

“I Want to Hide Behind My Male Christian Whiteness”: Christian Nationalism and How Educator Preparation Programs Prepare Candidates to Create Affirming Educational Spaces for LGBTQ+ Identities

Joseph R. Jones
Gordon State College

Introduction

Recently, I conducted an unstructured focus group interview and several unstructured individual interviews with gay male teachers in a southern state. Though the research study maintained specific research questions, some of the statements from the participants concerning their fear of addressing challenges surrounding gender and sexuality within their schools and classrooms surprised me. During the interviews, it became obvious that teachers were afraid of the current political tensions in their state and across the country. It also became apparent that teacher preparation programs did not prepare the teachers to address the challenges surrounding LGBTQ+ identities in their schools. The research study engendered this essay, in which I will first briefly define Christian nationalism and discuss Christian nationalism’s emergence into the national discourse and its role as a power regime. Afterward, I will offer my postulations concerning educator preparation programs’ response to Christian nationalism, as it relates to preparing candidates to create affirming educational spaces for LGBTQ+ identities.

Joseph R. Jones is a professor in the School of Education at Gordon State College, Barnesville, Georgia. Email address: Jjones1@gordonstate.edu

What is Christian Nationalism?

First, it is necessary to define Christian nationalism and fundamentalism, as both terms are important to my overall assertions. According to Perry and Whitehead (2020), Christian nationalism is a cultural belief system that advocates that America has always been and should continue to be a distinctly Christian nation; in this capacity, Christian nationalism maintains assumptions about militarism, nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and authoritarianism.

According to Dunn (2022),

Christian nationalism identifies the nation with God's will and action in the world; conflates national and Christian identity; and identifies service of the nation with service of God...Christian nationalism gives moral cover for actions, even unseemly ones, taken in pursuit of national or political goals. (para. 5)

Moreover, Christian nationalists argue that America's founders intended the new country to be a Christian nation. Because of this belief, Christian nationalism demands protection for this perceived connection between Christianity and the country. In this capacity, Christian nationalists believe certain societal actions, such as abortion and same-sex marriage, are a direct attack on the moral fiber of the American Christian nation. Further, Christian nationalism also desires to restrict the religious freedom of non-Christian religious beliefs, supports broad restrictions on immigration, and attack any perceived threats to Christianity. In simple terms, the foundation of Christian nationalism in modern American culture resides in privileging its own religious ideologies over others when determining laws, interpreting the Constitution, and in maintaining a democratic life.

To understand Christian nationalism, it is advantageous to define fundamentalism because of its connections to Christian nationalism. According to Harvard Divinity School's (2022) website, fundamentalism,

often associated with conservative religious beliefs across traditions but its origins lie in an early twentieth century American Protestant group that published a series of twelve pamphlets entitled *The Fundamentals*. Following a long tradition of different opinions regarding Biblical interpretation, fundamentalists were responding to new Biblical scholarship that examined the Bible in its historical context. They were also responding to a rise in secularism, including scientific explanations for human origins and development. Though there were differences among fundamentalists, most promoted biblical inerrancy, a belief in the miracles depicted in the Bible as true, the divinity of Jesus, and a belief that Jesus will return again in judgment. (para. 1)

According to the Episcopal Church (2022),

the term ‘fundamentalism’ was introduced by Carl Laws, editor of the *Watchman-Examiner*, who proposed five central and non-negotiable doctrines: (1) biblical inerrancy; (2) the divinity of Christ; (3) the Virgin Birth; (4) the substitutionary theory of the Atonement; and (5) the resurrection and second coming of Christ literally interpreted. Laws put forward these fundamentals as moderately conservative proposals, in a spirit, which today might be called ‘evangelical’ or ‘neo-evangelical.’ However, over time, fundamentalism has evolved to describe an extreme, narrow mindset, and aggressive resistance to an emerging liberal theology. (para. 1)

Fundamentalism connects to Christian nationalism through the interpretation of scripture. Christian nationalists adhere to the five fundamental beliefs (Episcopal Church, 2022), especially the inerrancy of scripture. Moreover, because they believe America is a Christian nation, any belief outside a literal interpretation of scripture is heresy; thus, such a belief attacks the moral foundation of America, which will bring God’s judgement upon the nation. After briefly defining these terms, I will next discuss how Christian nationalism affects the American P-12 schooling process.

