

## Queer Professors Info Sheet

Created 2014; Updated 2022

### Overview:

Scholarly work that focuses on sexual orientation largely remains under-represented in academia.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in order to alleviate this issue, my research deals with queer professors<sup>2</sup> and the obstacles that they face in academia. During my search for literature related to queer professors, I came across a variety of forms: anecdotal essays, case studies, and surveys. I compiled them in an annotated bibliography, and from that I created this info sheet.

This info sheet has several stakeholders: 1) queer professors – through this info sheet, queer professors can acquire knowledge on how other educators have managed to surpass or, if not, cope with the issues they face; 2) education administration – the info sheet can provide admin the knowledge they require to ameliorate queer professors' struggles in the work environment; 3) other members of academia, such as staff, faculty members, and students – the info sheet, by simply providing details of the dilemmas of queer professors, will hopefully open the eyes of academia to the *real* struggles of queer professors and generate support for and acceptance of said queer professors.

### Points:

- Holley (2011) claims that there are 5 different institutional climates for queer educators: 1) gay affirming, 2) gay tolerant, 3) gay neutral, 4) gay intolerant, 5) gay hostile.
- deLeon and Crys Brunner (2013), with their Cycles of Fear module, details the cycle of fear and oppression that queer educational leaders (professors, teachers, admin) face in their day to day lives. deLeon and Crys Brunner conclude that although fear is the ongoing theme in the cycle, with each conclusion of the cycle, the queer educational leader becomes more and more resilient.
- Out queer faculty members are more likely to experience issues in academia: 1) discrimination in hiring; 2) bias in tenure and promotion; 3) exclusion from social and professional networks; 4) devaluation of scholarly work; and 5) harassment and intimidation by admin, colleagues, and students (Dolan, 1998; Rupp and Taylor, 2008).
- About 27 % of LGBTQ scientists said they receive limited or no support and benefits from their respective institutions (Faulks, 2013).
- Heteronormativity (assumed masculinity, femininity, etc.), not necessarily homophobia, is one of the causes of queer professors' issues. Grace & Hill (2004), Holley (2011),

---

<sup>1</sup> Within the period 1976 to 2004 the British Educational Index lists over 1600 publications with keywords signifying gender within their titles or abstracts. Keywords signifying ethnicity appear in nearly 900 publications within this same period, while the equivalent number containing keywords for sexual orientation (sexual orientation, gay, lesbian, bisexual, homosexual, queer) has yet to reach 40. (Toynton, 2006, p. 191)

<sup>2</sup> Some of the literature I read did not exclusively examine queer *professors'* lives. Some articles, such as deLeon and Crys Brunner's, also examine queer *teachers'* and queer *administration's* lives. However, for this info sheet, I chose to narrow down my focus to queer professors.

Toynton (2006) and Wallace (2002) think this to be the case, and suggest that queer professors encourage their students to not only *recognize queers* but also *expose heteronormativity*.

- The issue of pedagogy remains at the fore front of queer professors' minds. Kopelson (2002) describes the increasingly distinct teaching approaches by queer professors: coming out pedagogies (identity politics) and queer, performative pedagogies. Nathanson (2009), in particular, details the pitfalls of coming out pedagogies in her anecdotal essay.
- According to Kopelson (2002), Wallace (2002), Schippert (2006), Toynton (2006), and Whitlock (2010), a queer, performative pedagogy consists of challenging the centered, Cartesian, authentic self. This kind of pedagogy encourages proliferation and confusion of identities.
- For Grace & Hill (2004), a queer praxis entails the examination of intersections of oppression (eg. Sexual orientation, race, gender, class, etc.). Lewis (2012) discusses that the queer professor's body *is* one such intersection of oppression (Lewis is a woman who is black and queer).
- Russell (2011), Faunce & Forman (2012), and almost every author discuss the importance of queer educators' roles as mentors to their students. However, the conflict between affectionate mentorship and professional (distanced) mentorship weighs heavily on queer educators' minds. Especially for Russell (2011), who struggles to balance between breaking the stereotype of "the gay educator as predator" while at the same time providing affection for queer students who need a confidante. Rofes (2005) asks the question: is there a way to be both the gay male (sexual) and the gay teacher (professional) in the classroom?

### **Recommendations:**

- In order to flourish, queer professors need a reliable and sturdy system of support within their institution (admin, colleagues, family, friends, etc.) (Mizzi & Star, 2021). Dolan (1998), Rupp & Taylor (2008), and Holley (2011) all support this notion. Rupp & Taylor in particular goes into great detail on how their supportive institution allowed them to remain as a lesbian couple (of professors) within academia.
- If coming out within an institution is not possible, the need for a bifurcated existence is necessary. Wood (2005) provides an account of the discrimination that she faces within Utah State Valley College, an institution that is largely unsupportive of homosexuality.
- It is not necessary to come out as queer. According to Nathanson (2009), coming out pedagogies has their pitfalls. She relates one story of a bisexual student who had fears that Nathanson was a judgmental lesbian. In order to alleviate her student's fears, Nathanson came out to her as bisexual. While coming out to her student solidified their camaraderie, Nathanson's act of coming out also reinforced her student's belief that lesbians are judgmental towards bisexual people.

