, 2009). The acronym LGBTQ is useful in the discussion of teacher ally stories of this study in that it represents the group of individuals for and with whom allies in this study advocate, however, this representation is not meant to remain fixed.

**Ally Work and Allies**

Although there has been much written by and about LGBTQ individuals, the body of literature on the work allies do and on ally identities is not as extensive. I feel this is because the privileged identity that straight allies occupy can translate to a sense of entitlement: once established within a heterosexist context, allies and the work of especially straight, white married women, exists with little scrutiny about how the work is done. Ally work of straight, white, and married women is often viewed as less threatening than ally work done by men, for example, because of the perception that straight women can be supportive, but will maintain adherence to heternormative social boundaries. This is not to say that there does not exist ally
work across the acronym; however, this study is limited to looking at straight allies since only straight allies were nominated. The limitation of not having LGBTQ representation within the nominees will be addressed further in Chapter 5. In the section that follows, two main areas of literature are addressed. The first discusses literature about how to be a good or better ally, which I call “ally work.” This section also includes a discussion of resources and materials that comprise support for ally work. After that is a section that discusses literature addressing ally identities. Within this discussion is an exploration of literature that addresses ally profiles and models, as well as one that addresses ally identity development. After discussing the two main areas of literature, ally work and ally identities, the chapter addresses where this study fits in with existing literature.

**Ally work.** Much of the literature around the work allies do is instructional or informational and seeks to support the work of LGBTQ allies. Influential contributions to this body of literature have been made by LGBTQ advocacy groups such as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), The Gay-Lesbian-Straight Educators’ Network (GLSEN), and The Safe Schools Coalition. Also within this body of literature is scholarship examining ally work within teacher education (Clark, 2008; Clark, 2010). Additional literature offers scholarship addressing ally models and definitions of ally work (Blackburn, Clark, Kenney, & Smith, 2010; Blackburn, 2012; Herek, 1994; Kennedy & Voegtle, 1998; Wall & Evans, 2000; Washington & Evans, 1991 & 1999) as well as literature that seeks to disrupt them (Ji, 2007). “Becoming an Ally” (Washington & Evans, 1991) stands out as being frequently drawn from and reproduced by multicultural and diversity centers in
universities across the country. Within this work, there needs to be further examination of ally work within heteronormative contexts. The body of literature around ally work that includes resources and materials is more extensive.

**Resources and Materials**

The primary focus of the body of literature that exists about ally work is ally resources and materials. A large component of this literature is generated by LGBTQ advocacy groups. One significant contributor to this literature is PFLAG, a large, non-profit organization made up of parents, families, and other supporters of individuals who identify as lesbian or gay. Two of PFLAG’s biggest contributions to the body of research about ally work are its publications of gay and lesbian-inclusive policy statements and its public anti-homophobic ad campaigns (Wilke, 1995). PFLAG offers support for ally work across a wide variety of contexts such as religious, military, family, and workplace. Another contributor to this body of literature is GLSEN. GLSEN’s audience consists of both practitioners and researchers. GLSEN’s presentation of their School Climate Survey, a survey that seeks information related to the experiences of LGBT students in schools, provides data and a call to action for ally work in that it contextualizes the results in plans of action for LGBTQ and ally educators (www.glsen.org/). Additionally, GLSEN generates supportive online literature for how to successfully utilize stickers, speaking cards, and organizational timelines for Day of Silence, an important LGBTQ-specific civil rights event in many schools. Like PFLAG, GLSEN does not limit its resources to LGBTQ advocacy work done by allies, but they do specifically acknowledge and support it. A third contributor to literature about ally work is The
Safe Schools Coalition. The Safe Schools Coalition contributes to literature about ally work by providing LGBTQ-inclusive resources such as handouts for teachers and administrators, teacher lesson plans, and “print and fold” cards for students (www.safeschoolscoalition.org/). Strong ally support from the body of literature generated by organizations like PFLAG, GLSEN, and The Safe Schools Coalition reflects a picture of ally work that is both approachable and sustainable. In addition to literature about ally work, there also exists literature that addresses ally profiles, models, and identity development.

**Ally profiles, models, and identity development.** This section discusses ally profiles and models, and ally development. Washington and Evans’ widely reproduced, “Becoming an Ally” (1991) offers a list of qualities and actions that broadly define what it means to be an LGBTQ ally. They define ally as “a person who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, an oppressed population” (p. 195). In addition, Washington and Evans identify the following as four specific cycles of ally work: awareness, knowledge/education, skills, and action (Washington & Evans, 1991). In other scholarship, ally work is modeled through activism in the form of a teacher inquiry group called The Pink TIGers, which is the group that I belong to. This model includes educator members who identify as LGBTQ as well as those who identify as straight allies. This literature shows LGBTQ teachers and allies combating heterosexism and homophobia through text and film (Blackburn et al, 2010). In addition, this scholarship focuses on inquiry within ally work in a variety of contexts, stages, and educational settings. Along similar lines, Ji (2007) suggests that
ally work is more dependent on the identity of the ally and the context of the work than on any one model or profile. Both Blackburn and Ji emphasize the importance of ally work within school and neighborhood communities. In addition to literature about ally profiles and models there is also research about ally development.

Also within this body of literature about ally work is literature that focuses specifically on ally identity development. Many studies around ally identity development (Borgman, 2009; Goldstein & Davis, 2010; Rhodes & Mio, 2000; Russell, 2011; Worthington, Bielstein, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002) and identity development specific to straight parents of gay and lesbian children (Vernaglia, 2000) are rooted in the field of psychology. In addition, however, there also exists literature rooted in socio-cultural theory that focuses on the ally identity development of pre-service teachers. Findings of studies rooted in the field of psychology seek to point to personality indicators of allies, such as cultural empathy and sociopolitical awareness. These studies do not focus on education or teachers, however. More salient to this study is scholarship that explores indirect connections between heterosexual privilege and ally identity (Case & Stewart, 2010; Herek, 1994; Simoni & Walters, 2001) and that which is specific to looking at teacher allies (Clark, 2008; Clark, 2010).

Scholarship examining connections between privilege and ally identity shows that heterosexual privilege, like racial and gender privilege, is generally invisible and difficult for straight people to grasp (Case & Stewart, 2010; Herek, 1994; Simoni & Walters, 2001). Simoni and Walters (2001) suggest that heterosexual identity development parallels White racial identity development. They propose addressing
feelings of privilege within heterosexual development as a means of increasing awareness of heteronormativity. Similarly, Case and Stewart (2010) assert that enactments of heterosexual privilege are not dissimilar to enactments of White or male privilege. Findings here pointed to a positive correlation between students completing diversity courses and their awareness of heterosexual privilege. Herek (2004) more specifically links heterosexual privilege to male privilege, pointing to “androcentrism,” or the centering of a dominant male viewpoint as a component of homophobia. Findings from all of these studies were derived from quantitative methodology that drew from data collected from college student participants. Literature about ally identity is not, however, limited to quantitative studies.

Another area of literature about ally identity significant to this study is scholarship that specifically addresses work with pre-service teachers in a university level teacher preparation program (Clark 2008, 2010). Clark (2008) observes that although not all pre-service teachers consider ally work to be a part of their work as teachers, utilizing LGBTQ-inclusive texts in teacher education programs can have a positive impact on shifting toward a more inclusive attitude. In addition, Clark (2010) distinguishes ally work from anti-homophobia work. Within this distinction, LGBTQ allies are defined as teachers who go beyond simply combating homophobic remarks. This scholarship shows that even within a pre-service teacher education program where candidates are going to work with children, ally work should not be assumed. Further, it points out that work defined as anti-homophobic is not the same as work done by LGBTQ allies. Like Case and Stewart (2010), Clark asserts that ally work is tenable in heteronormative contexts.
These studies offer both inspiration and foundation for further inquiry.

Further inquiry into intersections of privilege, heterosexism, and teaching is needed because it addresses the complexity of doing ally work in ways that do not reify heteronormative privilege. This study makes a significant contribution to existing literature about ally work in two ways. First, it presents data and findings about participants who are in-service high school teachers nominated by students who were GSA members. This combination was important because it relied on student input rather than self-nomination or other sampling methods. Secondly, the study reflects an insider perspective because I was both a researcher-participant and an in-service teacher who worked at the same high school as the other participants. This is important because it addresses how ally work and allies might be experienced by other in-service teachers.

**Defining Space**

In addition to being influenced by literature about ally work and ally identities, this study was also influenced by definitions of space. A large body of literature around the concept of space distinguishes it from place. Within this are definitions characterizing place as physical, fixed, bounded, and necessarily dependent on its relationship to other places; space, however, is characterized as fluid, providing opportunity for movement and dependent frameworks that are socially or culturally driven (Hubbard, Kitchen, & Valentine, 2004; Lawson, 2001; Tuan, 2001). Tuan (1999) points out that investments in place can sometimes foster hostility because change is seen as threatening to positions of power. Other research more inextricably links positions of space and power, asserting that they work in
tandem rather than having a causal relationship (Foucault, 1980). Foucault also specifically designates places and spaces that exist outside hegemonic conditions—like a classroom that is also a GSA room—as *heterotopias*, which can offer places of escape (Foucault, 1967). Along these lines, space (specifically, school space) has been conceptualized using “camp” as a metaphor (Weems, 2010). This metaphor of school space allows for transience rather than exclusive “escape,” as Foucault suggests. Other literature defines space as a series of representations of intersections of time and spatial relationships called *chronotopes* (Bakhtin, 1981). In addition, the term space can also refer to a space of performance (Blackburn, 2004; Butler, 1990) where acts and identities are viewed as reflections or repetitions of established social patterns. Finally, Pratt (1991) refers to “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” as *contact zones* (p.1). She describes contact zones as places where cultures meet as occurring within the context of “highly asymmetrical relations of power,” such as colonialism or, I would add, heteronormative school spaces (p. 1). One way to think about the difference between place and space is in terms of a room that is used for multiple purposes. My classroom, for example, was a place designated for teaching English classes, however, after school every other Thursday, it was also the room where GSA meetings were held. The designations of English class and GSA meeting room were fixed and therefore represented places; however, because students, conversations, and texts were sometimes used in both places interchangeably, the room represented space. This section discussed some of the literature defining space that has impacted this study. The section that follows addresses literature that looks at
the concept of safety.

**Defining Safety**

Another body of literature that has influenced this study addresses ways that school spaces are defined as being “safe.” One component of this literature emphasizes defining safety as keeping students protected from physical violence. Another relevant area defines safe to mean physical safety, but it gives equal weight to defining safety as being supportive and culturally inclusive. Yet another body of literature asserts that safety is non-existent, imagined construction.

After Columbine, schools began thinking more carefully about the physical safety of their students. Literature in the forms of safety manuals and policies that defined safety broadly and using extreme terms, such as “zero tolerance,” made sense as an initial response to the shock and sadness of the Columbine killings. Schools were foremost declared to be areas where students were safe from physical harm caused by weapons and/or drugs. Literature about safety in schools eventually began to include critiques of general or reactive definitions and reflected a more nuanced understanding of what safety for *all* students might entail. Stephens (1995) asserts, “There is no specific formula that outlines everything that a safe school should entail...it is more appropriate to identify an array of potential areas that should be addressed” (p. 19). Interestingly, overt attention to safety for students has drawn resistance from some, even when need was apparent. Thinking about safety in ways that seek to expand and complicate anything other than a basic understanding of it seems to represent threat in unexpected ways. One reporter, for example, termed the expansion of student safety to include nutritional
considerations called a school’s consideration for students who have peanut butter allergies as “faddish hysteria” (Hartocollis, 1998, para. 4). This kind of resistance to school responsiveness to students as individuals is also apparent when harassment of LGBTQ student safety is categorized as a “normal” part of the high school experience and attention to it is viewed as hypersensitivity or political correctness (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). Lindle (2008) also questions safe school legislation and asserts that real and perceived threats to students in schools can lead to an increase in “moral panic” (p.29). Further, and most germane to this study, some have contested that defining “safe” as inclusive is also limiting in that it perpetuates traditional, heteronormative frameworks. This body asserts schools should shift away from the word “safety” in favor of descriptors such as positive schools or queer schools, which advocate for change by locating the concept of LGBTQ inclusivity across multiple, simultaneous spaces. This literature asserts that working against homophobia is only one of many steps toward safety rather than a definitive end (Henry, 1993-94; Goldstein, Russell, & Daley, 2007; Hackford-Peer, 2010).

Scholarship points to ways that some schools have shifted their definitions from physical safety to include sensitivity and inclusion, and also to rightly trouble the very concept of safety. That the world is unsafe (Casey, 1995) is agreed upon across conversations; conversations about ways to address safety in schools, however, remain contested.

**Narrative Studies**

Yet another area of literature that has been influential to this study is narrative studies. Particularly influential are sociolinguistic approaches to narrative
studies, which focus attention on “natural” stories that are particular to the personal experiences of the teller (Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2005). Narrative studies also include findings that point to the strengths of narrative in expanding professional growth and facilitating change.

Narration lends meaning to human events in a way that is otherwise absent (Kerby, 1991). This was relevant to this study because narration was commonplace in the lives of participants to the extent that the ways in which it was meaningful was often overlooked. Telling stories to one another and to our students was a daily occurrence, but content and function had never been documented or analyzed. It has also been asserted that narrative can be used to expand knowledge and professional dialogue (Bodone, 2004; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2005. This research suggests that studying narratives can provide teachers with opportunities for professional growth. Another element of narrative studies points out that stories can act as counter-narratives and can be subversive in that they re-tell “the story of a tradition” (McEwan, 1997, p. 87-88). Along similar lines, Judith Butler (1993) asserts that stories and actions should be consciously reiterative and rearticulatory, or purposefully used to facilitate and support cultural change. One of the ways that Butler’s reiteration and rearticulatory functions became evident as I worked with participants was through using turning points in our life stories to support conversations about ally work (Löyttyniemi, 2001). We know that stories are important and meaningful; in tandem, we also know that they are certainly subjective.

Sociocultural approaches to narrative studies forefront connections between
storytellers’ subjectivity and the social groups to which they belong. Most relevant to this study is literature about ways that narrative is used to establish, maintain, and disrupt identities in schools. Foucault (1981) asserts that telling stories is a way to assert order, which is a primary objective for much of the storytelling that goes on in schools. On the other hand, however, Friere (1970) asserts that narrative has the ability to empower participants by providing a base for the evolution of reflection into action (Freire, 1970). The process of story telling is also identified as “emancipatory” (McEwan, 1997, p. 89). This points to narratives, or, in this context, counter-narratives, being used to empower and liberate—or as a tool to break apart the “order” of schools so often used to support the status quo. Further, Toolan (1998) asserts narratives are a kind of political action and “carry political and ideological freight” (p. 227). As such, narrative research is also recognized as deconstructive and informed by a commitment to social justice (Hodgson, 2009). Researchers Tappan and Brown (1991) that the “narrative approach…promises a measure of freedom from the arbitrary imposition of culturally bound values and conventional stereotypes” (p. 188). Narratives specific to teachers and schools have been used to draw attention to inequities around race and socioeconomic status, which is arguably political (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Heath, 1997). Narrative in research is also used to move closer to recognizing stories in ways that highlight the subjectivity of both researchers and participants (Carter, 1993; Foster, 1993; Gomez, 1996; Gomez, Walker, & Page, 2000; Muchmore, 2001; Schubert & Ayers, 1992). These kinds of recognitions were also present in this study.

Telling stories allows human beings to represent authentic personal
experiences in a way that is not only familiar to others (Ochs and Capp, 2001), but also in a way that allows for the kinds of social changes that are needed so crucially. The next chapter addresses the methodology and methods used to find out what our stories revealed about the work we did as teacher allies.
Chapter 3

Research Methodology and Methods

This chapter addresses the research methodology and methods of this study. First, it includes a reiteration of the research questions and purpose of the study and provides a description of the methodology. Second, it describes methods used in the study.

As stated in Chapter 1, the design of this study was constructed to address the following research question: **What do narratives of teachers who create safe spaces for LGBTQ students reveal about the work they do in schools?**

Before moving on to the methodology section of this chapter, I would like to reiterate my role in this study. I was a teacher who was also nominated as someone who created safer spaces for LGBTQ students; therefore, my role was that of a researcher-participant. In that role, I developed these follow-up questions in order to more specifically address the inquiry of this study:

- How did we use narrative to express why we chose to do ally work?
- What did our narratives reveal about why they created these spaces?
- What kinds of experiences did we chose to represent in our narratives and how did our experiences shape our commitment to LGBTQ youth?
- What did narratives that came in contact with each other look like?
• How did we use narrative to express why we chose to do ally work?
• What did our narratives reveal about why we created these spaces?
• What kinds of experiences did we chose to represent in our narratives and how did our experiences shape our commitment to LGBTQ youth?
• What did narratives that came in contact with each other look like?

This section restated research questions that were outlined in Chapter 1. The next section describes methodology that informed this study.

**Description of Methodology: Qualitative Research**

This study was guided by qualitative and narrative inquiry approaches to research. As a qualitative researcher, I subscribed to the following premises:

• The qualitative researcher is not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000).

• The qualitative researcher is "historically positioned and locally situated [as] an all-too-human [observer] of the human condition" (Bruner, 1993, p.1).

• Meaning is always "radically plural, always open, and...there is politics in every account" (Bruner, 1993, p. 1).

• Qualitative inquiry is properly conceptualized as a civic, participatory, collaborative project. This joins the researcher and the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue. (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 1049)

In alignment with these premises, my approach to the inquiry included keeping participant stories in tact (Mello, 2002). Qualitative sociocultural approaches to research assert that keeping the stories as whole as possible helps make sense of the
people telling them (Atkinson, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 1993). The use of a qualitative approach was a good fit for this inquiry because it allowed for a complex, multidimensional picture of the lives of the participants.

**Narrative Inquiry**

In this study, functions of narrative contributed important insights. Participant narratives were assumed to be both conversational and potentially agentive or powerful.

**Narrative as conversational.** Rich narrative inquiry focuses on conversational stories rather than formalized interviews (Riessman, 1993; Ochs & Capp, 2001). Sometimes referred to as a *Life history*, this approach means systematically collecting life history interviews, participating in reflective conversations, taking notes and writing journals in order to support the emergence of themes (Cole & Knowles, 1995, VanManen, 1990). This kind of methodology supported the use of less formal data collection that was comfortable and synchronized with the ways that we as teachers talked to one another, even during interviews that had formal characteristics such as set dates and times. Using conversational data in this way made sense within what Hymes (1996) describes as the “rhythm[s]” of our teacher lives (p.119). This looked like including data from hallway conversations and exchanges in the parking lot after school. Much of this data was used indirectly, such as to inform analysis and to facilitate collaboration (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach gave organization and explicit meaning to warm, ongoing connections that we made in our daily lives and across a variety of contexts (Linde, 1993).
**Narratives as agentive and powerful.** Narratives in all forms can be agentive and powerful. One of the agentive and powerful components of narrative inquiry includes looking at “truth” within stories as a relative term (Löytyniemi, 2001; Kerby, 1991) and is defined by both the storyteller and the listener. This stance points to the limitations of seeing stories as belonging to only the teller or listener. Inquiry drawing from this stance provided support for looking at narratives as socially constructed rather than representations of fact or fiction (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). This was especially useful in looking at Katie’s story because the “point” she articulated as teller was not the point I heard as listener. Further, that we were both participants in the study helped to combat the notion that I as an “interviewer” held more authoritative “truth” than any of the other participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

**Narratives as hopeful.** Another empowering component of narratives is that they can provide hope and inspiration, as was the case with this study. One narrative inquiry that offered inspiration for this study was McAdams and Bowman (2001) who ask, "What kinds of stories do highly generative [those who are concerned for the well-being of future generations] American adults construct?" (p. 11). This inquiry felt methodologically relevant. First, I imagined teacher-participants telling the same kinds of stories as the ones told by generative adults. Most salient is that the concept of "generative" struck me as inherent in the concept of "safety." Teachers nominated for creating and maintaining safe spaces for LGBTQ adolescents, a community against whom many work in anti-generative ways, had commonalities with adults in the McAdams and Bowman study. Participants in the
McAdams and Bowman study experienced being treated badly, yet told stories that focused on “redemption,” or a bad situation that was ultimately balanced out or reversed because it had a positive outcome (McAdams and Bowman, p. 5).

Relevancy to this study was noted when I collected anecdotal evidence informally from ally teachers before the study even started. We all knew the work was difficult, but had never talked about it in depth. The McAdams and Bowman study highlighted the common identity of being American. This kind of spotlighting is also important in regards to the commonality of being teacher allies. This identity provided methodological guidance to me as a participant in that it provided a blueprint for looking at how “generative” allies did work in schools and how that work fit with school culture. It also bolstered our commitment to the work we were doing and encouraged us to keep doing it.

**Narratives as humbling.** One of the important components in the methodology of this study was it allowed us to be vulnerable and truly listen to one another. As teachers who do a lot of talking, this was both enlightening and humbling. Errante (2000) shares a subtle but important realization that came to her in the course of interviewing a subject: I realized...[that] in hunting down the story I wanted [my participant] to tell me, I had shown little respect for the story he needed to tell me (p. 21). This recognition of knowing when and how respect was shown (or not) to participants and their stories was integral to the roundtable discussion, especially, but also to our ability to work well together after the study was over. Shifting to the role of listener was relatively new to all of us; we were used to students sharing personal stories, but were not as prepared for one another’s
willingness to talk at length about issues and events that were close to our hearts (Riessman, 1993). All of us at one point or another shared things that were emotionally risky.

**Methods**

This section discusses research methods employed for this study. The first section describes the research site and gaining entrance to it. The section that follows describes participants. The sections that follow discuss data collection and ethical issues and representation. The final two sections discuss validity and challenges and struggles.

**Research site.** The site of this study is the high school where participants and I taught. The high school, which I am calling Nexus in this study, is in a large suburban high school in northeastern Ohio; it is the newest building of three high schools in the district. The district itself has grown rapidly in recent years, showing a 318% population increase since 1990. Student enrollment was at approximately 1500 at the time of the study and there were 87 teachers in the building. Since opening in 2003, the school has earned and maintained a rating of “excellent” from the Ohio Department of Education. The ethnic make-up of the certified teaching staff is 99% white. I chose this site because I have a good sense of its history, climate, and schedule and had built a positive rapport with students and colleagues there.

Nexus houses the most socio-economically and racially diverse group of students of the three high schools in the area, and was initially known for recruiting forward-thinking teachers who ostensibly would posses the extra ability and energy needed to serve what the community labeled as a “challenging” student population.
I was hired in part on the basis of my experience with teaching Service Learning and Multicultural Literature, both valued for various alignments to the district’s character education program. Teachers who were not hired at Nexus were criticized for things like not having enough involvement with other staff members or not being critical thinkers. The school’s history includes the resignation of the first administrator in July 2003, one month prior to the school’s scheduled opening. The administrator who replaced him was politically and socially conservative and had been hired under stress.

Over the past several years the culture of Nexus has become more supportive of LGBTQ students and staff. GSA is visible in common, shared spaces around the school such as during morning announcements and parent Open Houses and there have been fewer incidents of vandalism of GSA flyers. Many staff members display “ally” stickers in their classrooms. In addition, several closeted staff members have come out to me and to student GSA members. Also, the district’s harassment and discrimination policies have changed to include enumerated protection for LGBTQ students and the school board hired an openly gay superintendent.

Gaining entrance. I gained IRB approval for this study in the summer of 2008. Access to the site and participants was not difficult because I had been working there since the building opened and had a lot of experience working with people in the district. Part of this experience included being re-instated as an employee in the building after having a conflict with an administrator who I perceived to be homophobic. This reinstatement contributed to accessibility because the administrator with whom I had the conflict resigned prior to the initiation of the
study. The current principal articulated support for GSA and the study, which made access easier and more possible. Within the site, participants and I had access to one another whenever we had time and school was in session.

**Participants.** Participants were student nominated by current and former GSA members. We were chosen based on student response to the following question: “Which teachers, if any, do you feel create safe spaces for LGBTQ students?” Students nominated a total of six teachers in the building. Two of the nominated teachers declined participation due to time constraints. The remaining four teachers, Derrick, Jason, Katie, and me, are the participants represented in this study. Students were able to nominate teachers simply by telling me in person or by writing down their nominations and submitting their nominations to me in my classroom or teacher mailbox. Junior and senior students who were involved in extra-curricular activities and those whom I do not have in class were sought out before school or during study halls. Because student nominators did not necessarily have nominees as their teachers, I assumed that participants’ abilities to create and maintain safe spaces for LGBTQ students may have as much to do with who they are as it does with what they do in their classrooms, or even other physical spaces in the school. Through their nominations, students seemed to convey a faith in the teachers they nominated: these teachers—whether or not they intend to be—were perhaps being read by some students as *texts* (Talburt 2000), and these living texts conveyed safety to those students. Nominees were provided with an outline of the nomination process and were asked if they wanted to participate in the study. If they agreed, they were told that they could withdraw from participation at any time with no
penalty or stigma. The inquiry process was made as convenient and “normal” as possible. Practical issues such as work and family schedules were taken into account throughout the study, and we worked together as we had prior to the study. In other words, we did not force conversations or collaborative efforts that were not already in place for the sake of the study. After the nomination process and logistical groundwork were established, we had the opportunity to get to know each other in new ways. One of the tasks that helped us do this was compiling profiles of ourselves and each other.

Profiles that are used in Chapter 4 to introduce readers to participants were co-written by participants at the end of the study. Writing the profiles was playful and meaningful. The profiles were developed through a process of emailing written descriptions of ourselves and each other back and forth until we had a composite that we agreed upon as being accurate. In the mix of a busy school day, these email exchanges were fun to send and open because it gave us an opportunity to share observations about one another. To make profiles easier to read, I formatted our composites into parallel structures. All participant profiles start by presenting general data about when participants and I started teaching and about our family lives, for example. I also edited out comments that were intended to be kept private. Formatted and edited profiles were then member checked by participants. The process of co-writing our profiles felt embarrassing at times because we said nice things about one another. This kind of positive attention was meaningful because it affirmed that we liked and respected one another even when we realized our differences. It also was meaningful in that we had not thought specifically about how
we saw one another despite working together every day. Writing our profiles
together brought us closer in a way that was both playful and meaningful. Even
before we wrote the profiles, however, data collection was supported by the fact
that we all worked at the same school.

**Data collection.** Data collection was comprised of interviews, transcripts, and
researcher journals. Considerations for this timeline were dictated by the Nexus
school calendar. Phase III, for example, was completed prior to 2009 because the
semester change is one of the busiest times for the teachers. Two formal interviews
were conducted with each participant with follow-up interviews when clarification
was needed (Foster, 1993). Formalizations of data collection were avoided. For
example, a question like, “What about you can we reasonably link to the
phenomenon of you being thought of as a teacher who creates safe spaces for
LGBTQ students in our school?” was altered to something like, “Why do you think
you were nominated?” so that we could pursue that conversation in a more normal
fashion. Data collection was also guided by looking at the stories not exclusively as
past experiences that needed to be gathered, but as components of our busy, human,
lived lives as they existed within moments of the study. A roundtable discussion was
held at the end of the data collection phase (Bruner, 1990). Interviews and the
roundtable discussion were audio recorded and transcribed with permission of the
participants (Appendices B and C). Member checks, scheduled and unscheduled, of
selected transcripts and researcher notes were made by each participant
throughout the study. Derrick, a friend and participant, interviewed me two times
just as I had interviewed him and other participants two times as well. For
convenience, Derrick’s interviews with me coincided with times when I interviewed him. All of us chose from the same interview questions (Appendix A). The interviews were a big part of data collection and stood out as being an integral component of the study.

**Interviews.** Interview conversations began positively in that all of us were happy and excited to have been nominated. During interviews, participants were provided space to tell their own stories and given whatever amount of time was feasible for them. The list of prompts was provided in advance (Appendix A) (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). The list of prompts was developed out of asking about *well-remembered event* from our own experience (Carter, 1993). Because this question felt too general, additional questions were sought. A question that seemed more specific to doing ally work was asking about having a *sacred story*, or “personal myth” in relation to the language of the nomination (Myerhoff, 1978, p. 221). Consideration of all these questions lead to the use of McAdams and Bowman’s list of Life Story Interview Questions (Appendix A) because it captured the individual questions in a way that was relevant, concise, and user-friendly. Having suggestions for ways to start or organize stories helped participants because they had busy schedules. Further, for Jason, who was less certain about what he wanted to include in his story, the questions provided an accessible starting point.

From the list, we chose our own prompts. Katie and I both chose the prompt about “turning points.” Derrick chose the prompt about “life chapters,” and Jason chose to respond to a variety prompts. Follow-up questions during the interview were open-ended in order to provide more freedom of response. Extra time for the
interviews was allotted so that we could talk informally and address logistical questions (Wallace, 1994). Stories shared during the interviews were organized in whatever ways made sense to us working within the priorities of our day. Questions were open ended to allow for a more conversational style and to encourage participation. This made sense because participants and I had had naturally occurring work-related interactions prior to the study; attempts to strictly limit participant responses would not have made sense. My position in this study was as a participant-researcher. This entailed me participating in the interviews. In addition, participants had the opportunity to identify as researchers, too, at different points in the study; that is, the opportunity of acting as both participant and formal researcher, seemed to help all of us better acknowledge the extent to which we were saying what we thought others wanted or expected to hear. My own life story interview was conducted by Derrick, a participant and friend who volunteered for the job. Because I was the GSA advisor at our school participants may have felt they needed to censor their ideas about LGBTQ issues; at the same time, as educators who do ally work in ways different than my own, they may have elicited a less reactive response on my part. Shultz (2003) points out the following:

Listening for silence includes listening for missing conversations and overlooked perspectives, and also listening for the moments when students are actively silenced by individuals and institutions. Listening for acts of silencing compels educators to notice and respond when students’ talk and participation are eclipsed so that schools and classrooms, indeed, all teaching interactions, can be fully representative of all students. [italics added] (Shultz,
Since many LGBTQ students are not out in our school, I imagined that my participants were adept at noticing and responding to silencing, even when “eclipses” occurred. This skill is one that I had hoped would transfer with our own work and in our group sessions so that we might recognize the ways that we ourselves were silenced as well as the ways that we are not. Interviews were important, but not the only form of data collection.

**Transcripts.** Transcripts were also used during this study. They were used by me in my role as researcher for coding purposes, but were also collaboratively used to encourage co-ownership in the data story and help build and maintain trust. Although I maintained sole responsibility for some things, such as transcribing audio recordings and keeping data secure, participants were told that transcripts were available to them at any point during the study, but they did not choose to access them. In addition, transcripts were presented to participants at various points during the study along with examples of feedback and member checks to ensure they had opportunities to work with them as much as they wanted. Transcript data that was presented verbally or in written form included naming my “speaking position” as a researcher and participant (Fuss, 1996, p. 383). Care was taken to name my own subjectivity throughout the process. For example, I said how I would think of things as an English teacher vs. as a GSA advisor or researcher (Fuss, 1996). In addition to data from transcripts, data from researcher journals was also used.

**Researcher journals.** During the study, reflective researcher journals were
kept by me. Revisions and reflections within those journals were allowed (Berman, 1994). Included in researcher journals were notes on individual interview sessions, follow-up group interviews, and on other interactions that were relevant. Researcher journals were initiated in Phase II of the study (Appendix E, Table 1) and were monitored with a researcher note taking system that was adapted for relevancy using Cole and Knowles’ Framework for Collaborative Life Story Research (1993, 1995) (Table 2). Their questions provided me with a basic checklist that covered a range of areas that I needed to think about as I wrote in the journals.

Several purposes were served by keeping researcher journals. One thing they did was help to inform analysis. They did this in that I used them to fill in gaps when I could not remember contextual details about conversations and events during the study. When I was unsure about how to interpret interview transcripts, I referred to my journals for help. Details in the journals offered a fuller picture of the context of the interviews than transcripts alone. Another purpose they served was with processing data. Critical readings of my journals helped me as a researcher to better understand my own subjectivity within my analysis work (Wasserfall, 1997). Although this was not directly visible, it did inform the study because I was immersed in thinking about analysis even when the data collection phase was over. The emotional outlet offered in journal writing was also important because we were confronting difficult topics, such as heteronormative bias. Here, the journals offered a space for reflection. Because they were made available to the other participants they also provided an opportunity to establish transparency and trust. Participants knew that they had access to the journals at any time. Although they did not choose
to access them, the act of journaling as well as the openness with which I wrote the journals had the capacity to build connections with participants (Alsup, 2005). Across data collection ethical issues and representation of participants was considered.

**Ethical Issues and Representation**

This section addresses ethical issues and representation. This study utilized sous rature and the notion of keeping participant stories as whole as possible to address ethical issues of a single representation by the researcher.

**Sous rature.** In this study, we shared our stories with the understanding that we could revise them if we chose to do so. This allowed us to be more honest about what we shared even when our stories made us uncomfortable or upset. Derrida's (1976) sous rature ("under erasure") was an important component of this understanding. Kaomea (2003) describes sous rature in the following way:

To put a term sous rature is to write a word, cross it out, then print both the word and its deletion. Because the word is inaccurate, or inadequate, it is crossed out; because the word is necessary, it remains legible. (p. 16)

The act of sous rature was not taken up, nonetheless, it was conceptually important to the study. Having a shared knowledge of the term helped us designate a process of reviewing our interview transcripts. For example, in the “looking over” of transcripts we shared the common idea that we were looking for specific things that we might want to “un-say.” In this process, there was not as much input from the other participants as I had imagined at the outset of the study.

**Keeping stories whole.** While specific words and phrases were counted in
transcripts, analysis was made while maintaining a broad understanding of the stories. Analysis was informed by an initial task of counting the number of times the other participants and I talked about “saying something [to students]” or stepping in when we perceived a student was at risk or in danger; however, this counting emerged into coding within the context of the larger stories.

Mishler's (1999) study of craftartists' narratives revealed that participants tended to share stories in which they highlighted life-changing moments. Mishler (1999) summarizes:

Confronted with the unexpected, [participants] reshape and reconfigure their [craft artisan] identities—always works-in-progress—either through efforts to maintain a sense of continuity with their previous mode of work or by changing direction...As they tell it, these 'turning points' (Kotre, 1984; Mishler, 1992; Rutter & Rutter, 1993) were often matters of chance: they just 'happened' to go by a glass studio or 'dropped in' to a ceramics exhibit, and this changed their lives. (p. 60)

The idea of exploring turning points, or points in stories that represent transformation (Denzin, 1989, in Löyttyyniemi) interested me, personally, from the outset because I was familiar with that kind of story in my own life experience. Turning point stories about relationships or career choices told by my mother or aunt were common in my household. Mellow (2002) asserts that turning points can be collocated (Mellow, 2002) across different stories (Löyttyniemi, 2001; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Additionally, I listed ways that participants divided their stories into examples of “good” or “bad” events because it offered an initial way to keep
track of systemic points of analysis within and across stories (Charmaz & Richard G. Mitchell, 1997). Good events included detailing positive interactions with LGBTQ family, friends, or students. Bad events included stories where LGBTQ individuals or issues were positioned negatively. Quantitatively coding for agency felt necessary because in my experience as a teacher I had informally noticed that agency was an assumed component of our job descriptions as teachers. Stories were coded for agency when participants talked about taking action, such as “jumping in [or on]” student behavior, “saying something” to address homophobic language, or “trying to make a connection” between curricula and discussion. Jason, for example, said he and another coach “pulled [a student] into the locker room and laid into him pretty good.” Stories about how and when student behavior is addressed is a common component of teacher storytelling, therefore, it seemed like an important starting point. Quantitative analysis was included in this study in the form of counting the number of times participants talked about turning points, described events that were “good” or “bad,” and mentioned having a sense of agency.

**Validity.** Validity in the study was addressed by looking for consistencies within the stories themselves and for triangulation within participant interviews and follow-ups. Atkinson (1998) asserts that internal consistency, or a lack of contradiction within the narrative itself, works as an effective means of ensuring validity when one is seeking an understanding of the perspective of the storyteller. Participant stories were checked for triangulation and consistencies by looking at transcripts and researcher journals. Inconsistencies were easier to spot in others than they were in my own stories. These “hidden” inconsistencies emerged over
time with repeated immersion in the data. Although Yin (2003) points to this “response bias” as a weakness when doing interviews (p. 86) and notes that eradicating it completely is impossible, he states that response bias may be discussed in order to make it more transparent. Discussion of heteronormative bias is included in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Challenges and Struggles**

Two of the struggles evident in the study were working across difference between participants and presenting stories in an equitable way.

**Working across difference.** Even though I anticipated a collegial research relationship with participants, deeply rooted differences created some tension. This challenge was documented and explored in my researcher journals, during member checks, and at the round table discussion. Goodson (1992) talks about the shifting roles of participants and researchers as they do the work of collaborative inquiry using life histories, arguing for a more “viable points” of trade (p. 244). For me, the notion of “viable points” was useful in addressing the tension of difference because it encouraged me to think of our roles in the study as interdependent, perhaps even definable as a research community. Each of us was responsible for some component of doing research at one time or another. One of the keys to this was not expecting (or dictating) when others took up the work. When Derrick had to be hunted down because he did not always respond to emails, for example, it did not mean that he was uninvolved in other ways. And, as addressed in more detail in the following chapter, when Katie did not take up points I showed her in our member checks, it did not necessarily mean that she was not willing to do so other times. Michele
Moore (2004) explains that methodology can “emerge out of circumstances” and may belong to a “discourse of struggle” (Goodley, Lawthom, Clough, & Moore, 2004, p. 63). Participants in this study did not always agree with one another, but we grappled with ways to do ally work within the common spaces of the school. Methodology acknowledging the struggles we were having, including emergent struggles between us during the study, these became part of the study and were embraced. The tension of difference between participants was especially highlighted in the final phase of the study when it was time to think about presenting data and findings.

**Presenting the stories.** Presenting my and Katie’s stories was challenging because I was insecure about my ability to do so in a way that would not do enough to name my position. Specifically, I worried that I would not be able to work across differences between approaches to the work that Katie and I did in a way that would be fair to her. McEwan (1997) notes the following:

> teachers and researchers may have very different purposes in telling a story, and this situation is fraught with potential misinterpretation and the likelihood of confusing aims...in representing teachers’ narratives in educational research, the researcher may incorporate stories shaped for different ends (p. 86).

Although I was aware of the concern of potentially “different ends” going into the study, it was more of a challenge than I imagined. Including multiple texts such as transcripted stories and co-created participant profiles helped to balance both my and Katie’s voices in the study. In addition, maintaining inclusion of Jason and
Derrick’s stories (Appendix D) offered opportunities for readers to take up any, all, or none of our purposes. Rhodes (1997) suggests presenting research in the form of multiple texts, and "playing with words" in order to show how a "final text" is an "illusion"; there is no such thing as an "end" to the story (p.1). Lather and Smithies’ (1997) Troubling the Angels also demonstrates how layering texts can help to resolve issues of final representation: both researchers and participants maintain strong voices throughout. Although I would have liked for all the components of the study that I wrote to have been indistinguishable from those contributed by participants (S. Gmelch, 1986), or for each to have run parallel, designated by headers or a difference in font (G. Gmelch, 1992), the final story emerged as a more traditional looking study. The notion of Rhodes’ ghostwriting helped me think about representation in terms of helping with rather than commandeering writing tasks that had to be done within the study. When participants, Katie included, did not have time to develop choppy emails and transcripts into prose, for example, I would do it, and then do member checks (Rhodes, 2000). Presenting stories using multiple texts addressed the concern I had about maintaining multiple perspectives, specifically, representing Katie in a way that was equitable.

This chapter discussed methodologies and methods of this study. The next chapter will present the findings that emerged from the investigation.
Chapter 4

Findings

I conducted this study because I wanted to find out more about the stories of teachers nominated for creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students. This chapter presents findings resulting from this inquiry. The first section of this chapter is dedicated to brief participant profiles that were co-written by each of the participants and me. The section that follows presents findings from data collected when all four participants’ stories came in contact with one another at our concluding roundtable discussion. Next, data and findings that lead up to the roundtable discussion are presented, specifically, my and Katie’s stories and findings about the approaches Katie and I took to ally work. Findings from the roundtable, where stories came in contact, are presented before findings from my and Katie’s stories because this order provided a context in which our individual stories could be considered. This order also foregrounded our growth and better captured the positive outcome of our interviews and overall spirit of the study. The final section is a conclusion of the chapter.

It should be noted that findings from Derrick and Jason’s stories informed analysis, but are not included in this chapter. Their stories can be found in Appendix D. Although I drew on Derrick and Jason’s stories for a more complete understanding of ally work and perspectives, the strongest polarity that emerged
was between the stories told by Katie and me; specifically, an art/athletic binary, better illustrated the findings of the study. A secondary binary that emerged, that of protection/punishment, was visible across all participant stories. This binary is discussed in the roundtable section and in the sections about my and Katie’s stories. Within the binary of art/athletics, my story was chosen to represent art instead of Derrick’s because it also fell within a spectrum of representation that felt more relevant to addressing the heteronormative culture of the building. Further, although Derrick’s story as an art teacher certainly represented “art,” it represented a struggle outside the binary I saw emerging between my and Katie’s stories in that it was beyond or “post” conversations held within school spaces. In other words, conversations about LGBTQ issues were as a rule exempted from what my art teacher friends refer to as “art world” because these conversations were normalized in ways that did not exist in traditional school spaces. My story represented the art side of the art/athletics binary within traditional school spaces because as a teacher of an English class I was held accountable within traditional school spaces and was also connected to art teachers, student-artists, and many of the values they represented in the building. Katie’s story was chosen instead of Jason’s to represent the athletic side of the binary because her position as football cheerleading coach was more privileged than Jason’s position as boys’ track coach. More about each of the participants and me will be detailed in the section that follows.

**Participant Profiles**

This section presents brief profiles of all four participants in the study. These profiles were co-created by all participants. Each participant contributed in some
way or another to writing all of the profiles. We all submitted characteristics about each of the other participants, then we collectively shaped the profiles through a series of emails. As noted in the last chapter, the process of writing the profiles acted as both data collection as well as a bonding activity that helped us wrap up the study.