- However, Wood (2005) thinks that not coming out and being subversively queer does not help matters either, as every word she says is being read by her students nonetheless. There is an ongoing debate about coming out vs not coming out in the classroom, and Kopelson (2002) captures this conflict to great extent in her article.
- A queer pedagogy consists of creating awareness of LGBT people's obstacles and challenging heteronormativity in the classroom in several ways. Taylor (2014) does so with her students through an activity called Coming Out Stars, an activity that puts her students in the shoes of LGBT people who are about to/just come out. Toynton (2006) suggests that it does not have to be about the content; as a professor of geological sciences, a queer pedagogy can exist through practice.
- It is worth noting that most of the literature I came across are US-based. The only exceptions are Toynton, who is UK-based, while Grace, Schippert, and Taylor (L.) are Canada-based. While the points made in the US-based articles can be applied to some extent to different contexts, more perspectives from different cultural contexts are necessary in order to broaden the scope of the literature on queer professors.

## References

- deLeon, M.J., & Crys Brunner, C. (2013). Cycles of fear: a model of lesbian and gay educational leaders' lived experiences. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(1), 161-203.
- Dolan, J. (1998). Gay and lesbian professors: out on campus. *Academe*, 84(5), 40-45.
- Faulks, K. (2013, October 17). LGBT scientists find varying acceptance in academia, industry. *Minnesota Daily*. Retrieved from <http://www.mndaily.com/news/campus/2013/10/17/lgbt-scientists-find-varying-acceptance-academia-industry>
- Faunce, R. & Forman, S. (2012, Feb 23). Gay Mentors in Modern Academe. *The Chronicles of Higher Education*. Retrieved from [http://chronicle.com/article/Gay-Mentors-in-Modern-Academe/130883/?sid&utm\\_source&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/article/Gay-Mentors-in-Modern-Academe/130883/?sid&utm_source&utm_medium=en)
- Grace, A.P. & Hill, R.J. (2004). Positioning queer in adult education: Intervening in politics and praxis in North America. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 36(2), 167-189.
- Holley, M (2011). Gay and lesbian faculty issues. *Journal of the Indiana University Student Personnel Association*, 2011 Edition.
- Lewis, M.M. (2012). Pedagogy and the sista' professor: Teaching black queer feminist studies through the self. Meiners, E.R., & Quinn, T. (Eds). *Sexualities in Education: A Reader* (pp. 33-40). NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Kopelson, K. (2002). Dis/Integrating the Gay/Queer Binary: "Reconstructed Identity Politics" for a Performative Pedagogy. *College English*, 65(1), 17-35.
- Nathanson, J. (2009). Bisexual Pedagogy: Bringing Bisexuality into the Classroom. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 9(1), 71-86.
- Rofes, E. (2005). *Status Quo or Status Queer? A Radical Rethinking of Sexuality & Schooling*. UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

- Rupp, L.J. & Taylor, V. (2008). Becoming the professors of “Lesbian Love”. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 9(4), 25-39.
- Russell, V.T. (2010). Queer teachers' ethical dilemmas regarding queer youth. *Teaching Education*, 21(2), 143-156.
- Schippert, C. (2006). Critical projection and queer performativity: Self-revelation in teaching/learning Otherness. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 28(3), 281-295.
- Taylor, L. (2014). Engaging teacher candidates in anti-homophobia discussions: reflections on caution, care and commitment. In Gousse, D. (Ed), *Out Proud: Stories of Pride, Courage, and Social Justice*, 36-42. St. John's: Breakwater Books Ltd.
- Toynnton, R. (2006). 'Invisible other': Understanding safe spaces for queer learners and teachers in adult education. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 38(2), 178-194.
- Wallace, D.L. (2002). Out in the academy: Heterosexism, invisibility, and double consciousness. *College English*, 65(1), 53-66.
- Whitlock, R.U. (2010). Getting queer: Teacher education, gender studies, and the cross-disciplinary quest for queer pedagogies. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 19(2), 81-104.
- Wood, L. (2005). Not a hetero: Confessions of a dangerous homo. *Cultural Studies*, 19(4), 430-438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380500219449>

- Compiled by Jay Jimenez

See also:

- Mizzi, R.C., & Star, J. (2019). Queer eye on inclusion: Understanding gay and lesbian student and instructor experiences of continuing education. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 67(2/3), 72-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2019.1660844>.