The first profile presented is Jason’s, who teaches science and coaches boys’ track. The next profile is Derrick’s, who is an art teacher and advises the school’s Art Club. After that Katie’s profile is presented. Katie teaches freshmen social studies and coached football cheerleading at the time of the study. Last, my profile is presented. At the time of the study, I taught English and advised the school’s GSA.

**Jason.** Jason is a white, straight male. At the time of the study, he was married to a female middle-school teacher who also taught in the district. Jason coaches boys’ track and cross country at the school where he works. He is in his mid-thirties and was in his 11th year of teaching when this study took place. Like Katie, Jason and his wife at the time were also new parents to their first child, and they all lived in the district. Jason teaches Science to freshmen and sophomores, and his room is located in the same wing of the building as Katie’s.

Jason is very thin and looks young for his age. Other than his build, though, it would be difficult to guess that he is a runner because his movements in school spaces are unhurried. The pressures of the teaching day are not reflected in Jason’s physical movements in the way they are with some teachers. When Jason is seen in the halls he gives the appearance of a graceful explorer. Jason’s typical hallway greeting is a laid-back, “Heyyy, what’s happenin?” His work attire is professional and fashionable. He seems to stand out among the other male coaches at our school.
because of his slender build and European-style clothing. Although Jason and I do
not typically hang out in the same circles outside of school, we knew one another
prior to our interviews, and I was comfortable approaching him. There are several
reasons why a lot of people feel comfortable around him. First, he is good company.
He has a playful personality that seems universally appealing. It is difficult to
imagine a staff picnic or holiday party without Jason being there. Second, Jason uses
a quiet speaking voice. It comes across as kind and somewhat humble; he always
sounds like he’s willing to listen when you are talking to him. Third, for me as the
GSA advisor, Jason’s approachability has to do with track being a gender-equitable
sport and the fact that despite having a fantastic record they do not get much
attention relative to football. I also had a GSA student who ran boys track who told
me that he liked Jason and that he enjoyed having Jason as a coach.

**Derrick.** Derrick is a white, straight, male who is married to a woman. He and
his wife have four cats, one dog, and no children. He has a basement full of Star Wars
action figures and owns every album ever made by Weird Al Yankovic. Derrick lives
with his wife in a small suburban neighborhood that is located about a half hour
away from the school. He is the youngest of my three participants and was in his 4th
year as an art teacher at our school at the time of the study. My interviews with
Derrick were longer than those I had with Katie and Jason.

Like Jason, Derrick is well liked in the building. In addition, people like
talking about Derrick and his interests. He’s incredibly quirky. He does spot-on
impersonations and has a huge vocabulary. Physically, Derrick is tall and pale, has
long hair compared to most male teachers, a full beard, and is known for his creative
attire, which ranges from kitten t-shirts to formal suits to full-blown *Hello Kitty* costumes. He created and advises our school’s Art Club and has inspired a cult following among art students, especially ones who have trouble finding other places to fit in. Going to Art Club, in fact, is a common alibi used by my GSA kids when they can’t or don’t want to tell their parents they’re attending a GSA meeting. Striding down the hallways of the school, Derrick’s approach conveys that he’s got some fantastic news to tell (which he usually does) and that he’s going to tell you about it right away. He takes an especially mischievous interest in sharing stories about the unusual, illogical, or comically grotesque. Interestingly, Derrick appeals to traditional, conservative staff members. Like many artists, he is very charismatic. In her definition of contact zones, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section, Pratt (1991) notes that often times parodied responses to structures of authority go unrecognized. This kind of unrecognized parody is embodied by Derrick in that sometimes people who are traditionally conservative do not realize that his enthusiasm is often meant ironically. In his interview he stated that he saw his classroom as being exempted from "indoctrinate[ing]" students with messages of tolerance because tolerance is "inherent in art.” Derrick and I are friends and tend to hang out in the same circles both in and outside of school.

**Katie.** Katie is a white, straight female who is married to a man. She and her husband have one daughter, who was born just as the final phases of our interviews were wrapping up. Katie lives in the school district where she works. She is in her early 30’s and was in her 7th year of teaching at the time of the study. Katie teaches Social Studies on one of the school’s three freshman teams.
Katie has membership in a group of young, athletic women who teach freshmen in our building. She is a petite blonde who is confident and energetic. In addition to taking on the extra duties and challenges that are expected of freshmen team teachers, Katie also was a junior varsity cheerleading coach. Katie and I did not know each other well prior to our interviews, but her reputation as a strong professional preceded her. I remember being somewhat resentful of Katie because her status as a coach and a freshmen teacher was more valued in our school than mine was as someone who taught Cultural Studies and advised GSA. Moreover, what she did in the school seemed to necessitate a kind of structured routine and allegiance to the status quo that made my and my students’ lives uncomfortable. My resentment, however, shifted during our first interview when Katie was deeply candid and welcoming. In the course of our interviews, I reproached myself in my researcher journal for focusing on the things we did not have in common rather than on the things we did.

Jill. Like Katie, I am a white, straight ally. At the time of the study, I was married to a man and was in my 13th year of teaching. I lived in an urban neighborhood located about 35 minutes away from the school where I worked. At the time, I was teaching Cultural Studies and American Literature to juniors and seniors and sophomores, respectively. Among my friends at school were teachers in the Art and Foreign Language departments who, over the years, had sort of appointed themselves as cultural ambassadors for the school. Members of our group often pursued non-traditional channels when we wanted to get something accomplished in the school. What this usually meant was organizing support that
came from outside the building first, then strategically working backwards to get permission from our administration. We were adept at collecting and presenting evidence with a conservative audience in mind. On the other hand, however, several of us also had worked together using more forthright, traditional routes such as writing grants and had organized guest speakers to come visit our classes and the school as a whole. Although most of our projects garnered praise and positive attention retroactively, in the initial stages we were consistently challenged by some staff and administrators. When I was not in my own classroom, I spent most of my time in the art rooms or school library.

Participants shared that other staff in the building saw me as a feminist, but not as one that matched the angry-female stereotypes associated with the word as it was being used in the suburban school where we worked. I was told by one of the participants that my feminine clothes (in particular, my shoes) created confusion for some staff and administrators. Participants also said that they thought I had a reputation for being inquisitive about things that were happening in the school, and that tended to make some of the male administrators in the district nervous. One participant noted that in the same way it was good for students to see teacher allies and LGBTQ staff, it was also good for closed-minded staff to see a “feminist” wearing high heels. Participants also said they imagined that treating others fairly was important to me even when I was not at school. They also noted that both in and out of school those who were even partially aligned with my views on important issues (like politics) to non-important issues (such as TV shows) liked conversations I initiated and liked the way I kept confrontational conversations going. At the same
time, however, because I had strong views and conveyed them assertively I could sometimes be intimidating to people outside my group of friends; participants noted that people who were not already included in my circle tended to shut down when they were around me at school.

**Stories in Contact**

This section presents findings from the final phase of data collection, the roundtable discussion, where all participants came together to talk about stories we had shared in our individual interviews. The discussion centered on excerpts of transcripts from these stories. The first part of this section discusses Pratt’s definition of contact zones in relationship to the roundtable discussion and its analysis. Next, the art-athletics binary that existed in the school is briefly discussed. After that, findings from the roundtable discussion are presented in the context of this binary. Finally, findings that show how the roundtable discussion represents a shift in power are presented.

**Pratt’s Contact Zones.** One of the concepts that emerged during the analysis phase of the roundtable discussion data was the idea of participant narratives coming into contact with one another rather than being co-created, which was how the roundtable discussion had been originally conceptualized. Pratt defines contact zones as places where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (1991, p. 33). Although it is arguable that the building itself was a contact zone for us as co-workers who were LGBTQ allies, it was not designated as a space for specifically talking about ally work in the way the study was, therefore, any grappling or clashes that occurred were
disconnected, relatively generic and ultimately unproductive. When we discussed Day of Silence at staff meetings, for example, asymmetrical relations of power in the school were evident, but the space was not truly a contact zone as Pratt describes because confrontations went un-named. Often confrontations about logistics of the event were passed off as bickering, but deeper issues of homophobia were not pursued in the context of the school as a whole. In addition, as noted earlier, specific conversations about LGBTQ issues in our building were often lost or ignored under the larger label of addressing “tolerance” or “diversity” issues. The conversation of the roundtable, on the other hand, was specifically named as one among LGBTQ allies. The Contact Zone of this particular roundtable, thus, stripped the usual protocol that was used for confronting opposing views (contesting the bell schedule, for example, and replaced it with harder but more honest conversation.

Pratt’s definition of contact zone was useful in relationship to thinking about the roundtable discussion for a couple of reasons. First, it provided an accurate description of the roundtable discussion. Terming it “co-created” was a misnomer because power dynamics and time constraints prevented true collaboration in piecing together the data story. The study did not preclude the privileged identities that we occupied. The dynamics of our straight and white identities, for example, were very much still in play, especially because the roundtable discussion took place within the larger context of the school, which was both heteronormative and homophobic. The hierarchy of privilege that was mentioned earlier in the chapter—Katie’s identity as a football cheerleading coach being privileged over Jason’s as a boys’ track coach, Derrick’s as art teacher, and mine as GSA advisor—represented
the kind of asymmetrical power describes. While this alone likely did not prevent
the roundtable discussion from being a co-created narrative, the fact that we had
not yet reached a stage of where we could recognize and explicitly acknowledge
these dynamics did act as a barrier to co-creation. A second way that
conceptualizing the roundtable discussion as a contact zone was useful was because
it highlighted differences in power among participants in the school and within the
smaller space of the study, specifically, within the roundtable discussion. Namely, it
showed how power dynamics shifted between the context of the school at large and
the context of the roundtable discussion: there was a shift in power and
authoritative voice from athletics to art. This shift occurred because I was both a
researcher and participant. This kind of shift was good in that it allowed me to voice
(directly or indirectly) my perspective among listeners who were committed to
having the conversation; however, it was limited because there was little space for
participant leadership in the inquiry.

**Art-athletics binary.** Before moving on to presenting the roundtable data, a
brief description of the art-athletic binary of our school is provided. This is
important because a significant shift in power dynamics within this binary occurred
in the contact zone of the roundtable discussion. The art-athletics binary is the first
of two binaries that are discussed in this chapter.

At the time of the study, athletics represented the dominant discourse and
art classes, teachers, students, and viewpoints arguably fall into the category of
“unsolicited oppositional discourse” (Pratt, 1991, p.39). In other words, they did not
fall within the legitimized culture of the school. "Art" projects and events such as
painted murals in the school, a day-long art immersion called "Arts Alive!", and poetry slams were largely unsupported because they represented a critique of the “imagined community” (p. 34) of hyper-masculinized athletics where football, boys’ basketball, and the girls’ cheerleading teams contributed to shaping a culture of heteronormative gender roles (Pascoe, 2007) and were most legitimized. As noted in the last section, projects initiated by the art department were included in the school culture only after much strategic work on the part of art teachers, a small group of non-art teacher supporters (art allies, perhaps), and their students. This designation of art as non-legitimate was sometimes attributed to art being an elective rather than a core class; in other words, because art credit was not needed for graduation, art classes and, by association, art teachers themselves were viewed as extraneous. Arguably, exclusion and resistance on the part of the school administration was rooted in associations made between art and deviance, specifically, homosexuality. These associations were positioned opposite the heternormative dynamic held up by sports, particularly football. This is not to say that there were not individuals in the school who indeed identified as athlete-artists and LGBTQ (we knew that there were), but rather to the way that that particular combination of identities was not recognized by the dominant culture of the school. The connection between legitimacy and heterosexuality was also explored in Chapter 1. Here, in the same way that was pointed to as evidence that a heteronormative society decriminalizes actions linked with heterosexual privilege, a heteronormative school could not recognize an identity that it has legitimized, that is, the identity of a male athlete, as anything other than heterosexual. To do so
would de-stabilize the power systems upon which hetronormativity depends. The art side of this binary, thus, was tolerated but ultimately not legitimate. The hegemonic nature of this binary where art was not valued was disrupted in the space of our roundtable discussion. This binary was one of two that emerged as being most relevant to the findings of the study.

**Protect/punish binary.** The second binary highlighted in this chapter was that of protection and punishment. This binary emerged during the analysis phase of roundtable data, but also can be linked to the earlier concept of coding for agency. This dynamic is presented in this chapter because although the concept of protecting students emerged from analysis of participant stories, thinking about it in terms of a binary became evident in later stages of analysis of the roundtable discussion. This section first presents definitions of protection and punishment as they were conceptualized in this study and discusses how participants enacted protection and punishment in different ways. After that, this section addresses the link between the protect/punish binary and heterosexual privilege.

Protection here was defined as positioning oneself in the role of defender or protector. This definition was derived from two areas of analysis. One area was the ways that we as teachers talked about our sense of responsibility for student safety. We discussed how and when we carried out this responsibility in general. Detailed findings about this will be presented in the next section. Another area of analysis was in and around the recurring tensions I experienced as a researcher and colleague during the analysis phase of working with the art/athletics binary discussed in the previous section. In my identity as a teacher on the art side of the
binary I realized that there existed a sense of protection over art-side students and colleagues who identified as LGBTQ and a sense of wanting their views to be asserted over the views of those held by the those on the privileged side of the binary, which was athletics and the heteronormativity it represented. This was reflected in the definitive power shift evidenced at the roundtable, specifically, in the space I controlled as the researcher—and art-side advocate. The controlling, privileged elements of these protective moves were not evident at the time, but became more so as the study progressed. Further data around protection and privilege (specifically, heterosexual privilege) and the ways they are linked to self-efficacy is presented later in the chapter.

The concept of punishment emerged as being a component of privilege associated with the role of protection. It should be noted that punishment was conceptualized broadly. The concept of punishment was derived from attitudes and actions that I used to limit power and authority of staff and administrators who were on the athletics side of the binary. For example, I would ask pointed questions at staff meetings or ask athletics-side administrators to define or explain things publicly. This would clearly anger and embarrass them to the point that they became defensive or would temporarily amend their plan for the pep rally, homecoming, or other kind of school activity. Unofficially and often unconsciously these actions were intended to attempt to gain a particular kind of authority in the building and district, namely one that was more equitable towards non-conforming identities. One example of this was when Derrick’s voice was given privilege over Katie’s during the roundtable discussion. This was evidenced in the co-created
profile presented earlier in the chapter where participants observed that staff and administrators who “were not already in [Jill’s] circle tended to shut down.” This shutting down likely resulted of my asking questions at staff meetings or sending out email inquiries that were intended to silence the dominant voices in the building and further enforcing a particular binary, that is, that the art-side students and teachers who also represent non-traditional identities are victims who need protecting. As someone who identified as “art” but also heterosexual, data pointed to my reinforcing heterosexual privilege. This was consistent with findings that are presented later in the chapter. The next section presents findings linked to the other side of the protection/punish binary.

The concept of punishment was also derived from the ways in which participants talked about explicit, conscious, and openly sanctioned actions taken by teachers towards students when they broke classroom or school rules and was also linked to heterosexual privilege. This was evidenced in Jason’s interviews. In his first interview Jason stated, “My students know when they come in to the room they’re not going to be bullied or hassled or made fun of if I have anything to say about it.” In the same interview, Jason cited an example where a well-known football player who also ran track called one of the other boys on his track team, one who did not also play football, a “faggot.” Jason explained, “one of the assistant coaches and I pulled [the football player] into the locker room and laid into him pretty good.” In his second interview, Jason responded to a deeper probing about how he viewed his role as a teacher who created safe spaces by stating, “if a situation came up where a big gay guy was bullying a smaller straight kid I’d jump in to stop that,
too—although I’ve never seen this happen, but just as an example...I’d jump on that, too.” Data here pointed first to Jason’s perception that all of his students—gay or straight, big or small—“know” protection or punishment in the same way in his presence. Data, however, also pointed to a complication: although there existed the perception that student identity had no bearing on actions that merited punishment (or protection), the example provided during the interview depicted a heterosexual football player being punished and a gay student on the track team being protected. In the data that followed, there was a reversal of the binary (track punished, football protected) but it was quickly negated in the narrative with the statement, “I’ve never seen this happen.” Data from my and Katie’s interviews revealed similar positionings within the protect/punish binary. Like Jason, both of our narratives included examples of us punitively “ripping into” or giving a “talking to” students who we perceived to be straight. Findings here indicated that heterosexual privilege was also supported by punishment, whether it was between straight staff members or a straight teacher punishing a straight student. While the agentive nature of all these acts of punishment are not necessarily bad in that there are times, certainly, when LGBTQ students (and student teachers or other staff) do need protecting, it is problematic an in all examples LGBTQ was the identity needing protection; it was fixed as victimized. Findings from the roundtable, however, revealed that Derrick did not enact heterosexual privilege in the same way within the protect/punish binary.

Although all participants considered keeping students safe as part of our jobs, we differed when it came to how safety looked. For Jason, Katie, and I it
included more “jumping in” to protect and punish students. For Derrick, however, it meant offering support, but also allowing students to handle things themselves. This was highlighted in the roundtable discussion:

Jill: Ok, so how do we...the kids can tell the differences in us [teachers] and we can tell differences among the kids. How do we, as teachers, protect kids without labeling them as needing protection? And you, [Derrick,] talked about Kim. How she can hold her own.

Derrick: Well, you [talked about Kim] too. Because she obviously can.

Jill: Because she can.

Katie: That is really hard because we tend to watch the ones who are loners and not the ones who are very social. Me personally, I think it's the [students] who have been picked on in the past. The ones who are reading in the corner or alone in the commons.

Jason: I think, too, that humans have the innate ability to sense when there’s a certain vibe being put out there. You can kind of sense discomfort in a child or student and it’s up to teachers in our profession to try to kill that and squash it before it becomes [something] more.

Derrick: Um, I don’t do this on purpose, but when I respond to a situation like that I don’t think I respond to it in terms of “I’m defending this kid who needs it”. My attention is glued to the person who said that thing. I discipline that behavior. I mean, even if they were directly targeting someone I don’t bring that person directly into it because I think that would do that [position other person as victim who needs protecting].
Katie: Right.

Data pointed to Derrick taking a notably different stance on protecting and punishing students than those taken by Jason and Katie in that he distinguished his stance from Katie’s notion that there exists a certain type of kid who needs protecting as well as Jason’s assertion that teachers have instincts about when students are uncomfortable when he stated that “even if [a student] was directly targeting someone” his focus was on the behavior or situation. Data here and in my interview also pointed to my alignment with Derrick’s stance in that we both talked about allowing our shared student, Kim, who was an out lesbian, to “hold her own” rather than jumping in. However, it also showed that this stance was entirely consistent across Derrick’s interviews.

Findings about enactments of the protect/punish binary acted as a springboard for delving into deeper analysis of the roundtable discussion in that findings showed a recursive connection between privilege and binaries. Complexities and tensions around protect/punish binary contributed to the formation of the original roundtable question, “How do we, as teachers, protect kids without labeling them as needing protection?” This question initiated a roundtable discussion where there were opportunities for us to explore tensions together as a group. The next section presents findings about the power shift that occurred within the art/athletics binary during the roundtable discussion.

**Roundtable as site for power shift.** The contact zone of the roundtable evidenced a site where a shift in the asymmetrical power relationships among
participants occurred. The shift in power in authoritative voice represented a shift in the power dynamic of the art-athletic binary. Specifically, my and Derrick’s voices were privileged over Katie’s voice and the homophobia represented by the anti-bullying story she used as part of her curriculum. Jason’s voice served as mediation between the two sides of the binary.

Katie had not recognized that her story was homophobic when it was highlighted and presented to her during member checks leading up to the roundtable; therefore, the contact zone of the roundtable discussion provided much needed “grappling” space that we had not yet found. In my field notes I commented,

I was so glad that [Katie’s first] interview was going well that I didn’t want to be confrontational. I am going to address [the fact that her story is homophobic] prior to the group roundtable.

What was evident here was that relationship building with Katie was prioritized early in the interview phase of the study and confrontation was viewed as a threat to that. Specifically, I did not initially confront Katie about the homophobia in her anti-bullying story because I was afraid she would shut down or withdraw from the study. Field note data here additionally revealed that I defined “going well” as being non-confrontational. This is analytically important because it shows that when Katie and I were doing ally work alongside each other in our building, and, further, during times when the homophobic theme of her anti-bullying story was addressed in pre-roundtable conversations our LGBTQ ally stories were not yet truly in contact with each other. Certainly we grappled with LGBTQ ally work independently, but the roundtable provided a true contact zone where we could explore tensions around
not only the homophobic aspect of Katie’s anti-bullying story but around the ways we did the work day-to-day.

In addition to providing this kind of space for confrontations, the contact zone of the roundtable also marked a space where Derrick and my voices were privileged over Katie’s in a way that they were typically not outside the context of the study. The space also provided the opportunity for Jason’s voice to align with the existing binary or allow it to remain reflective and moderate, as it had been for much of the study. Much like our reciprocated interviews, the dialogue between Derrick and I during the roundtable was aligned. This power shift within the context of the roundtable was evident. Both alignment and a shift in privilege were evidenced in the group’s initial exchange, which is shown again here:

Jill: Ok, so how do we…the kids can tell the differences in us [teachers] and we can tell differences among the kids. How do we, as teachers, protect kids without labeling them as needing protection? And you, [Derrick,] talked about Kim. How she can hold her own.

Derrick: Well, you [talked about Kim] too. Because she obviously can.

Jill: Because she can.

Katie: That is really hard because we tend to watch the ones who are loners and not the ones who are very social. Me personally, I think it’s the [students] who have been picked on in the past. The ones who are reading in the corner or alone in the commons.

Jason: I think, too, that humans have the innate ability to sense when there’s a certain vibe being put out there. You can kind of sense discomfort in a child or
student and it’s up to teachers in our profession to try to kill that and squash it before it becomes [something] more.

Derrick: Um, I don’t do this on purpose, but when I respond to a situation like that I don’t think I respond to it in terms of “I’m defending this kid who needs it”. My attention is glued to the person who said that thing. I discipline that behavior. I mean, even if they were directly targeting someone I don’t bring that person directly into it because I think that would do that [position other person as victim who needs protecting].

Katie: Right.

Data here pointed to several important things. First, it showed continued alignment between my and Derrick’s responses. Second, it highlighted differences in participant perspectives. Finally, it showed that Katie was initially comfortable with voicing a perspective that was not aligned with mine and Derrick’s, but that she shifted into a less-assertive position as the conversation progressed.

The initial exchange of the roundtable showed alignment in my and Derrick’s views. In our individual interviews, both of us had talked about Kim, a student in our English and art classes, respectively, and who was also an out lesbian who was on student council and very involved with GSA. It should also be noted that Kim had progressively changed her name, hair, and attire in the time we had known her to reflect a more masculine identity. The fact that I used Kim to prompt Derrick to cite her as an example of a student who was both empowered and a lesbian during the roundtable showed that I wanted to establish a particular perspective right away.
This was further evidenced by the absence of an invitation to Katie and Jason to share examples from their stories. By selecting Derrick to respond first and selecting Kim as an example, it showed that I wanted to establish the art side of the binary within the power dynamics at the roundtable. More specifically, data pointed to my desire to establish LGBTQ as a student identity that was not only not in need of protecting, but was one of empowerment and success. In addition, when I echoed Derrick’s language, “Because she can” it also showed alignment in a way that lent strength to our collective viewpoint.

Katie shifted to a less confident position within the space of the roundtable discussion. Katie responded to the original question, “How do we, as teachers, protect the kids without labeling them as needing protection?” by saying that “we” look for kids who have been “picked on in the past” or who are “loners” her response was confident and assertive. This was consistent with our interview experiences. It should be noted that the pronoun “we” in this context was used to refer to her and the freshmen team teachers with whom she worked. Although Katie’s response did not directly address my and Derrick’s citation of Kim, it pointed to Katie voicing a perspective that was oppositional to mine and Derrick’s.

Foremost, the student behavior of “reading alone” was paired with the label “loner,” which has a negative connotation for some teachers. This was not a universal pairing among teachers in our school, however. In the English department, for example, teachers tended to characterize students who read alone as particularly bright, creative, and even gifted. Katie also asserted that, for her, kids who needed protection are students who are identifiable (in part) by the way others have
treated them in the past. Arguably, this pointed to Katie viewing student identities as non-fluid and served as a counter-example to Kim, a student who had a fluid identity, was an avid reader (but not a “loner”), and was, generally speaking, not in need of protection. In response, Jason asserted that “humans have the innate ability to sense when there’s a certain vibe being put out there” and noted that people “kind of sense discomfort in a child or student.” Data here pointed to Jason moving away from Katie’s perspective that a certain kind of student was in need of protection. The view that Jason articulated was that needing to step in to help a student was linked to a “vibe” or “sense.” This was a more fluid viewpoint than Katie’s because it was based on individual or situational need rather than the fixed identity of “loner.” The next two speaking turns were taken by Derrick and Katie.

Derrick: I respond to a situation like that I don’t think I respond to it in terms of “I’m defending this kid who needs it”. My attention is glued to the person who said that thing. I discipline that behavior.

Katie: Right.

Here, Derrick stated that when a student needed protecting his attention was “glued” to the perpetrator of the harassment, as he put it, “the kid that said the thing,” not on the person being victimized. This evidenced a perspective that was even further away from using Kim as a counter-example to the traditional anti-bullying discourse of the school in that he turned the focus onto the kids doing the bullying rather than on the kids who were being victimized by it. Data here also pointed to further evidence that Derrick supported fluid student identities for all students in that he stated that even within his focus on the “kid who said the thing,”
he talked about disciplining the “behavior.” In other words, he allows space for the student to behave differently in future situations. When Katie took up the next speaking turn, she responded with, “Right” even though her interview stories and initial roundtable response did not align with the perspectives of Jason and Derrick, whose responses were more contextually based. This showed that her perspective was less privileged because she affirmed viewpoints different than her own rather than contesting them as she had in her first speaking turn. The brevity of her speaking turn (one word, “Right”) also pointed to her making a shift into the less-centered position of listener. This position also reflected Katie’s growth as she processed and learned from comments others made.

Jill: [to Katie] One of the things we talked about is that some of the work you do in school is because you don’t want there to be threat towards the kids because you yourself were threatened at one point. You felt uncomfortable. So, when you think about your life and your work as a teacher, do you still perceive that same kind of threat? That’s something that I thought I saw in our interview.

Katie: For me, I try to get the kids to see that doing the right thing is necessary because of—we talked about that word, “threat.” I hope I didn’t come across as that I was only telling the kids to accept someone because they would be threatened if they didn’t. I hope I didn’t come across that way...You have to respect everybody. That’s what we try to get across, that it’s the right thing to be accepting of everybody not just people who act and look like you.
One of the things data pointed to here was a shift in the way Katie’s voice was privileged. The pauses and repetition of the phrase, “I hope I didn’t come across” during this speaking turn pointed to a more uncertain stance and a reconsideration of the way her anti-bullying story had “come across.” It was evident that Katie was surprised that she had “come across” as someone who was “only telling the kids to accept someone because they would be threatened if they didn’t.” In addition, data pointed to the fact that up until that moment Katie did not know that her story was being heard differently than she intended. This was shown in her response to the question, “do you still perceive that same kind of threat [where students like Keith are a danger]?” In her response, Katie stopped and re-directed what she was saying the moment she realized the possibility that her story had promoted fear:

> For me, I try to get the kids to see that doing the right thing is necessary because of—we talked about that word, “threat.” I hope I didn’t come across as that I was only telling the kids to accept someone because they would be threatened if they didn’t.

Katie did not finish her initial sentence about why kids needed to do the right thing. Instead, she immediately began to process the word “threat” as it was used in the context of our interviews and as it was being heard in that moment in the context of the roundtable. Arguably, data here, then, also pointed to her realizing that perhaps she was coming across in the same way as her story. This was shown by her making moves away from the concept of “threat” once she realized that it was represented. The message of fear was replaced with the different, more positive message of respect: “You have to respect everybody. That’s what we try to get across, that it’s
the right thing to be accepting of everybody not just people who act and look like you.” This newly stated point showed that Katie did not like the message that was being heard and wanted to change how it and, likely, she “came across.” She then further distanced herself from this message by shifting her emphasis from “I try to get the kids to see...” to “[Respect] is what we try to get across.” The shifts Katie made pointed to Katie’s consideration for changing the way she told the story and re-positioning herself within her privileged identity.

**Binaries Within Ally Work**

The primary binary that emerged from the ally work represented by participant stories was one between art and athletics. Katie’s story represented the athletics side of the binary, while my story represented the art side. From the list of prompts Katie was given (Table 2) she chose to tell a turning-point story about her awareness of her own actions as a high school bully. Like Katie, I also chose to tell a turning-point story in my role as a participant in the study. The story I told was about a lack of awareness of my heteronormative privilege when I was in graduate school. After presenting a brief introduction of Katie and me and our stories, the next section examines our pedagogical approaches. Included in this is an exploration of the link between self-efficacy and privilege. This is followed by an exploration of our narrative approaches. The final section of this chapter examines our collegial approaches.

Katie and I conducted interviews in her classroom, which was in the freshmen wing of the building. Before the study, Katie was a staff member I very rarely saw. In her room, a tidy, super-organized space, I felt like a stranger in a strange land. This
kind of classroom belonged to a teacher who was not like me: baskets matched, desk was clutter-free, support for local and professional football teams was organized in tasteful clusters. At the time of our first interview, Katie was several months pregnant and was tired. She shared that telling her story took an emotional toll on her, but she wanted to tell it. It was a story she told to her students every year as an important component of an anti-bullying unit she and her freshmen team-taught. The story had also earned a place in the larger anti-bullying canon of the school.

**Katie’s story.** Katie chose the prompt about “turning points.” She talked about a time when she was in high school and she and her friends picked on a classmate for his clothing and mannerisms. She characterized herself as a “bully” and a “brat” who did not listen to teachers’ warnings about her behavior. Eventually, her classmate struck back by setting fire to the school’s theater and making a “hit list.” Katie’s name, among others, was on the list. The list caused a panic in the school and the student was expelled. Rumors circulated about his sexuality. After some time had passed, Katie heard that he had committed suicide. Katie has felt guilty for years about what she sees as her part in her classmate’s death. As a result, she does everything she can to prevent similar bullying-related tragedies from occurring.

In our second interview, the story Katie shared was about a former student on her freshman team who was bullied. The girl who was accused of bullying him was suspended. As such, Katie felt that the school had “sent a message” that bullying would not be tolerated. During this interview, I told Katie that I had been thinking a lot about the ways she’d connected an anti-bullying message to one of self-preservation. Specifically, I talked to her about the way she told students not to
bully others because it might come back to them. This was a tough topic for me to approach and was a point wrought with tension. She clarified that she saw the way she used this anti-bullying message was as a way to protect both bullies and those who were victimized.

**My story.** Also like Katie, I responded to the prompt about a turning point in my life. I identified my shift from assuming the sexual identity of one of my professors, Josie, to acknowledging my own heteronormative bias as being important to raising my awareness level as a teacher. I remembered insisting to one of my friends that Josie was straight, even though Josie had essentially come out to the class we were in at the time. This “blindness” concerned me because it had implications for my students. I wondered how many times my cultural blindness had caused me to miss opportunities to connect with my classes. I shared concerns about the possibility of overlooking students and talked about feeling personally responsible for the degree to which marginalized students felt accepted when they were in my class.

My follow up stories included talking about my interest in women’s rights as a foundation for my interest in LGBTQ rights. I also talked about being upset with a student in my class who spoke from a perspective that was unconsciously privileged. I recognized that my own privilege interfered with my ability to hear students’ stories from their perspectives. At the same time, however, I acknowledged that when students made homophobic remarks in front of my student teacher or the class I felt justified in my anger and assessments.
**Pedagogical Approaches**

This section is dedicated to exploring pedagogical approaches reported being used by Katie and me. In other words, these are approaches we used in the work we talked about doing as teachers in and around the school. These pedagogical approaches had strengths as well as limitations. Some of the limitations included reliance on a heteronormative fixing of texts and identities. Interestingly, within our work, our approaches were rooted in a strong awareness of homophobia and we were pro-active in combating it. This is illustrated with one example from Katie’s stories, where she shared a story that she used in her classes as part of an anti-bullying unit, and four examples from my stories, which represented a variety of contexts where I depended on heteronormative privilege.

**Canonizing hetronormativity.** As I mentioned earlier, the turning point story Katie told was different than the stories shared by other participants because she explicitly used the story as a text in her Social Studies curriculum. Specifically, she and her team used it to anchor lessons in an anti-bullying unit that they teach every year. The lesson, in fact, has been sanctioned by the school’s administration and guidance department to such an extent that its absence would have caused concern. The story was a component of the anti-bullying canon discussed in Chapter 1. As such, there was a somewhat uncontestable rationale for telling the story in place prior to the study. Although Katie’s intention for re-establishing the story’s merit in the context of the study was heartfelt, the fixedness of the narrative was ultimately problematic and limited as a pedagogical approach.

The primary limitation of Katie’s story was not that it had been formalized, but
that in its formalization and, I assert, canonization, it had become fixed and intractable. She could readily talk about why she used the story with her students, for example, but did so in only one particular way. This was evidenced by her repetition of one phrase to frame the story as a component of the anti-bullying lesson: “It’s important for students to know that [bullying/hate language/harassment] is not ok.” In addition to the fixed framing of the story, the story itself was also fixed: there was only one story and one version of that story shared with students, colleagues and administrators. Further, in the telling of the story, there was little space for input from student listeners. The ways the story was fixed were evident as Katie expressed frustrations with that year’s storytelling experience:

When I told my story to my freshmen students this year their general response was that of, “Hey, thanks for depressing us!” The day after I told it, one of the kids was like, “You were mean in high school, Ms. Walden!” In some ways I feel like my students missed the point because the responses I got this year didn’t seem as complex as they’ve been in the past.

Here, Katie dismissed student comments that her story was “depressing” and that she was “mean in high school” by saying that she felt like her students “In some ways...missed the point.” Fixedness was evidenced because despite students presenting other, viable points, she did not deviate from her lesson plan and did not articulate consideration for student concerns or, more broadly, consider opportunities for including new perspectives that did not map onto “past responses.” Despite Katie’s indication that she had been hoping for “complex”
responses from the students, she also indicated that the “point” of her story was singular and, inferably, non-negotiable. Further evidence of the story’s fixedness was in Katie’s evaluation of her storytelling: her focus was not on the visibility of the conversation, but rather on the way the conversation about bullying was not as “complex” this year as it had been in the past. Despite what appeared to be opportunities to trouble the narrative in complex ways, revisions of the story or lesson were not mentioned.

In addition to the limitation of a single story pedagogical approach, that the story was told from one perspective in order to get students to arrive at a singular anti-bullying point was also problematic. Further, “the point” itself also created limitations in that it prioritized protection of listeners who identified with the position of the bullies. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Initial evidence of the fixed positioning of both the point of the story and the actants within it was evidenced when Katie talked about her main reasons for telling the story:

I notice that during this unit any bullying occurring on the 9th grade team tends to slow down if not stop it for a while. I hope that by telling the story every year I can influence students. They need to know bullying should never be tolerated. If for no other reason they should know it because it may someday help to protect themselves.

Here, Katie stated that the primary reason for the story was to help students “protect themselves.” In the larger context of Katie’s story, that is, one where the protagonist was a remorseful bully (Katie herself) who narrowly escaped the
consequences of picking on a dangerous loner, the main point of safety and protection was intended for listeners who *identified with the bully*. Here, the limitations of linking of a fixed “point” within the pedagogy (protection and safety) to a fixed identity of those needing protection (popular kids) was evident.

Before continuing, it is important to unpack briefly the ways that these evaluative categories can get messy.

**Pro-active and privileged.** The duality of strengths and limitations in pro-active pedagogical approaches was exemplified by an incident where Katie became actively involved in a situation where a student was being bullied. Here, pro-active ally work masked heteronormative privilege and entitlement. In our second interview, Katie talked about a time when a student of hers stole another student’s clothes during gym class and threw them off the second story balcony at school. The student whose clothes were stolen, Robert, had been victimized on a regular basis because he was perceived to be gay and talked in a “nasal” voice. In our interview, Katie shared that she played a major role in the way the incident was handled and processed by her freshmen team and by the administration. In the following excerpt, Katie described what happened after the incident occurred:

Robert said, “Well, somebody stole my gym clothes.” I was infuriated. I was like, “Oh-my-God!” and ripped into [the class], trying to guilt whoever took the clothes into a confession. After class, one of the girls came up to me and whispered, “I know who did it.” All three freshmen teachers on our team turned in the girl who did it and then stopped what they were doing in their classes for the next three days so that they could work on anti-bullying lessons
with the other kids.... Even though the incident only happened once, its severity qualified it as a “bullying incident,” which was in direct violation of the school’s anti-bullying policy and the girl [who did it] was suspended for three days. When she came back to school the other team teachers and I hot seated her, which was a procedure we had in place for any student who needed extra attention due to sinking grades or other problem behavior.

Data here showed that Katie was pro-active in that she addressed the situation right away and in multiple contexts. As a teacher concerned for her student’s safety and well-being, taking immediate action was pedagogically strong—certainly better than dismissing the threat as inevitable for boys like Robert. Further, that Robert saw that his teacher was upset by someone treating him badly likely affirmed his own painful feelings.

Notably, however, that she was “infuriated” by the incident also pointed to a fixed positioning of Katie as entitled and privileged and Robert as victim. Like her anti-bullying curricula, Katie’s response to the situation and her claim to anger, was assumed. Robert, on the other hand, was not provided space to (re)position himself on the day of the incident or in the processing of it afterwards. Katie’s actions in the processing of the incident further evidenced a fixed identity of heteronormative entitlement. Katie turned in the student who threw the clothes and took part in “hotseat[ing]” that student after the student was suspended. After that, she re-directed not only her own planned lessons, but also the lessons of the other teachers on her team in order to address the incident. Also relevant was inherent entitlement evidenced by Katie’s confidence in reporting the way in which the incident was
defined or “qualified” by the school. Further, the school extended her authority in that she was permitted to assign further consequences to the bully. Katie and the other teachers also were able to designate the girl’s behavior as “problematic” in more than one context. In sum, all of these actions pointed to Katie’s initial outrage influencing not only the institutional procedure for addressing the incident, but also the way that future bullying incidents were addressed and perhaps even defined. This was problematic because it linked appropriate actions of leadership to inappropriate claimings of identity. For Katie as an adult who was legally responsible for her students, she was right to advocate for her student. In her identity as a straight, white, middle-class adult, however, her actions were presumptive and very likely limited Keith’s ability to advocate for himself in that situation or future ones. In addition to the limitations of employing fixed narratives, maintaining a pro-active approach while occupying a position of unexamined heteronormative entitlement was also limited.

Limitations of utilizing a pro-active pedagogical approach within a position of entitlement was also evidenced in my story. Data pointed to a sense of self-awareness of my entitlement, however, this awareness did not mean that my approach was without limitations. Limitations were shown in the way I processed an incident involving a wealthy, popular student in my Cultural Studies class and in the way I addressed I homophobic comments in the presence of a closeted pre-service teacher.

The first way this limitation was shown in the way I talked about a student’s biased comments during a classroom discussion about a character named Ray, a
poor yet powerful young Native American woman in Michael Dorris’ novel *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*:

I was irritated by this student of mine because she kept insisting that it doesn’t matter what or who your parents are because people who hire you just want to know if you can do the job. She was like, “I’ve gotten all kinds of jobs before and my parents had nothing to do with it.” I was getting so mad at her! As if how you’re dressed or how you talk or how your parents have treated you doesn’t impact anything!

In this excerpt, I was angry that my student did not recognize the ways that cultural capital had benefitted her (Bourdieu, 1973) even though we had spent much of that particular unit talking about white privilege. Inferably, I was aware that potential employers would identify the student as white, straight, and middle class and that she would have more access to getting a job because of those qualities. Later in the interview I stated, “On some level, I am just like my student in class...because [in the past] I haven’t been aware of [having been] pre-judged.” I also noted:

I have to notice when someone’s trying to tell me something, especially when what they’re saying just isn’t in my experience. I can’t just not catch those things because those are the things that need to be caught the most.

Here, data pointed to my being pro-active in terms of awareness; however, my awareness was limited. When I said I was on “some level” “just like” the student with whom I was angry, data reflected that I was often aware of my own biases, and could name that “level” in a conversation. Like Katie, I could point to times when I had messed up and did not want to continue to “not catch” things in the ways I had
in the past. Notably, however, my assertion that the “things that need to be caught the most” are especially those things that lie outside my own experience showed that I was on the lookout for missing a particular kind of thing to “catch.” As a Cultural Studies teacher and a GSA advisor, then, what this amounted to was my wanting to make space for marginalized stories, or those I think of as being silenced or undervalued by dominant culture. Notably, however, within my assertions of the importance of awareness and my expressions of anxiety about the degree to which I could recognize my own biases, I also asserted that stories outside my experience needed the most attention. Experiences that were not mine, in other words, were positioned as necessarily other. What data pointed to was the duality of being pro-active within an identity of entitlement: I was pedagogically strong in the way I took action, even lashed out, to support a marginalized perspective represented in one of my class texts; by taking a stand against my wealthy student’s perspective, ostensibly, I protected students who identified with Ray. My approach was limited, however, was in the way I designated and claimed the kind of story, and, arguably, individual that “needed” me. Although my curriculum was structured around a variety of stories and perspectives, my actions revealed that I was not as aware of my entitled identity as I thought.

Another example of the duality of being pro-active within an entitled identity was when I talked about working to combat homophobia in my classroom. Specifically, I pointed to the way I used alternate pronouns when talking about couples during classroom discussions. I recalled:

I try to offer scenarios...that don’t automatically assume a heterosexual couple. I
try to use language that shows different pronoun combinations so the kids don’t think that’s an abnormal situation. I want to make [same-sex pronouns] part of a normal description.

Here data showed me being pro-active in the way I chose my language and took steps to disrupt heteronormativity. Taking a pro-active stance is also inferable here in that I was comfortable with the conversations with students, parents, and administrators that were likely to ensue as a result of this kind of disruption. Field notes revealed that I was also happy to initiate these conversations at places like parent-teacher Open House night. Although data initially pointed solely to entitlement in that I described wanting to “make” students in my classroom shift to a less heteronormative way of thinking about couples and confront staff and community members who did not agree with me, a deeper analysis revealed that I was also acting within a framework that, again, necessitated my fixing the identities of those whom I perceived needed talking to, shutting down, or otherwise combatting. Here, my approach of pro-action and entitlement was advocating for LGBTQ students, however, it was limited in the same way that Katie’s approaches were limited in that I did not allow space for fluid identities.

Another example of the complexities of pro-active and entitled pedagogical approaches was shown in the way I handled homophobic remarks in my classroom. The pattern of being pro-active while working within an entitled identity was the same. This pattern was evidenced by an incident where my students had made homophobic remarks in front of a closeted gay pre-service teacher:

One time when I felt more justified about being outwardly angry was when I
had a student observer in the other day...From the way some of the kids were saying things about the gay community I could tell that almost everyone in the room but me assumed that everyone listening was straight. I was so angry and I wanted to protect my student teacher from what they were saying but that’s the stuff the kids say. I said something about it to them...There are times when [students] need to understand layers and there are times when they need to know they’re not allowed to be rude.

I continued,

I’m not a parent but I would want someone to tell my kids [how and why they should not be rude], especially because most of the time they’re not doing it on purpose. I would even want someone to tell me that now.

Most prominently, I demonstrated that I was pro-active in speaking out against homophobic comments made in my classroom. In saying something I showed that I took action to interrupt “students saying [homophobic] things about the gay community.” This kind of confrontation was similar to the same-sex pronoun disruptions I talked about in the last section. In this instance, however, the dynamic in my room was different in that I was hosting a pre-service teacher who also identified as gay and who was closeted. This data revealed my sense of entitlement. The dialogically controlling moves I made here were again rooted in heteronormativity in that I made them on behalf of my student observer, a closeted pre-service teacher. As a veteran teacher whose practice relies heavily on classroom discussion, I was certainly able to recognize the contexts likely to result in homophobic comments. I could have prevented (i.e. silenced) homophobic comments
prior to their actualization. However, here I permitted actualization of the
comments, and then, as part of a show “for” my student teacher, talked about
allowing myself to be publicly angry about them. That I allowed them to be said at
all evidenced limitations to my pedagogical approach to ally work in that it showed
that I positioned myself as regulator for a demonstration of homophobia—despite
the harm it caused my student observer and students in the class. On one hand, as a
mentor teacher I was strong in modeling appropriate disapproval in response to
homophobic comments made by students; this show was something I had
consciously made explicit to straight student teachers in the past as well. On the
other hand, the context of this particular modeling (i.e. pre-service teacher who
identified as gay and closeted was present) revealed that my pedagogical approach
was fixed. The rhetorical justification I made for being angry about homophobic
comments was in effect a justification for complicity in a pedagogy that relied at
least in part on maintaining a heteronormative status quo. For comparison
purposes, another space to consider was my position during GSA meetings where,
despite struggling with the relative chaos (i.e. students cursing, talking loudly and
talking over one another) during GSA discussions, I rarely jumped in to correct them
and allowed them to correct one another as they saw fit. Although I did not talk
about this shift of entitlement when Derrick interviewed me, the question of context
in relation to jumping in pro-actively as a teacher was an issue that came up across
all participant interviews. I was still highly pro-active during GSA meetings
(scheduling meetings, organizing fund-raisers, etc.), but I was less entitled and did
not claim the space or the people in it in the same way. In sum, although I reified
binaries between pre- and in-service teachers and, further, between LGBTQ and ally teachers and students in the context of my English class, my pedagogical approach was less limited in the after-school space of my GSA.

Although our pedagogical approaches to ally work were pro-active, they were often dependent on entitlement and heteronormativity. In the same way that canonizing a fixed ally curriculum was limited, performing ally work within fixed pedagogical approaches was also limited in that Katie and I often positioned our identities as both empowered and obligated to help. In doing so, we limited spaces and opportunities for students to (re)imagine themselves in a range of identities. Notably, pedagogical commitments to inclusion and visibility to our ally work were insufficient in terms of our teacher commitments to creating and sustaining safer spaces for LGBTQ youth in schools. One area where this was evident was our practice of being persistently pro-active in addressing homophobia and bullying in our own classrooms. This practice was rooted in our sense of self-efficacy, or our belief that we could do something (Bandura, 1977). Katie and I, for example, each talked about readily jumping in whenever we sensed there was a need to do so in classroom spaces as well as in larger school and district spaces. Being pro-active was a required component of doing one’s job well. As with Katie’s fixed curriculum, however, being pro-active was limited in that was at times inextricably linked to our enactments of fixed, non-fluid identities. More specifically, it relied on heterosexual privilege. Although there is a strong argument for self-efficacy as an integral trait for successful teachers—which I do not contest—I also assert that there is a danger that what seem to be generic self-efficacy practices also contribute to the reification of
heternormative privilege.

**Narrative Approaches**

Stories Katie and I shared about our ally work were also categorized in terms of our narrative approaches. Katie and I both told two stories that evidenced our respective narrative approaches. By narrative approaches I mean the representations we chose to share in the stories we told during the course of the study. These approaches felt more limited than our pedagogical approaches in that they were often unconscious and deeply rooted in larger heternormative Discourse.

**Breaching bullying.** The story Katie chose in response to the prompt was a cautionary tale. As a teacher, this kind of narrative approach felt familiar to me because so many of us share stories that fall under the pattern of what Bruner (1991) defines as canonicity and breach. This kind of story is when an unusual occurrence interrupts what is thought to be the canonical (i.e. normal) state; the breach story in some way supposes normativeness, or a claim about how one ought to act. In Katie's story, bullying was the norm. She highlighted both the ways in which her bullying a classmate contributed to a preventable tragedy, and also how her actions resulted in her own endangerment. She identified the duality of her message in the following:

I can't believe I didn't realize that me picking on Keith could hurt him to the extent that he would imagine killing me or himself. Today the thought of being on that hit list still scares me. I wish I would’ve understood how much pain I was causing Keith because I would’ve definitely stopped.
One component of Katie’s cautionary message was her warning against causing pain and tragedy for others. She emphasized that she “can’t believe [she] didn’t realize...picking on Keith could hurt him to the extent that he would imagine killing [her] or himself.” Here, she wanted listeners to know that there were serious consequences (i.e. pain and death) for the victims. Listeners should learn from her mistakes (as a bully) by making different choices than she did. Also represented in her message, however, was a component that warned against consequences (harm or death) for the bullies. This part of her message was intended to let listeners know that it was not safe to tease and harass others because those who are being victimized can retaliate in serious ways. That “being on that hit list still scares [her]” indicated that in addition to wanting to prevent future victimization of students, she wanted to protect potential perpetrators, too. One can assume Katie was aware that her classmate Keith in fact imagined killing both her and himself; therefore, her messages of caution were warranted. Another layer of analysis, however, was more useful in the context of looking deeply into the way that the representations Katie chose to represent her work were themselves unconsciously homophobic. This point was best illustrated by examining the discrepancy between Katie’s level of awareness of homophobia in others and her lack of awareness of it in her own work.

**Stories about homophobia.** One strength in Katie’s narrative approach to ally work was that she was aware that homophobia existed and spoke out against it. This occurred two times in her interview stories. The first time was when she described people’s homophobic response to her classmate’s “hit list” and expulsion from school:
After hearing about the hit list, lots of kids made the connection that Keith was kind of like one of those dark [Columbine] characters that they’d been hearing about on the news. Part of this became people talking about how Keith had homosexual tendencies. These discussions about his sexuality sort of contributed to the fear that people had of him after the hit list incident. It was just one more thing to explain his violent behavior.

The other time Katie recognized homophobia was when she shared that she had a cousin who was closeted:

I actually have a gay cousin who lives in Manhattan. He won’t come out to his parents until the day they die because they are so anti-gay... It’s sad...because he has this really nice boyfriend that they'll never get to meet.

In each instance, Katie pointed to the unjust treatment of her classmate and her cousin, respectively. In the first instance, Katie expressed outward contempt for the people who characterized Keith’s perceived homosexuality as “just one more way to explain his violent behavior.” In the second case, Katie angrily lamented that her aunt and uncle were “anti-gay” because they were going miss out on knowing their son. Specifically, she noted that they would never meet his “really nice boyfriend.” In these two instances, Katie identified with those who had been targets of homophobia. Being aware of and speaking out against homophobia were positive narrative approaches to ally work.

**Homophobic stories.** Katie’s narrative approaches were limited, differently, however, in that she identified differently when she told the anti-bullying story to her class. In her story, she identified herself as the bully. Unlike her narrative during
the interviews, in her classroom story she represented experiences where individuals who were identified as gay or lesbian were portrayed as victims or as dangerous and positioned her listeners as identifying in the same way, that is, occupying privileged (i.e. straight, white, popular) identities as well. Reflexivity or what is known in narrative theory as a *metafictional* consciousness was absent. In other words, Katie did not “remind [listeners] that her story is...born of other stories” (p. 494-95, Herman, Hahn & Ryan); her *process* of getting her message across, therefore, was not visible. Another way of looking at the story was in the way it represented a progression from naïve youth to wise adult. This representation was heteronormative in that it positioned her adolescent and adult selves to be representative of everyman (Anonymous, 1910), or a generic character with whom *anyone living within the norms of society* can and should empathize: student listeners were meant to imagine finding themselves not only in the same situation, but experiencing that situation *in the same way*. Katie’s position in the narrative, that is, white, middle-class, bully who learned her lesson via narrowly escaping dire consequences for her actions, was presented as that of a flawed but heroic individual (Davies 1997). On the other hand, Keith’s position, that is, isolated, poor, homosexual, dangerous, and suicidal, was presented as that of a deviant who was *overly* victimized by his classmates. The normal, canonical state was students harassing other students. The breach, or interruption here was the extremity, or extent of Keith’s reaction to being bullied, *not the bullying itself*. Katie identified the bullying actions of her adolescent self (“we kind of picked on this kid”) as being “Like many other typical teenagers.” Further, Katie pointed out that when she tells
this story, some students “get mad at Keith for not being able to deal with a typical high school experience,” adding that they noted, “Everyone gets teased.” As I explained in the last section, this story had become canonical in that it was known by both students and other teachers as a prominent component in Katie’s curriculum, she told it every year, students were graded on it, it was linked to memorializing Colombine—a strongly and rightly powerful anniversary particularly in high school culture. As such, it also functioned to reinforce particular positionalities of its student audience. The apparent multiplicity of positions offered was, in fact, misleading: acceptable positions may only fall within traditional hierarchies, specifically, within the straight, middle-class, white “everyman” range. Mistakes are permitted only insofar as you as actant fulfill the everyman identity.

Before, during, and after this lesson students were encouraged through class activities and discussions to talk back to the story, and to Katie herself. And they do, she noted, both in and out of the classroom as well as later ("over months and years"), even after they are no longer students in Katie’s class. The kind of talking back (the booing of the insensitivity of Katie-as-adolescent, the appreciation of Katie-as-adult for her recognition of it, or even the sincerity of the students’ reflections on their own behaviors as adolescents), however, only reflected identification with positions of bully and/or regretful bully or that of restrained or absent bully. Keith’s otherness was portrayed as so extreme and violent that any identification with his position (being “picked on” or feeling isolated, for example) was limited: it was a necessity for making the larger point of the story in that conversations about how he must have felt as a deviant helps non-deviants to be
better, more tolerant people. Hypothetically, identifying more fully with Keith’s feelings (something like, “I feel so angry I feel like shooting some of my classmates sometimes, too”) would be disastrous. At the very least, as a student in Katie’s class during this lesson voicing too much empathy with Keith would have been an admittance of one’s own potential as a deviant.

If we hold with the theory of deviant behavior outlining that “deviant identity must be defined relative to a shared normative frame of reference” (Kaplan & Lin, 2000) certainly, heteronormativity is one of the most commonly (re)enforced frames of reference at the high school where my participants and I work (Blackburn & Smith, 2010) as well as in wider social contexts (Jongh, 1992; Russo, 1981). In these spaces existed an unexamined linking of criminality and homosexuality such as the one Katie pointed out in our interview (“lots of people made the connection that Keith was gay…Part of this became people talking about how [he] had homosexual tendencies…and his sexuality sort of contributed to the fear that people had of him…It was just one more thing to explain his violent behavior”). Katie made this connection explicit during our interview; however, she did not do so in the version of the story she said she shared with her classes.

Arguably, by omitting the erroneous connection between homosexuality and criminality, the story that Katie told to her classes supported homophobia. Namely, her narrative de-criminalized individuals who identified and were identified by others as straight, protecting and privileging them and their actions. In her story, heterosexuality, ostensibly, was “just one more thing” by which non-violent, law-abiding students could be recognized (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1994). In effect, the
primary message of Katie’s story (Don’t be mean like me) depended on one’s acceptance of her positioning of Keith (But really, really don’t be deviant and gay like him). Katie’s motive for telling the story was sincere: she wanted to prevent future tragedies. In the context of her curriculum, however, the role of bully, either actual or potential, was the one with which students were encouraged to identify most.

**Heterosexist stories.** The narrative approaches I used in my ally work were also complex. They differed from Katie’s in that heterosexism rather than homophobia was more apparent. Data revealed, however, that the degree of heterosexism, like that of Katie’s homophobia, fluctuated across contexts and that the fluctuation was dependent on identity positionings. This fluctuation across contexts was evidenced in an exchange where Derrick and I talked about public (i.e. classroom) and private (i.e. home) responses to homophobia:

Even though [in class] I didn’t get visibly mad or yell, just confronting [a student]...publicly is something I try to avoid. Outside of class, though, I recently got really mad about that teacher getting fired [for teaching *The Laramie Project*]. When my husband showed me [that] article I couldn’t even look at it for a while because things like that tend to be very consuming for me.

Here, I talked about two distinct physical spaces where I recognized confrontations with homophobia: school and home. Like Katie, at least one of my stories featured talk about how I was aware of and got “mad” about homophobia. Further analysis, however, pointed to a narrative approach that revealed heterosexist privilege in that controlling the how and when of my responses to homophobia was assumed.
Having a choice to not look at an upsetting article “for a while” (or ever) because having to respond to it would have been “very consuming” was something I expected. Not incidentally, my initial knowledge of ally work itself was a choice. Unlike my student teacher who was closeted, I had more control over the timing and degree to which I confronted homophobia and, in fact, could do so at a much lower risk of myself being confronted. In sum, what I was telling Derrick about had to do with strategy: control and choice were assumed. Although homophobia was not evidenced by my story, the omission of consideration for how and when I monitored homophobic student responses reflected a heteronormative narrative approach.

**Collegial Approaches**

Finally, Katie and I both also used approaches to ally work that were collegial in nature. This category examined how we interacted with one another as colleagues. In our ally work, we reached out to other staff for support. Although our collegial approaches also had limitations, they presented fewer challenges than those presented by our pedagogical and narrative approaches. The work looked immediately accessible.

**Outreach and support.** One of the times when Katie’s collegial approach to ally work was evidenced was when she reached out to me for support after telling her story. At the beginning of our interview she had emphasized that she was going to tell me the same story she told to her students “every year.” Notably, however, at the end of the interview she stated: “You know, I still feel very guilty about Keith’s suicide and I have a lot of guilt about it.” The confidential tone of this comment suggested she used the story to do additional work, specifically, to share that she felt
guilt about contributing to events leading to a classmate’s suicide. The shift she made from naming her students as listeners (“It’s important for the students to know”), to me as researcher as listener (“You”) revealed that she was inviting me to support her in the work she did. Although it is possible that Katie shared the fact that she feels guilty in the original version she uses with her classes and might address her students collectively as “you”, what emerged was a moment between us where the story became markedly more interactive and fluid. That she included that particular part of the narrative in her initial storytelling interview showed that she used narrative as not only as a fixed way to affirm work she does in her anti-bullying unit, but she also used it as a means of seeking support from another ally.

This function of story as support was threaded into our second interview as well. In the second interview, however, it took form in Katie’s support for my work. Near the end of our interview, Katie stated:

I always hear the kids talking about topics that they discuss in [your] Cultural Studies classes. They talk about this stuff in our classes, too, and the kids bring up connections they make between the two. When they say, “We talked about that in Ms. Smith’s class!” I love that. It feels awesome because the students are getting the right messages from different sources.

Here, Katie shared that she had heard students making connections between her class and mine and was happy about that. Specifically, she liked that students were “getting the right messages from different sources.” This data revealed even more about the way Katie’s collegial approaches to ally work were strong in that she was open to making connections between similarities in the work she perceived that
both of us do. Arguably, this also pointed to Katie’s support for collaborations for our future ally work together. Data showed the challenges of our collegial approaches to be minimal.

**Friends and allies.** Although my collegial approach to ally work also included outreach to staff, data pointed to more limitations. One of the limitations revealed was that doing ally with a friend was complex. Derrick, my interviewer and another participant, and I are friends. In terms of support, the collegial support was without challenge. Our interviews were lengthy and conversational in nature. Within these risk-free conversations, what emerged were convivial explorations of ally work. With Derrick, conversations acted as a catalyst in that they were motivating and fully supportive; however, they were limited in that they did not create opportunities to explore outside perspectives. This was evidenced in the following exchange:

Jill: So, this is my story and apparently some sort of confessional. I am a judgmental person.

Derrick: You must be non-judgmental at least some of the time because you are the GSA advisor!

Jill: Ah! But I am just judging a different group of people, aren’t I? I’m judging the jocks and the people who listen to bad music and who live in __________.

What about that woman who was in Oklahoma, the one who was fired because of the way she was doing a film about *The Laramie Project*? You bet I judge the people who fired that teacher.

Derrick: But, if you didn’t judge those people you would be crazy! She was
fired because she was probably gay herself, right? I mean, let me ask you something, what would you say about how you run your classroom? Not about GSA, but just in terms of how you conduct your classroom?

Jill: Well, that is something I’ve thought about a lot, but it’s gotten more difficult to define. At first, I could point to a thing, like a text. It was like here it is! This text has gay characters in it! But now everything sort of blends together.

This excerpt highlighted the way that I used my story to build further support from Derrick, but also the way that it did not push us to pursue new ideas or perspectives. Although I invited critical talk during my interview and there was evidence of intensity, the conversation was not risky for either of us. For example, when I stated, “Ah! But I am just judging a different group of people, aren’t I?”, I was rebutting Derrick’s insistence that I was not judgmental of the students in her GSA. Then, rather than agreeing with me, Derrick continued with another contradiction: “But, if you didn’t judge those people you would be crazy!” In this excerpt, our repeated use of the word “but” reflected a perpetuation of supportive banter rather than argumentation. This was characteristic of our exchanges across the data set. What emerged was that despite repeated articulations of difference, we were positioned almost identically in our views. Toward the end of the interview, the following exchange showed our alignment:

Jill: Even though I didn’t get visibly mad or yell just confronting [students], like, publicly is something I try to avoid...[And] I couldn’t even look at [the
newspaper] for a while because things like [a homophobically motivated firing] tend to be very consuming for me.

Derrick: I'll privately be mad [about homophobia]. I'll privately be mad that people are stupid and that students will blurt something out that is so completely ignorant.

Jill: It’s hard. The kids can be hard.

Here, we echoed one another’s points. Both of us expressed anger towards homophobic individuals both in and out of the classroom, and both said that the anger we felt in private was deeper than what we permitted ourselves to publicly express. Ultimately, we converged on the shared point that teacher-ally work was “hard.” Explicit connections with my original story about ally work were, in fact, inactive for most of the interview. In contrast to the conversations between Katie and me, talking specifically about ally work seemed to be replaced by unspoken understandings: there was no need to cover shared ground. Had any of the other participants—someone with whom I was not already close—interviewed me, this kind of omission would have been impossible.

One of the strengths, however, of utilizing a collegial approach with Derrick was that the minimization of risk allowed space for reflexive thinking about inquiry. There was less need to keep up polite conversation, which in other participant interviews at times contributed to the obfuscation of important issues (Mayo, 2004). In fact, field notes accompanying Derrick’s interview revealed that I “forgot my researcher manners.” In the following excerpt I recounted tensions I had around her arguments about the sexuality of my professor, Josie:
On some level, I am just like my [naïve] student in class...[What bothered me] was that I missed that when people tell stories those stories are important in many ways and are told for reasons that I, as a listener, reject because I am making assumptions based on my identities, too. My rejection of noticing a particular function of Josie’s story could be because I didn’t want Frankie, a younger woman, to be right or because of the way she was saying it, and I felt competitive with all that.

That I drew attention to the function of story as Derrick interviewed me about my turning-point story showed reflexivity. Notably, I also introduced the academic language of story “function” into the conversation. Its introduction pointed to an internal nod I was making to myself in my role as a researcher as I was doing the research; it was not a mutually understood reference. Additional evidence for this was reflected in field notes where I described Derrick as “patient” during this segment of the interview. Derrick, in other words, was not participating as much in the conversation; he waited for my while I worked through what I found relevant at that moment, namely, an analysis of story that I also envisioned within the larger inquiry of the study. Presumably, Derrick recognized my shift from the more inclusive, co-created inquiry they had been doing in other parts of the interview.

Further, my story exemplified what Goodson (p. 3, 1998) points to as a meaningful component in postmodern teacher education in that the reflexive quality of my “story of self” acts as an “ongoing narrative project.” This is relevant because my reflexivity pointed to looking at my own life and life stories as a process rather than as a non-malleable or fixed entity. On the other hand, although the conversation
eventually shifted back to a more inclusive function, the kind of reflexivity represented in this excerpt was also potentially controlling and didactic on my part. Thus, even as an ongoing project, at times the story was not open to equitable co-creation. This section of the interview pointed to my use of story as a tool for reflexivity, however, it also highlighted an instance where reflexivity was used non-inclusively in that the academic language I used was neither addressed nor negotiated with Derrick. In this regard, data showed the importance of authentic exchanges between listener and teller.

Like Katie, I used story to garner support. I sought support for the work of the study rather than for the work I was doing in GSA or my classroom, which were both spaces in which Derrick already had membership. This kind of support looked primarily like seeking reassurance from a friend and colleague while maintaining the knowledge that he would eventually be participating in larger discussions. I did not, in other words, do anything to disrupt our established (positive) relationship. From this perspective, although my story was useful in some ways, it was also limited. Getting Derrick on my “side” in order to unify prior to our meeting as a group was not a conscious goal, however, it pointed to the ways that conscious and unconscious alignment moves where I needed to maintain connections with and support from like-minded participants potentially undermined outreach in my collegial approaches.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented participant profiles and explored what our stories in contact looked like. It identified the roundtable discussion of the study as a contact
zone rather than a space of co-created narrative. It also presented how participant support of the protect/punish and art/athletics binaries contribute to heteronormative privilege. Finally, it presented findings that showed that my and Katie's narratives revealed more similarities than differences in our pedagogical, narrative, and collegial approaches to ally work.

Findings presented in this chapter showed the roundtable as a contact zone that provided space for confrontation and a power shift that was not available in other spaces of the school. Confrontation of the art-athletics binary within the contact zone was supported by an alliance between Derrick and me, who represented the art side of the binary. Stories not typically valued by dominant, heteronormative school Discourses, such as the one about Kim, the lesbian student council member who did not need protection, acted as counternarratives to stories about Keith, the student who committed suicide and was portrayed as both victim and criminal. Findings also pointed to participant growth within this shift, specifically, Katie recognized her story was being heard in a way she had not intended and aligned herself with perspectives that were less homophobic and heteronormative. Data leading up to the roundtable discussion also revealed that there were strengths and limitations within three approaches to ally work: pedagogical, narrative, and collegial. This was important because it revealed that ally work is not a proclivity, but rather is shaped by social contexts. In school, this means that ally work should not be taken up by or delegated exclusively to teachers whose identities align with traditional stereotypes of people who are artistic, “liberal,” subversive or deviant. Data from stories told during my and Katie's interviews were used to highlight these
findings. The primary way our pedagogical approaches was limited was in the way it often linked pro-activity with entitlement. Times when this was most problematic were when we positioned texts and identities as fixed rather than fluid. In addition, our narrative approaches were also limited. Although we both recognized and combated homophobia, we did not recognize ways that we positioned others and ourselves heteronormatively. Our pedagogical approaches offered the most hopeful data for continued work in other approaches. Despite falling on opposite ends of the binaries represented in our stories, Katie and I demonstrated that we could work together in that we used our stories as a way to support actual and potential ally work. Equally important was that data pointed to implications for a potential shift in the way that ally work is viewed in schools: ally work can be viewed as generative rather than isolated and dependent on the presence of a particular teacher or group of teachers. Further, data pointed to evidence that anti-bullying spaces (like a GSA classroom) or curricula (like Katie’s anti-bullying unit) were not always safe. Implied here is that viewing these spaces as starting points for safety rather than sites that offer full anti-bullying “coverage” at all times or for the entire school allows for ally work that is both generative and better serves students.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter first presents and discusses data and research questions in relationship to implications of this study. After that, limitations of the study and ideas for future research are presented.

Implications

This section presents implications that can inform efforts of other teachers in the school, district, and others outside the district. Data reflected implications for teacher communities, staff and student safety, equitable teaching practice, and professional development. Within this presentation, this section also addresses the following research questions: “How did this newly co-created narrative impact the work of other teachers in our building and district?”, “What did our narratives reveal about why we created these spaces?”, “What kinds of experiences did we choose to represent in our narratives and how did our experiences shape our commitment to LGBTQ youth?”

Building teacher communities. One of the important things that emerged from the study was an increased level of community among teacher allies in the building. Data revealed that one of the ways we used our narratives was for collegial outreach. Many of us had been doing ally work for years, but it was often sporadic and isolated. Since the study, however, both allied and out LGBTQ staff have become
a visible community. Evidence of this community included visibility of LGBTQ issues and conversations in staff meetings, professional development sessions. Examples of this included an in-service “early release” day specific to addressing LGBTQ bullying and harassment and a school hosted panel comprised of ally staff and parents and LGBTQ students, staff, and community members. The silencing of these voices in a time prior to this study was glaring in hindsight. While I do not suggest that the opening of these kinds of spaces is exclusively attributable to this study, I assert that this shift from silence to visibility in the building and district has been cumulative and our work during this study both contributed to and marked a culmination in this shift. The implication of this kind of shift is that visibility can be systemically transformative. Drawing from Carey, Richardson (1989) asserts that the kinds of stories we can write, the kinds of lives we can thereby live, are...most strongly linked to the kinds of stories we can create, not to the hegemonies we can resist. It is through association, community building, sharing, and empathy that we have some hope of repairing and transforming culture. (p. 79)

The study highlighted my residual perception that I was better suited to do ally work because I had already been marked in a particular way in our district. Increased, successful visibility for LGBTQ issues in schools, however, dispelled this in that after the study there was a shared representation among staff rather than the single, necessarily resistant representation of one staff member who was the GSA advisor. This was most evidenced by the fact that our GSA now has a panel of staff advisors who are affiliated with a variety of identities rather than just one (me)
advisor who identified as an artist only.

In addition to building community among teacher allies, this study provided opportunities for teachers who did not yet identify as allies to advocate for LGBTQ issues even if they did not consider themselves to be the “right” type. Word of the study and the kinds of stories we were discussing in our small group spread to spaces outside the study (i.e. happy hours, before staff meetings, and Open House). Teachers who were not participating in the study and who were not nominated became interested.

**Safety for staff, safety for students.** Data from teacher narratives also revealed that we worked for safe spaces because it was part of our jobs to keep students safe. Binaries such as the one Katie and I represented contributed to an unsafe school culture. Explicit and ongoing conversations between us, that is, teachers who represented opposite sides of traditional binaries, worked against reifying existing representations of threat in the building. This, I assert, can create a better, safer learning environment for students.

After this study I was more likely to take risks engaging non-artist perspectives because I had seen that sharing ally work with teacher-athletes was not as risky as I had imagined. Seeing support in the form of pedagogical outreach from Katie allowed me to imagine future conversations with staff and students who identify as LGBTQ or allies and who are also athletes. Prior to the study, at staff meetings, for example, if speakers were coaches, many artists in the building would have automatically rejected investment in the conversation—and vice versa. Study participants have modeled for students and other staff a community that can work
together within and across the art/sports binary. Because the tale of us working together has been both specific and tangible, and stands out against the more generic ones that are traditionally promoted in the building and district can translate to students working across differences and building new kinds of communities among their peers. Teachers who do not explicitly model the disruption of identities within this binary, I assert, risk promoting them.

**Recognizing personal biases for more equitable practice.** Data revealed that we also used narrative in our pedagogical approaches. These approaches reflected homophobic and heteronormative biases that Katie and I were not aware of prior to this study; once we became aware of them there was an willingness to make changes. In other words, we unconsciously included representations of our biases in the stories we told. However, we also articulated willingness and intent to make changes. Implied is that teachers who locate and acknowledge their own biases are better situated to treat their students more equitably. Hymes (1996) points out that the "general disposition in our culture [is] to dichotomize forms and functions of language use, and to treat one side as superior and the other side as something to be disdained, discouraged, diagnosed as evidence or cause of subordinate status" (p. 112). As a researcher who was also our school's GSA advisor I could relate to his dichotomy during my interviews with Katie. In the analysis stage of this study, however, the stories Katie and I told revealed a shared approach of collegial outreach to other teacher allies. The biases I held against the athletic side of the binary were broken down in the process of our conversations. I assert that this kind of common ground in collegial approaches to ally work offers unique
opportunities for similar connections across difference. Fecho (2001) notes, "by embracing that which threatens, the marginalized can create a space for imagining a more actualized self" (p 14). What Fecho describes was evidenced by my embracing the athlete identity Katie represented, especially on the day we had our round table discussion. Overall, contrary to what some might assert, increased visibility of differences in pedagogical and narrative approaches did not further polarize the existing art/athlete binary or add to existing tensions. On the contrary, exploration of new identities within our ally work minimized the binary and created opportunities for repositioning allies and the work we were doing. In the area of teacher research there is a lot of potential for autoethnographic research in the area of ally work and, within this, opportunities to find out more about pedagogical, collegial, and narrative approaches. Inquiry might start with how and when teachers locate themselves on the binary that Katie and I represented and can lead to conversations about how ally identities, safe spaces, ally work look in other schools.

**Professional development.** When teachers were informed of their nominations the knowledge that they had impacted school spaces in a way that connected them with students who were also in GSA immediately encouraged them to participate in the study. Further, data from the study evidenced collegial outreach. One implication of this is that future recognition and visibility of ally work can encourage and motivate more involvement in conversations about creating safe spaces in schools. Some examples of this in the months that followed our study included increased teacher involvement in an early release anti-bullying workshop that was specific to LGBTQ bullying and voluntary attendance at an anti-bullying
workshop at an off-site center for the arts.

Beyond this, participants and I emerged from the study in a place uniquely suited to pursue professional development (PD) outside school contexts. In the course of the study we became more aware of the relationship between stories about our lives and the ways we identify others and ourselves.

**Limitations**

One of the things this study made apparent was that teachers do ally work in different ways. Analysis of the stories we told prompted the question of what the work looked like to student nominators. This consideration pointed to a limitation of the study: ally work sanctioned by the school at the time of the study was more visible than ally work that was not sanctioned or altogether silenced. In the nomination process, therefore, the work of straight, white, middle class, and married allies was more accessible to student nominators than work done by staff who had been marginalized, most importantly, that done by LGBTQ staff themselves. This limitation resulted in a lack of representation of the work LGBTQ staff do to create safer spaces in schools for LGBTQ students.

Another limitation of the study was that data was only collected during the academic school year. Participants did not have much time for extended conversations and processing outside the school day or during vacation breaks. Further, interactions we did have time for were often interrupted by outside conversations and happenings in the school. Had there been time to work together for an extended time in a space perhaps located away from school the study would have provided opportunities for capturing a more complete picture of participant
life stories. Notably, this would have impacted the way that my story was positioned in relationship to Katie’s. As participant-researcher, I had much more time to think about what I was going to say at the round table and how I wanted to say it. Further, because the round table took place at the end of the school year, Katie had even fewer opportunities to access the data over the summer.

Relatedly, another limitation was I identify as a straight ally. As such, I risked reifying that LGBTQ staff and allies as somehow marginalized, abnormal or reactive (Richardson, 1997). Ostensibly, this reification is limiting for LGBTQ students. Before the study I built in what Richardson (1997) names as form as resistance in that I explicitly collected multiple, negotiated stories rather than relying on my single story (and identity) to do the work. Despite this, my role as lone researcher as a straight GSA advisor was limited. This limitation could be addressed by having multiple lead researchers.

As an ally who was acting within a re-established privileged identity in the district, I was also keenly aware of the limitation of homophobic backlash (Blount, 2005). In a historically conservative district such as ours, the study was likely viewed as threatening by some. As such, the increased visibility of ally work and LGBTQ issues resulting from this study could expose our teachers and our district to public pressure in the future (Shulman, 1990). Although there was no visible evidence of this kind of pressure during the study, potential risk for it was a limitation in that I did not designate time or resources for the purposes of gathering data to this effect in the months following the study.

Finally, this study was limited in that the recognition of biases was so deeply
engrained that even in the later stages of analysis work without the help of the Pink TIGers, the outside teacher inquiry group I belong to, I would have struggled to maintain the same level of vulnerability and faith that was developed during the study. This is a limitation because teacher communities that support and also trouble ally work are not readily available, but they are crucially important. Even with support, I struggled with knowing how to navigate the accountability and forgiveness paradox bell hooks talks about: What does accountability and forgiveness look like? Frustrations with blatantly homophobic interactions with some teacher-coaches too readily eclipsed the ones (like Katie) who were willing to take up ally conversations. In these conversations, we all need to be held accountable. In sum, my habitual mappings of homophobic coach identities onto coach-like teachers who do ally work and, similarly, the mapping of my own role of activist-ally extraordinaire reified the school’s heteronormative status quo most days. This pointed to the importance of sustaining teacher communities that are inclusive and specific to ally work, that include critical questioning about how and when ally work is being conducted, and that look closely at by and for whom the work is being done.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Foremost, it is the responsibility of teachers and schools to ensure safe learning environments for LGBTQ students. To that end, further critical inquiry into anti-bullying curricula, programs, and policies is recommended. It is recommended that future studies forefront representation of LGBTQ staff and students. This is not to say that inquiry should not include continued involvement of straight GSA
students and advisors, but more space must be made for LGBTQ voices themselves. In addition, I recommend that schools explore and support inquiry around extended conversations between LGBTQ and ally staff members during times that are outside the school day and during holiday breaks. This will allow more time for processing conversations and provide more opportunities for deeper reflections among participants. Further, it is recommended that multiple lead researchers take on this kind of inquiry. Doing so will build in multiple perspectives across all phases of the study. Finally, for the purpose of preparing to address homophobic backlash it is recommended that conversations about levels of homophobia and heteronormativity should be had with students, staff, and administrators at potential sites prior to conducting these kinds of studies. Further, participation in supportive teacher communities, such as the Pink TIGers, should be explored prior to the study. To be clear, homophobic backlash should not deter inquiry, but it must be prepared for and addressed with serious attention.

The findings of this study pointed to ways that we as educators can incorporate, normalize, but also embrace research as a normalized part of teacher collaboration. This kind of normalization benefits teachers whose experience with data and data collection has been limited to formalized, negative, or mechanical statistics. Teachers can feel more confident in replicating their own formal or informal studies within this field or others.

In narrative study, a popular exemplar of plot is the following: “The king died then the queen died.” What distinguishes a story from a mere listing of events (“The king died. The queen died.”) is making a connection. At the beginning of this study,
the ally work my participants and I did looked more like a sequence of events than a story that a plot. Through our work together in this study, however, independent ally actions conducted in relative isolation now have a connectedness and a place in the larger narrative of our school. Through sharing stories about our lives we took risks, built trust, and acknowledged our biases. From this point, we are better prepared to serve our students.
Appendix A

Life Story Interview Questions

I. Life chapters: If you had to divide your life into its main "chapters" and provide a brief plot summary for each chapter, how would it look?

II. Significant scenes: For each of the 8 scenes below, describe what happened, who was there, what you remember thinking and feeling in the scene, and what you think the scene says about you.

   High point – Describe a scene of great joy, happiness, or positive affect. What would be the best scene in your story?

   Low point – Describe a scene of misery, fear, or negative affect. What would be the worst scene in your story?

   Turning point – Describe a scene in which you experienced a significant life change.

   Earliest memory – What is your earliest memory? What kind of impact do you think that event and its memory have had on your life?

   Important childhood scene – Describe an important scene from your childhood.

   Important adult scene – Describe an important scene from your adult life.

   Any other important scene – Describe any other important scene.

III. Life challenge: Describe your single greatest challenge in life.

IV. Important “Characters”:

   Most important positive influence - Describe the person or institution that has had the most positive impact on your “story.”

   Most important negative influence - Describe the person or institution that has had the most negative impact on your “story.”

V. Favorite stories: Describe some of your favorite stories (seen, read, heard, or experienced).

VI. Future plot: If you had to speculate, where do you see your life going? What happens next? What are your goals for future?

VII. Personal ideology/-ies: What are some of your fundamental values in life?

VIII. Life theme: Identify themes in your life. What do they seem to represent?

(McAdams & Boman, 200)
Appendix B

Consent for Participation in Research

Project title: THEIRS, MINE AND OURS: CO-CONSTRUCTING LIFE STORIES OF TEACHERS WHO MAKE SAFE SPACES FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS

Practicing Investigator: Jill M. Smith

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research entitled: Co-constructing life stories of teachers who make safe spaces for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) students.

Dr. Caroline Clark and Dr. Mollie Blackburn, Principal Investigators, or their authorized representative, Jill Smith, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _________________________ Signed: ___________________________

(Participant)

Signed: _________________________ Signed: ___________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative) (Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

Witness: __________________________

Dr. Caroline Clark Dr. Mollie Blackburn Ms. Jill Smith
Associate Professor Associate Professor Doctoral Candidate
(614) 688-5449 (614) 247-7310 (614) 258-3027
c Clark.664@osu.edu Blackburn.99@osu.edu smithjill@mac.com
Appendix C

Teacher Letter

Dear (name of teacher):

We would like to invite you to participate in our study “Theirs, Mine, and Ours: Co-Constructing Life Stories of Teachers Who Make Safe Spaces in Schools.” Our study is focused on sharing and collaboratively constructing the life story narratives of teachers who have been nominated by LGBTQ students and/or allies as making safe spaces in schools for LGBTQ students. A life story is a story that is seen as specific to the individual teller, as well as being situated in that teller’s social and historical context. Our proposal involves teacher and university collaborators sharing stories about their lives and then looking for themes across our stories. These stories will be audio taped and transcribed. We invite your involvement in the following ways:

- participating in interviews related to your life story;
- participating in transcript and/or thematic analysis;
- participating as interviewer of Co-investigator, Jill Smith;
- participating in collaborative reconstruction of life story narratives (editing, discussion, etc.)
- participating in a group roundtable discussion.

The audiotapes of our life stories will not be kept indefinitely; all tapes and transcriptions of tapes will be destroyed six months after the end of the study.

We estimate that it may take about 6 hours of your time to participate in this project. As with all research, your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

If you would like to participate in this study please read and sign the attached consent form and return it to Jill Smith at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions regarding this research or your rights related to participation in this study, please feel free to contact any of us. Thank for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Caroline Clark  Dr. Mollie Blackburn  Ms. Jill Smith
Professor  Associate Professor  Doctoral Candidate
(614) 688-5449  (614) 247-7310  (614) 581-8025
clark.664@osu.edu  blackburn.99@osu.edu  smithjill@mac.com
Appendix D

Participant Stories²

Katie’s story. Ironically, I ignored teacher intervention when I was in high school and I acted like a bully. It’s weird because I’m now a teacher and I think about whether or not the kids are ignoring me! I went to a private high school and in the 11th grade I was in an Algebra II/Trigonometry class, which was an average-level math class for juniors at my school. One of my classmates at this time was a young man by the name of Keith who was a year younger than almost everyone else in the class. He was a little more intelligent than the average 10th grader and had advanced in Math. Like many other typical teenagers, I guess, my friends and I kind of picked on this kid for a little bit because he was so smart. And he was also picked on outside of class because he was a bit different. The way he talked, the way he dressed, he sat by himself at lunch...those kinds of things.

One thing I remember that I personally made a point to pick on him for was that he wore pajama pants underneath his school pants. At this point in my life, I have no idea why I laughed at him for this, but I did it anyway. I made fun of him and called him a loser. One day the teacher took me in the hallway and told me to knock it off. He told me that K. walked to school and that was the reason why he had to wear the pants in the colder weather. Without the added layer he would have been freezing on his walk to school. I didn’t have that problem because someone drove me to school every day. As a sixteen year old brat, I didn’t understand what walking

² All names other than participants’ are pseudonyms.
in the cold would be like. Even with the teacher's reprimand, I just went on picking on K. the rest of that year.

The next year was 1999, the year of the Columbine shootings. I no longer had classes with K., but I still saw him in the hallways and at lunch. My friends and I continued to mock him, sort of giggling whenever he walked by. Keith was picked on by the student body as a whole, too. He didn't have a lot of friends and stood out as that kid who was always isolated. So, the week after Columbine, something really big happened. Keith was caught setting fire to the school theater. He was immediately expelled because of it. Right after that, when school officials were clearing out his locker they found a hit list. And my name was on the list. The dean of students and the principal called me down to the office and although they didn't show me the actual list, they warned me to be aware and cautious. For weeks that followed that I was really freaked out. School shootings were a new thing in America and we had been hearing about the black trench-coat mafias made up of kids who would kill other kids.

A few years after Keith's expulsion I found out that he committed suicide. When I tell this story to my students, I try to impresses on them that I had something to do with Keith being so miserable in high school. I tell them that my actions helped to drive him to thinking about killing himself and other students, and driving him to end the teasing himself because we wouldn't.

Even now, more than ten years later, I still shake my head in disbelief that I didn't listen to my teacher. I can't believe I didn't realize that me picking on Keith could hurt him to the extent that he would imagine killing me or himself. Today the
thought of being on that hit list still scares me. I wish I would’ve understood how much pain I was causing Keith because I would’ve definitely stopped.

After hearing about the hit list, lots of kids made the connection that Keith was kind of like one of those dark characters that they’d been hearing about on the news. Part of this became people talking about how Keith had homosexual tendencies. These discussions about his sexuality sort of contributed to the fear that people had of him after the hit list incident. It was just one more thing to explain his violent behavior.

After I tell this story to my class, the students respond to it in different ways. Some seem to process it over months or years and then come up in the hall or to my room to talk more about it. Some kids get mad at me for picking on Keith and some get mad at Keith for not being able to deal with a typical high school experience. Everyone gets teased, they say. I tell this story in class every year even though it’s hard because I think it’s important that the kids see me as a human being who has made some big mistakes, that teachers aren’t perfect but that’s no excuse not to try to do better. I also try to use the story to caution students because it shows that bullying does affect people in really serious ways. I warn them about judging others because they do not know what others are going through physically and emotionally, or why they are doing things that might appear odd. It’s important for students to know that there are times in life when you can’t take back careless judgments that you’ve made or stupid things you’ve said. There are times when the story can’t end with, “Then we went off into the sunset and we’re best friends!” You know I still feel very guilty about Keith’s suicide and I have a lot of guilt about it.
Part of it is me trying to deal with that part of it.

A lot of the students have questions after the story. I notice that during this unit any bullying occurring on their 9th grade team tends to slow down if not stop it for a while. I hope that by telling the story every year I can influence students. They need to know bullying should never be tolerated. If for no other reason they should know it because it may someday help them for their own benefit to protect themselves.

I’d just returned from maternity leave right around the time of the anniversary of the Columbine shootings, so I figured that day would be a good way to bring up the discussion, even though that class hadn’t shown any signs of bullying the way that some of the kids have in the past.

When I told my story to my freshmen students this year their general response was that of, “Hey, thanks for depressing us!” The day after I told it, one of the kids was like, “You were mean in high school, Ms. Walden!” In some ways I feel like my students missed the point because the responses I got this year didn’t seem as complex as they’ve been in the past. Sarah and I talked came up with some questions for the students, using Columbine as a way to get the kids talking about school violence. We had students write responses on a big paper and then after a few days read the responses as a class. They could remain anonymous if they wanted. The main set of questions we asked the kids to respond to had to do with cause. “What do you think the problem was at Columbine? Do cliques still exist? Are they still as big as they were 20 years ago? 30 years ago?” Students said that they didn’t think cliques were as dominant today as they were back then, they mentioned that when
they go to the cafeteria for Stacy’s Psychology class project they can stand on the second floor balcony and find they can determine and depict the school’s cliques. They name “jocks” and “brainiacs” as two that they notice. It’s distant. It’s very, very distant. The kids were in kindergarten when Columbine happened. They probably don’t think of it they way we do. But there’s always that kind of kid who hides behind a book, never socializes—freshmen like R. [student at Central], who will bury themselves even when you’re talking to them in the middle of class.

This one bullying incident was the worst I’d ever seen. When Robert was a freshman a few years ago, a girl who was also on the same freshmen team stole his clothes once during gym class. The day it happened, Robert came into class wearing gym shorts. I was really surprised because he’s the kind of kid who would never wear shorts in class, much less gym shorts. When I asked what was going on, he explained in his nasal-y voice, the one that had become known as one of his trademarks, and told me, “Well, somebody stole my gym clothes.” I was infuriated. I was like, “Oh-my-God!” and ripped into them, trying to guilt whoever took the clothes into a confession. After class, one of the girls came up to me and whispered, “I know who did it.” All three Freshmen teachers on our team turned in the girl who did it and then stopped what they were doing in their classes for the next three days so that they could work on anti-bullying lessons with the other kids. They felt so awful about it and knew that the incident had to have mortified Robert. As the rest of Robert’s side of the story unfolded, I found out, too, that the gym teacher had been trying to protect him from locker room taunts by giving him permission to keep his clothes in the gym so that he wouldn’t have to change in front of the others.
The teacher made a special arrangement with him so that he could keep his clothes in a hidden spot behind the bleachers. The girl who stole the clothes somehow figured out he kept them in the gym, hidden, but otherwise unmonitored. I was most shocked when, to add insult to injury, the girl also wound up throwing the clothes off the balcony. This was particularly awful, like something that happens in the movies, but not in real life. The girl had the clothes hidden in her locker and was told to retrieve them once adults in the building found out what had happened. Instead, she threw them over the balcony during that day’s lunch period. Even though the incident only happened once, its severity merited it being qualified as a “bullying incident,” in direct violation of the school’s anti-bullying policy and the offending student was suspended for three days. When she came back to school the other team teachers and I hotseated her, which was a procedure we had in place for any student who needed extra attention due to sinking grades or problematic behavior. The girl’s response to all this was that Robert was annoying and always told her she was wrong when she tried to talk in class. This was, actually, another one of Robert’s trademarks. If someone responded to a question incorrectly, he would make this scoffing noise, even though he personally would never respond out loud. We were totally outraged about this girl’s actions, though. We were like, “You can’t let that kind of stuff roll off your shoulders? You attack him by taking his gym clothes? His personal possessions? And you humiliate him because he can’t find his stuff?” Even though in the end, the girl got the message from the school that what she did was not ok, she was not sorry because she’d needed to make her own point. She wanted to humiliate him because she felt he’d humiliated her.
For me, the clothes stealing incident is proof that bullying isn’t a thing of the past, that it’s still happening. One way I try to make connections with Columbine is by warning students that it only takes one time to tick somebody off. I want them to understand how much damage words can do to a person and the impact one can have on their future, on their life. I worry that they don’t see that high school can be terrible enough to make someone end it for themselves. The “clothes incident” reminded the freshmen team teachers of the movie Mean Girls and hit them hard. For days after it happened, I just wanted to cry when I saw Robert. Today, Robert is doing ok, but still isn’t very social. One of the nice parts about having a big school, though, is that after freshman year the classes get mixed, so there’s potentially more opportunity for him to be around kids who weren’t on his team at the time of the incident.

Did you see that thing about Iowa legalizing gay marriage? You asked me what I thought about the backlash. Does gay marriage make some straight people feel mocked, like their marriages were not as valid? I definitely think so. I agree that some heterosexuals are extremely threatened when society says that same-sex marriages are ok. I actually have a gay cousin who lives in Manhattan. He won’t come out to his parents until the day they die because they are so anti-gay. It’s funny to everyone else who knows him when his parents talk about him being such a bachelor because they have no idea that he’s gay, but everyone else seems to. It’s sad, too, though because he has this really nice boyfriend that they’ll never get to meet.

Jill: Ok, so one of things I’m wondering about is how you shouldn’t bully for
your own benefit. Because...it might come back on you?

Katie: Well, you shouldn't bully not only because what it does to other people but also you shouldn't bully because of what it could do to YOU, to your education...bomb threats, hit lists, in this day and age people could create a website about you. Anything could happen. We talk about that a lot in my Current Issues. It's a huge thing. One person could copy what you said and forward it on to someone else and you might not even realize.

Jill: Like at school? Outside of school?

Katie: Anything. But like that girl [who stole Robert’s clothes]. She not only hurt someone else but in the process she hurt herself. She got suspended, half credit on her work while she’s out...all of those things.

You asked me if I had any questions for you. I did. I’d always wondered if you had something happen, like a “trigger event” that had sparked your passion to work as an activist for LGBTQ rights. I always hear the kids talking about topics that they discuss in Cultural Studies classes. They talk about that stuff in her classes, too, and the kids bring up connections they make between the two. When they say, “We talked about that in Ms. Smith’s class!” I love that. It feels awesome because the students are getting the right messages from different sources. One thing that they don’t seem to be getting is the idea that hate language isn’t to be used around anyone, not just that it needs to be tempered because it might be offensive to some teachers who are particularly sensitive to that topic. When I hear students say, “You better not let Ms. Smith hear you say [that’s so gay]!” I’m just like, “Or ANYBODY!
Right? NOBODY should hear you say that!” I think the students value your opinion specifically, though, about LGBTQ issues.

I think some people [who need to hear about LGBTQ issues] just have misconceptions and are too focused on how they want to live so they don’t care what goes on outside their own world. I think their lack of interest isn’t because they didn’t want to care, but rather that they didn’t know “any different.” When I went to college she remembered thinking, “Wow! There are a lot more different people than I thought!” I think that billing your Waiver Day session as “professional development” would be a good way for people who needed exposure to LGBTQ issues to get it.

**Jill’s story.** For my story I’m going to talk about that “turning point” question. It was when my friend Frankie and I were taking a class together at Ohio State. It was one of those things where we were taking an evening class after teaching all day. I always remember that period of time as just going through a series of motions at the end of a long day of teaching. For me, there was also always some anxiety for me around classes at that time because of not getting fee waivers or not knowing where to park. Dumb things like that. I also recall having a perpetual sense of some kind of mystery bill or ticket because I’d overlooked a secret form somewhere along the line. This mindset isn’t an excuse for my stupidity, but it does help to highlight how not in my element I was when I first started that whole graduate school thing. One night in class, one of our professors around that time, Josie, told a story about her work at a youth center called _____, a place where she worked with LGBTQ kids. After class, Frankie and I were walking out and she said something like, “That was a
quite a revelation, don’t you think?” I didn’t know what she was talking about and I definitely remember being a little annoyed by her question because it came across as this really teacher-y way to ask something. Asking me to evaluate something before we’ve established that I even know what the thing is we’re talking about. I’m sure I do it, too, otherwise, how would I have known to be annoyed? I think it’s just a slick way of allowing yourself to tell someone a fact you know they don’t know. I totally wasn’t in the mood. I asked Frankie what she was talking about. She told me that she detected a revelatory tone when our professor was talking about the youth center and said that she thought it was her way of telling the class something about herself, too. I remember feeling smug at that point because it sort of dawned on me that Frankie was telling me that our young, blonde feminine professor was a lesbian and I knew for a fact that she absolutely wasn’t. I should say, too, that Frankie was, and still is, the GSA advisor at the school where we both taught at the time and she thought everybody was gay. I told her that I’d talked to our professor before class last week and I knew she was straight. I’d just come from Used Kids and had bought a Pixies CD and she’d chatted with me about how she liked the song “Here Comes Your Man.” Your man. Obviously, lesbians don’t like songs like that. What stronger evidence do you need? When Frankie pointed to the emotional tone of the youth center story as evidence for her point that our professor coming out to the class, I told her that she was reading too much into it. Obviously, to me, our professor was just deeply committed to the kids she’d worked with. For me, that was how I limited it.

Frankie and I went on like that for a couple of class days that followed. We
worked together in this big workroom and we’d jab at each other about it. I can see that you’re already catching on to where this is going. As it turned out, I really had missed something that Frankie caught. I don’t remember the exact moment when I found out that our professor actually was a lesbian, but that part isn’t really important. What does seem important to me looking back is one, not realizing that I didn’t pick up on something that was an integral aspect of the story and, it was about this professor that we really liked, and two, knowing that this not picking up on something wasn’t a fluke. I think it was a full-blown failure to acknowledge something repeatedly, about a half dozen times. What I came up with was that I had been stubborn because of my own biases. And I didn’t think of myself as that kind of person.

Thinking back, I wasn’t even considering what Frankie was saying. And what I had missed wasn’t about having what some call a “radar” about who’s straight and who’s not. It was that I was missing that when people tell stories those stories are important in lots of ways and people might be telling them for reasons that I, as a listener, am rejecting because I’m making assumptions based on who I am. I think part of my rejection of Frankie’s story could be because I didn’t want her, a younger woman, to be right or because of the way she was saying it, and I felt competitive with all that. Whatever it was, my blindness to it still scares me. It worries me a lot because for the first six years of teaching I had to have been missing so many stories in my own classes, with my own students, with my colleagues...everything. And I still have to be missing them in certain other ways, right?

In class the other day this girl in my Cultural Studies class made a comment.
She’s this little white girl from a family with a lot of money. You can just tell. We’ve been reading *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, and there’s a girl in the story who lies about her family, at least in part, so she can get a job. One of the things she says is that her dad’s this pilot who’s not around because he’s on vacation, but the truth is he’s a mailman who “forgets” her birthdays because he doesn’t care much about her. And then she also lies by saying that she’s 18 when she’s really 15. I was so frustrated with this kid because she kept insisting that it doesn’t matter what or who your parents are because people who hire you just want to know if you can do the job. She was like, “I’ve gotten all kinds of jobs before and my parents had nothing to do with it.” I was getting so mad. As if how you’re dressed or how you talk or how your parents have treated you doesn’t impact anything! This student didn’t realize “here’s how I am because of how I’ve grown up and what I’ve been exposed to.”

Doors can be opened or closed depending on that.

I feel looking back that I used to be really, really focused on male privilege, but I don’t think I distinguished white male from non-white and I definitely didn’t connect it with sexuality. I was very myopic. I only cared about the thing that was most related to me. What I want now is to be less self-centered. I want to try to take the focus off of how to lash out against things just about me and get to things that aren’t about me. Everything affects everyone to a point, I know, but just to try to be more aware. I may just be an immature person who takes longer to find things out, like a big baby. You know, people who are younger than I am can sometimes see things I can’t, and it’s not like I haven’t read things or been places. I wonder why I don’t see them earlier. I want to understand more about what things are going on
with other people. Other than a freak weather occurrence or random car accident, I always thought, Ok, whatever life you have it’s based exactly and only and exclusively on decisions that you make. It’s all your choice. On some level, I am just like my student in class, and never thought, ok, people might be prejudging you, because I haven’t been aware of being pre-judged. Except, for me, for what I thought of as the WHITE MALE vs. WHITE FEMALE thing.

I have many more turning points like that that still need fixing because as a teacher I have to notice when someone’s trying to tell something, especially when what they’re saying is not in my experience. I can’t just not catch those things because those are the things that need to be caught the most. So what happens if what I’m hearing is different than what the speaker intended? That’s a good question, I think. There’s always that risk in storytelling or conversations, and it seems to happen between adults all the time, but the consequences don’t seem to carry as much weight as when it happens in a classroom with kids. In my case, at least, it had to mean that I was being judgmental, even if I was doing it unconsciously. So, this is both a story and apparently some sort of confessional: I am a judgmental person. Even as a GSA advisor I am just judging a different group of people, aren’t I? I’m judging the jocks and the people who listen to bad music and who live in ________.

Did you see that thing about the teacher who was in Oklahoma, the one who was fired because of the way she was doing a film about The Laramie Project? You bet I judge the people who fired that teacher. When I think about this in terms of how I run my classroom it’s gotten more difficult to define even though I’ve thought
of it a lot over the past few years. At first, I could point to a THING, like a certain text. It was as though I was saying HERE’S the text that has gay characters in it. But now everything sort of blends together. I know I try to offer scenarios when I’m talking that don’t automatically assume a heterosexual couple. I try to use language that shows different pronoun combinations so the kids don’t think that’s an abnormal situation. I want to make it part of a normal description. The day of the interview, for example, we were talking about a girl in a story who was staring at another girl. One option for why she did that was, “Oh, I like her hair, it’s really pretty.” And I also suggested that she might have a crush on her. And some of the kids were shocked. It’s that kind of reaction that reminds me to keep saying things like that without making it a huge separate deal. I wish I knew the best way to get some of our kids to stop being homophobic.

I have gotten frustrated, for sure. Most recently, a girl read a poem she’d written to the class and in it she used the phrase “no homo.” I don’t like that at ALL. When I first heard it I couldn’t believe it. And I’d confronted the same student about this issue after class earlier in the year. This second time I made the decision to say something to her about it in front of the class. I said something like I’m curious about why you felt like you had to include that. Is there something that made you feel like you had to say that? Would it be wrong to you if you didn’t say it? If somebody perceived you as gay what would be wrong with that?” Even though I didn’t get visibly mad or yell but just confronting her like publicly is something I try to avoid. Outside of class, though, I recently got really mad about that teacher getting fired. When my husband showed me the article I couldn’t even look at it for a
while because things like that tend to be very consuming. It’s hard. The kids can be hard.

One time when I felt more justified about being outwardly angry was when I had a student observer in the other day. He is an out gay man, but wasn’t out to the students because he wasn’t there very long. He read a story with the kids about a guy who was in a car accident and was in a wheelchair, then used discussion about this handicapped guy to talk about other marginalized communities. From the way some of the kids were saying things about the gay community I could tell that almost everyone in the room but me assumed that everyone listening was straight. I was so angry and I wanted to protect my student teacher from what they were saying but that’s the stuff the kids say. I said something about it to them, but didn’t, of course, say anything about the guy being gay. They need to be more sensitive whether he is or not. The next day, he and I talked about it after class and he was shocked that the kids acted like nothing happened, like they hadn’t attacked him the way we saw they had. They didn’t realize what they were saying. It made me realize that the students are in our care, but we as staff need to care for one another, too, especially if an adult like that is a guest in our building. If these were my own children I would correct them, right? There are times when they need to understand layers and there are times when they need to know they’re not allowed to be rude. Ideally, we want those things to mesh together but even if they don’t you still have to do both. I’m not a parent but I would want someone to tell my kids that, especially because most of the time they’re not doing it on purpose. I would even want someone to tell me that now.
**Jason's story.** My family is very accepting of everybody. If a person starts out hearing their family making derogatory comments about people’s race or sexual orientation it will really impact that kid in negative ways. They’ll think, “Well, Mom and Dad are saying it, so why shouldn’t I?” Your environment shapes the way you value people or you don’t.

Right now there’s a “hot” ongoing debate about whether or not homosexuality is a learned behavior or if it’s something that is present at birth. As a Science teacher, my views are that being attracted to someone of the same sex is not necessarily learned; I believe people are attracted to certain things and certain people because those attractions are part of what makes them who they are. For me, humans just have that innate ability to feel attraction, to know what they like, to be pulled toward someone they want to partner with or spend their life with. People can experiment with different attractions, but ultimately they know what’s pulling them. That’s what makes you you.

You asked me about how I saw myself in my group of friends compared to how I saw myself as a teacher and coach and if among my homophobic male friends I was ever labeled as “liberal” or if I stood apart from them in ways I could identify. I don’t feel like my friends have or do think of me as especially liberal, but I also don’t think that they always mean what they are saying. In my experience, guys just like to debate for the sake of debating. If you take a stance they might take the opposite just to play devil’s advocate. The reason I think I’ve taken the stance of an ally instead of a homophobe is because early on I had friends who were gay. I also am
just so focused on my own life that, selfishly, I don’t take interest in what others are
doing one way or the other. Often times what other people are doing in their lives
doesn’t matter to me because I know what’s going on in my own life. It’s not that I
don’t care about other people, but rather that I don’t think I should interfere.
Everyone has their own problems to worry about, right? Even if they don’t agree
with what someone’s doing they should overlook particular area. After all,
*everyone’s* doing something that somebody doesn’t like.

One of the things I struggle with understanding the most is those Christian
churches and churchgoers who don’t celebrate same-sex relationships. I can’t
understand the hypocrisy. For me, it’s like churches are saying, Hey, don’t judge. No
wait, JUDGE! But only judge *those* people. When there are religious protests where
people say, “This is what I believe and I don’t believe this” and everyone’s only
listening to one side. For me, that’s a kind of bullying right there. Those people are
just putting others down and making them feel bad.

I have seen some Christians use quotes from the Bible to say gay people are
bad. When they do this they don’t consider that there might be gay people who
either haven’t even been exposed to church or they’ve quit going because of exactly
what the other Christians are quoting, so it shows they’re not even thinking right to
begin with. What these Christians don’t seem to consider that being gay is really
*society’s* dilemma not God’s. The issue goes back to educating people. I know what
the Bible says, but I also know enough to think of it as an analogy or interpretation. I
was raised Methodist and have a wife who’s Catholic, so I’ve been exposed to
different kinds of church services. Regardless of denomination, there’s no way that
everyone follows *everything* that the Bible says, so attacking one specific group of people who aren’t following something someone picks out is ridiculous.

Then there’s this argument about gay adoption rights and support for same-sex parenting. These are easy. Why *wouldn’t* you want a home that’s nurturing and they teach them good morals and values just like everybody else? Why *wouldn’t* I want my child to go over there to play? Additionally, I don’t feel like I’m in a position to judge other human beings. Here’s what I would say to these right-wing Christians who think the “gay lifestyle” is somehow wrong. Ok, let’s say being straight really is ‘God’s Plan,’ then let’s let the Big Man be the judge, ok? Then why don’t you let him be the judge of *everybody* and you keep out of it. How about that?

I went to college at Otterbein, which is a big theater and music school and is known for being a small school where the percentage of gay students there is fairly high. When I went there I had many gay friends and acquaintances. Some of my straight male friends from college have been and are still disgusted by gay people and gay-bash gay men, especially. I feel much differently and don’t understand why some of my friends are like that. Experiencing college meant meeting new people, learning about new cultures and different ways of living life. Getting a bigger perspective than the one you came in with is one of the primary reasons why I wanted to go to college to begin with. If people don’t want to learn about ideas that are bigger than where they came from they have wasted their time.

A few years after graduating from Otterbein, I worked as a lifeguard at a country club. My boss at the time was an openly gay man. I admired and respected him because he was good at his job and is just an awesome person. One of the things
I learned from him was how to interact well with people and with kids. Getting to know my boss through working and hanging out with him reinforced the acceptance of out gay men that my family, church and college experiences have instilled. Everyone seemed to like this guy. He had a magnetic personality, but when I think about it I remember one or two people who rolled their eyes or made some little comment about him, though. I guess I didn’t necessarily see myself as trying to defend him, but just saying, Hey, I work with him, he’s an awesome guy, like you would for anyone. Plus this guy comes from a highly respected family in Westerville, his brother was a teacher and coach in Westerville and his parents still live in the neighborhood.

Another person I think of while I’m talking here is about my wife’s aunt, who is a lesbian. In recent years, I have gotten close to her and her partner, S. Both women hold big-time jobs at big colleges in the east. Last summer, my wife and I stayed with them for 4th of July weekend. During our visit, I had the opportunity to get to know them better and I just respect them both so much. The more time we spend together the more I feel reinforced in my support of gay rights, especially when it came to gay marriage. People who gay-bash or who are unsupportive of gay rights are just ignorant. They must not know anybody who’s gay. If they’d meet someone who has a different preference than they do they’d see, ‘Oh! I can talk to this person just like I’d talk to anybody else!’ and then their guards come would have to come down. It’s very unlikely that their pre-conceived notions would hold up. Just seeing the prosperity and general success of gay individuals in my family, when I was in college, and at my job would draw anyone’s respect and support. They
just need to see that.

One of my early memories about teaching and coaching was coming across a situation where B., one of my runners, was being verbally attacked by this other guy on the team during track practice. This is when I was still friends with my boss, and I kind of thought of how he would’ve felt if he’d been attacked, but I thought, What if he wasn’t the boss? Although B. never came out, a lot of people wondered if he was gay because he had an effeminate way to him. There was this one day at practice when H., who was huge and a football player, too, called B. faggot. It was an attack that got ugly very quickly. My heart just kind of went out to B. because he was standing toe-to-toe with a much bigger kid, speaking his mind and being strong, but as soon as the word faggot left H.’s mouth he and everyone else could tell that it pierced B. to the bone. He lost ground at that moment. I was down the track from where the B. and H. were fighting when I heard it. I ran to them to stop things from escalating further, and it did stop. They went their separate ways after that. After practice that day, I had a heart to heart talk with B. to make sure he was ok and to reassure him. B. shook it off, saying, “No coach, I’m fine, I’m fine,” but I wasn’t so sure. I felt like I had to keep repeating to B. that he had his support if he wanted it. As for the other student, H., one of the assistant coaches and I pulled him into the locker room and laid into him pretty good. We were like, “Do you realize what you just said? There’s no difference between what you said and someone calling you a nigger or something else derogatory! Although H. could be a real jerk sometimes, he was a smart kid, smart enough to realize he was wrong. He later went to B. and apologized, but I felt so on edge about the whole thing, even with B. saying things
were fine. I was relieved that the incident took place in the last part of the school year just before both boys graduated because I feel like it could’ve really escalated.

In my classroom, I have been lucky in that I haven’t seen any attacks like the one that happened at practice. The biggest problem I notice, though, is language use. Kids using “gay” to describe something they think is stupid or to talk about anything they don’t like. I can’t *stand* when they do that. I actually try to nip it in the bud by putting it into class expectations at the beginning of the year. I just tell them that kind of talk is unacceptable. I think I also pretty much jump on *any* bullying I see. I want my room to be a safe environment for the kids and I think it is. My students know when they come in to the room they’re not going to be bullied or hassled or made fun of if I have anything to say about it. And something kind of cool I’ve noticed more so than in the past is that there seem to be other teachers who include expectations about that kind of language early on in the year. I also think that although the freshmen are still saying “That’s gay!,” they have been saying it less than they did five or six years ago. It seems like the “trend” of saying it has burned out, or that or middle school teachers have started addressing it, too. I hope that’s the case so that high school teachers like us aren’t working on it alone all the time.

For the second interview I asked you to prompt me a little bit. I wasn’t sure where to start. I was thinking you could just ask me questions if you had any. You asked me if I thought of “science” as a subject that lent itself to being more objective and non-judgmental and wanted to know more about how I saw myself as a science teacher who supported same-sex partnerships and attraction. Then you also asked
me about a science teacher in our building who is really religious and talks openly about being against gay people because it isn’t natural. You shared with me that that you saw me as being on the other end of the spectrum, however, and wondered how two “scientific” people could hold such different perspectives.

As far as my colleague goes, clearly, for her, the influences of society or religion have outweighed scientific evidence. Even if homophobic individuals would allow themselves to be able to see evidence that being gay is as “natural” as being “straight,” they would say it’s something that should be suppressed. It may be natural, but it’s not morally right, so you have to control it. It’s the religious component, not the scientific one that says you have to make a different choice. For them, gay sex is categorized as just another bad choice that humans shouldn’t make, like doing something violent to another person. It’s not un-natural, per se, but you shouldn’t do it. I do also think a lot about the complexity of wanting to be with someone, and I don’t think people always do. Choosing a partner isn’t only about sex. It’s an attraction based on many different aspects. Straight people don’t choose long-term partners exclusively based on sexual attraction either, but for some reason people act like that’s the only thing gay people are interested in.

You asked me if I felt like my philosophy of stepping back, living one’s life and letting others live theirs, felt contradictory to what seemed like an active ally role when I was working at the country club and in my job as a teacher now. Yeah, well, that’s a tough one! I guess I don’t like confrontation, but I absolutely can’t stand when people try to degrade others. I think I’m a compassionate person. I get pulled into situations when it looks like someone needs help. All people at some time or
another get put into positions where they can’t stand up for themselves in the way that they want to, or they can’t say the things because they know there will be negative consequences for them if they do. Confrontations like that can get even worse if no one jumps in.

I think my biggest reason for jumping in right away at school is because kids’ reactions to most altercations are so negative most of the time. The students haven’t reached a maturity level where they articulate that they feel threatened or don’t agree with something in a calm way. They don’t say, “You know what, what you are doing is ok, but I just don’t agree with it.” Instead, their reactions are more like, “Hey, faggot, who do you think you are?” The extremity of student language, too, really gets your attention and I feel like I have to step in because it can get physical and dangerous very quickly. And if a situation came up where big gay guy was bullying a smaller straight kid I’d jump in to stop that, too—although I’ve never seen this happen, but just as an example that I’d jump on that, too. I don’t know if there’s ever going to be a Utopian world, but I believe that part of being a good teacher is knowing how to instinctively sense when someone’s being physically or emotionally threatened and to step in when you do.

**Derrick’s story.** I remember in elementary school my Mom explaining to me that my uncle was gay. The way she did it was just like you’d explain anything to a little kid: in simple terms. We were riding in the car one day and she told me that my favorite uncle, my dad’s brother, was together with another boy like [mommy] and daddy were together with each other. I just saw it as something she was telling me. My mom’s positive definition of what it meant to be gay was positive, and my
relationship with my uncle was, and still is, loving and very positive. I was also excited to just know more about what any word meant, so knowing what gay really meant was cool. I liked learning new words. Up until that time my original definition of “gay” was “tan” because I guess when I heard people say things about gay people they happened to be tan. I know my uncle was and just thought that was all there was to it. My mom said nothing negative about my uncle being in a relationship with another man and there was no backlash from their family. He wasn’t disinvited from Thanksgiving or anything like that.

Speaking of family, I remember my uncle and I having this kind of interesting talk just before my wedding. My uncle was joking with me about the high level of interest my mom took in his “gayness.” I’m thinking now that even though my uncle laughed about it at the time, there may have been something off-putting about my mom’s need to be characterized as tolerant of other people. I think that my mom sees her children as an extension of the way people see her, so part of it may be about her rather than my uncle.

I heard “gay” used as a derogatory term early on in school. In the third grade, one of the boys in my class called me a fag. I didn’t know really what it meant and started using it as an insult at school because that was what everyone else was doing. One time at home, however, I got in big trouble with my mom because she heard me use the word fag to insult my brother. I didn’t understand that “fag” had anything to do with “gay,” and thought that it was just something to call someone, like saying they’re fat. My mom explained to me that “fag” was a mean thing that some people said about my uncle and that I shouldn’t say it. Even after I found out
that it was actually an insult, I didn’t yet have the guts to tell the kids at school who were using it to stop. Teachers at my school did not reprimand the kids who used the word “fag,” probably because they didn’t know about it. It mainly happened during recess on this big, spread out playground we had.

I didn’t know if I asked about sex or if my mom talked to me about it just because she thought it was an important thing to bring up. I didn’t really understand what my mom was saying at first. She sort of started talking about it like this is how grown-up men and women make babies. Later, when I heard about it in fourth grade I remember gaining a better understanding of sex, like “OH! That’s what she was talking about!” It was then that I understood what my mom had told him was out of whack. It was just really incomplete. Even with a little bit of groundwork, though, I felt that at least I had a better understanding of the sex education we got in school. More so than some other kids who had not yet heard anything about sex from their parents. In both first and second grades I had these serious crushes on two of my female classmates. I felt confident about my sexuality at an early age in part, I think, because my mother had already made sex o.k. by talking about it. So, later on when these kids called me a “fag” it didn’t really bother me because I’d already established what I was and felt really sure that my sexuality was normal. “Fag” didn’t bother me. It was like, “I’m not that.” The literal meaning of what they were saying compared to the fact that I really liked girls just seemed kind of funny to me.

When I was older, I had a better understanding of what people were saying when they called other people a fag, but in terms of my uncle the threat was really remote. I was more irritated than upset, I’d say, because I felt the word didn’t apply
to my uncle in the way they were using it. I was like, They don’t even know my uncle...how would they know what they’re saying? I thought they were just dumb. If I hadn’t known I was attracted to girls the word fag probably would’ve impacted me differently. I’m sure it would.

I’ve thought a lot about how attraction works, if people are inclined to be a certain way, like being attracted to a certain sex or being open-minded versus being fearful. I think that human nature works to a certain degree not to trust things that are not like you, but then it’s a person’s environment that can translate the distrust into curiosity and acceptance, or, of course, dislike and a continuation of mistrust.

I was looking at that “main characters” question. I would say Weird Al was one of my strongest influences in middle school. My wife thinks that Weird Al is stupid, but I don’t care. Even now I think Weird Al’s vocabulary, intelligence, and creativity make him the best children’s artist ever. He is someone who teaches kids that it’s cool to be unique and that being completely unlike everyone else is cool. Weird Al helped me to separate myself from the expectations put on me to be like everyone else. As I got older when I would hear people call people a fag and I didn’t feel like I had to ignore them. I had this attitude like, I don’t care. I am who I am. It was around fourth through sixth grades that I experienced a lot of growth. I wasn’t willing to compromise who I was in order to gain popularity. I started to assert this a lot. For example, we heard “fag,” “faggot,” and “queer” so much in middle school that they were part of the vocabulary that was everywhere. And adding the phrase, “your mom” was another way kids harassed and bullied other kids. When I heard these kinds of insults a million times, so I started to respond to them in the affirmative as
a way to shock the other kids into reversing the way they used them. So, if someone said, “your mom is hot,” instead of the protesting and defending her he would respond with, “Yeah, I know, we just took a shower together this morning.” The kids would be so stunned they would then leave me alone. Sometimes I’d be like, “Yeah, I might be gay!” and it would shut people up. But I did have girlfriends at the time, so it didn’t feel like anyone really thought that, but it made them uncomfortable enough to make them stop.

There was also this kid I was friends with in school who is out now, as an adult. I know I was bothered by all the school crap, so I can’t imagine what this guy must’ve been feeling like having to live through the ignorance. I don’t even think there was one out person at my school until around senior year. But even in 9th grade I met other people who could see what was going on. The conversations I had with my girlfriend in 9th grade were like, “I think it’s dumb when people say ‘faggot,’ that annoys the crap out of me” and she was like, “Yeah! Me too!” We sort of moved into realizing, Hey, I don’t just have to make a joke of it, I can just tell people they’re DUMB, I can tell them, “You’re an IDIOT for saying that!” So I went through a period—and I’ve grown out of it—where I would respond very, very negatively to ANY thing that I thought was dumb. People being racist, sexist, homophobic, whatever.

I remember an important division for me in middle school: my love of art verses my hatred of sports. I especially hated organized crap like football. I didn’t like the way they made people prove who they could beat. One time we were arm-wrestling in class and I beat these guys that I guess everyone called athletic in
unsanctioned arm-wrestling and I remember thinking, “Pst! I don’t need sports!”

Organized sports were just dumb. I remember sometime around seventh grade that the people who said that fag-type comments were definitely, definitely the people who were into sports. At that time, I didn’t really correlate sports and art. It was like, Well, I don’t really like sports, I really like Art, but I didn’t think to say those things in the same sentence. And, in sixth grade we read *Bridge to Terabithia*. And there’s something involving a paint set and the boy’s dad gets mad that he has it and he feels like painting is like a girly thing to do, and I had never, ever thought of that like that before and had never been exposed to thinking that that art was not like a totally, like, whatever. Not that I thought it was masculine, but that I didn’t think of it every as having a gender at all. It was like I’m a guy and I love doing this. No one had ever said anything like that to me. After I read that, I don’t think it changed anyone else’s perspective, but it made me think about my love of art in relation to sports and that type of thing, and I just started to feel like, my life is really different from a lot of other people’s lives and that was fine, but it, um, kind of made me go on the defensive a little bit. I was an Art kid and one of the very few and most of the guys in my grade were, like, gay-bashing jock-type dudes. So, that put me on the defensive a little bit. I remember we read it in class and I cried in class because one of the characters dies. And I didn’t want anyone to see me crying, but I couldn’t help it. I just kind of put my head down like I was tired. Maybe like defensive is the wrong word. I was more...when I was around those people I just expected...the worst.

When I was growing up I really liked school and wanted to be there. My teachers did a good job with protecting kids who were getting picked on in front of
them, but when there was no teacher around it was fair game. One of the things in school that I loved was when teachers would hang things up in their classrooms rather than just having a plain room. There was this really cool chart of Pi in my math room and I remember trying to memorize it, not because I liked math but because I thought it didn’t fit in with the way I’d been taught about numbers up until that point. It didn’t make any sense and that’s why it was so cool. When I was a freshman, I started to think more about what I was learning and what I could do about it. Like torture and death. We had Amnesty International and I started doing that. I thought the best way to make horrible things go away was to kill the people doing the killing, or destroy their government, at least. I used to be mostly pro-death penalty, too, which is weird to me now because my opinions have really changed since then.

If I have someone in class who says something dumb, like “That’s gay!” I never jump down their throat, I almost never respond angrily, or literally call them dumb. I try to turn it around by making joke of it so they can see that it’s a bad thing to do, but so it gives them the opportunity to laugh at themselves. I don’t give detentions for them saying, “That’s gay!” because it’s never escalated and my students stop saying it right away when I point it out. I treat it like a mistake. They make other kinds of mistakes. When someone makes a mistake teachers should respond in ways that are constructive, so the kid feels like he or she’s being looked out for, too. You don’t attack a mistake; you help a person do it better the next time. Yes, sometimes I do think a mistake deserves to be attacked, but in the long run attacking the person doesn’t accomplish change at ALL. No one ever, ever considers
someone’s perspective when they come across heatedly. People might temporarily stop whatever they’re doing because you scared them, but they aren’t really listening. And none of this is easy. I have to keep my temper in check all the time. If I spoke my mind all the time I’d have been fired long ago. People can be so ignorant and foolish and they are so PROUD of what they are! I would love to just be all about vengeance. That’s why violent movies can be so darn satisfying! The more violent the better! But I don’t want to live in a society like that. I hate real violence. Everyone does, really.

I have a student in class who reminds me of how I was when I was her age. Not exactly, but close. She’s emotional like everyone except that she is not going to just storm out of the room like some kids because she’s upset. She isn’t directly confrontational, but can hold her own even when other kids are vicious to her. I don’t step in to defend Carrie (pseudonym) because stupid people don’t even phase her.

So there was this one assignment I gave where I challenged the students to find art that is PRO-George W. Bush because I mean, really, how much of that are you going to find? Very, very little. I even thought about making some, just to be funny. There are things that I think you can do to help the kids be more progressive and tolerant people. I don’t think you have to indoctrinate students with a message of tolerance because they are getting that point of view whether I push it or not, but then again that message is inherent in art. Like when I assign painting techniques the kids are not required to paint the same thing. They paint whatever they want to express but just practicing the technique I want to get across. Gay-bashing and
generally putting each other down doesn’t fit into the vibe necessary for self-expression. Still, though I hear gay-bashing a lot more than other insults. It seems more accepted, which sucks. Teachers should do something because it’s rampant. I don’t have a zero-tolerance policy for any kind of student language, though, which may sound bad. But I take into account both the individuals as well as the situation. I would never say the word “faggot” is funny when it’s used, but my responses the word “gay” depend a lot on how it’s is used.

Did you see that thing about Miss California? I think that thing about freedom of speech completely misses the point of ‘freedom.’ It doesn’t mean that you get to mess with somebody to the point of being insensitive. If some kid said, “Anyone who doesn’t support gay marriage should die” I would certainly tell him that’s not ok either! Not thinking about what you’re saying and using the word “freedom” to describe that is really dumb. Plus the only reason people care what she thinks is because of what she looks like. I’ve never even seen a minute of “The Apprentice,” and think it’s completely gross, but I think it’s really funny that Donald Trump comes out with his arm around [Miss California]! That’s just funny!
# Appendix E

**Tables**

*Table 1: Research Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
<th>Phase V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Contact participants</td>
<td>b. Transcribe initial interviews</td>
<td>b. Analyze narratives for emergent patterns</td>
<td>b. Transcribe follow-up interviews</td>
<td>b. Member check roundtable discussion (selected transcripts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Select participants</td>
<td>c. Begin researcher reflection journal</td>
<td>c. Develop questions for follow-up interviews</td>
<td>c. Member check second interviews</td>
<td>c. Analytic memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Distribute life story interview questions for participant review</td>
<td>e. Take preliminary field notes (add to journal later)</td>
<td>d. Maintain reflection journal</td>
<td>d. Maintain reflection journal</td>
<td>d. Share outcome with selected audience (to be negotiated with participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Take preliminary field notes (add to journal later)</td>
<td></td>
<td>e. Participant(s) conduct researcher interview</td>
<td>e. Roundtable discussion with participants using emergent categories (audio taped)</td>
<td>e. Roundtable discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f. Transcribe researcher interview</td>
<td>f. Transcribe roundtable discussion</td>
<td>g. Conclude reflection journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location: on site</td>
<td>Location: off site (participants will choose)</td>
<td>Location: on &amp;/or off site (participants will choose)</td>
<td>Location: on &amp;/or off site (participants will choose)</td>
<td>Location: on &amp;/or off site (will be negotiated with participants)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Framework for Collaborative Life Story Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How can collaborative self-study work with others be facilitated?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time will interviews take? How can roles and responsibilities, both personally and professionally, be adjusted to allow time for interviews?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where will interviews and conversations take place?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are differences in emphasis and expectations to be addressed?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are the strengths of the partnerships between and among researcher and participants identified and considered, and to what extent are the complementary?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will ongoing interpersonal relationships be negotiated?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the focus of the inquiry?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will (or should) the reporting process proceed? How are decisions about reporting made?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the elements of inquiry are completed (Phase V): When, where, and how does the research project proceed?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might the research activities interfere with normal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
routines? What allowances need to be made?

What arrangements need to be made to ensure opportunities for ongoing reflexivity, responsivity, and mutual involvement?

**Ethical issues (Cole & Knowles, 1995)**

How will confidentiality be assured prior to data analysis?

Who will transcribe interview tapes? Who will have access to the research information?

How can the information be presented or reported in a way that makes participant risk explicit, and, if desired, avoidable?

What happens when there are conflicting impressions and interpretations? Whose voice is heard? How are decisions to be made?

**Political issues (Cole & Knowles, 1993)**

Who will use this research? Why? When? For what purpose? Are there hidden agenda associated with participation? How can openness be assured?

What are the long-term goals of this study? Are there short-term goals?

How will participation in the study be viewed by others in the school community or educational context in which the work is embedded?

Are there institutional privileges or benefits associated with participation in the research? Are there potential disadvantages to participation?

**Educational issues (Cole & Knowles, 1993)**

How is participation in this project likely to influence development and inform practice in the classroom, university, and beyond?

How will participation in the project inform the professional development of all persons?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent is participation in the research empowering?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the research work propel others to engage in similar processes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will the outcomes be disseminated? By whom? To whom? For what purpose will the research be disseminated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


schools-ban-peanut-butter-as-allergy-threat.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm.


In S. Pollard (Producer). United States.