Christian Nationalism, Foucault, and the Schooling Process

In the most recent political cycle, the emergence of a political power regime, Christian nationalism and the fundamentalist movement, has caused a great amount of trepidation for many in the American citizenry. I posit former President Trump provided Christian nationalism a conduit, through which the regime could more fully influence fundamentalists’ beliefs concerning race, gender, and sexuality because power “cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It is linked with a production of truth, the truth of the individual himself” (Foucault, 1980, p. 214). In this manner, Christian nationalism used Trump as the catalyst to garner political power because white conservative fundamentalists and Trump shared the same ideological beliefs. In essence, Trump became a coalescing instrument utilized by the movement to increase their power.

To better conceptualize my assertions concerning Christian nationalism as a power regime, I believe a brief and simplified discussion of Foucault offers a lens, through which one may examine America’s current situation. Additionally, a discussion of Foucault is necessary because of his connection to queer theory, which I discuss later in the essay. In terms of power, Foucault suggests that power is established

through accepted forms of knowledge and understanding “truth.” In this capacity, power becomes a ‘regime of truth’ that permeates society, and such a regime of truth emerges through

the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1986, p. 135)

The regime of truth is the result of discourse within a society by those who the regime has granted the authority to speak “truth,” and the “truth” is reinforced and solidified by educational systems, media, political ideologies, religion, and other socially valued institutions. The reinforcement is important to mention because power exists in the daily lives of all individuals; socialized norms become embedded in the society’s social consciousness, which causes society and individuals to govern his/her/their own behaviors through the “truths” that exist.

For clarification and to provide connectedness with my discussions of sexuality and queer theory, it may be beneficial to examine Foucault’s beliefs concerning power and sexuality. In discussing the history of sexuality, Foucault (1984) traces how society has marked certain sexual practices (masturbation, sodomy, adultery, etc.) as deviant from the norms of modern culture as established through social institutions. For example, he cites how schools separated young children to discuss their sexuality. In same sex groups, school personnel taught children how to speak appropriately about sexuality in rigid and technical terms (Foucault, 1984). In this manner, the institution of school engaged in hegemonic practices by controlling the ways the children discussed and engaged in sexual activity, much like the current divisive curriculum laws that several American states have passed.

Further, Foucault uses the example of teachers in male boarding schools who aimed to produce acceptable behavior concerning masturbation. Foucault (1984) argues that through discussions of this sexual act by school officials, the nature of sexuality and sexual desires enters into regimes of power that label and categorize masturbation as anti-normative according to the school officials, who hold the power. The school officials controlled students’ sexual acts through labeling something as anti-normal.

Using power and Foucault to examine the current condition in America may provide insightful reflection. First, Christian nationalism attacked critical race theory, which prompted the construction of the “us versus the woke,” as evidenced by the Governor of Florida’s

statement in his recent election speech, “Florida is where woke goes to die” (Czachor, 2022, para. 3). In doing so, Christian nationalism attempted to force society to view “the woke generation” as deviant because they support issues surrounding social justice. This action also created the avenue to force schools (through divisive curriculum laws) to not discuss any curriculum that examines the truth about racism in America, which gave the regime more power over schools and the indoctrination of white supremacy because schools are no longer allowed to discuss the realities of white oppression and white privilege.

The regime has also influenced higher education institutions. In Georgia, a state legislature demanded that all 26 University System of Georgia institutions of higher education provide his committee with a list of every course or college program that discusses social justice issues (Stirgus, 2022). In essence, the legislative committee wanted to examine if state funds supported courses, programs, faculty professional development, among other areas, that involves topics surrounding social justice and racism. Faculty had to submit a list of any mention of any topic that falls within the parameters of social justice in any professional presentation, any article, and any course that they have taught while employed in the system. Every faculty member in the university system was required to submit this information.

While attacking critical race theory, Christian nationalists began focusing on LGBTQ+ identities. For example, the pastor at Steadfast Baptist Church, a fundamentalist congregation in Texas, stated in a sermon that “homosexuals have no hope of salvation...every single homosexual in our country should be charged with a crime. The abomination of homosexuality that they have, they should be convicted in a lawful trial. They should be sentenced with death. They should be lined up against the wall and shot in the back of the head” (Burke, 2022, para.8).

Drawing from Foucault (1978), this statement, by a fundamentalist Christian nationalist, perpetuates a discourse that attempts to force society to dehumanize LGBTQ+ individuals by naming LGBTQ+ identities as anti-normal because such identities are against biblical teachings. Moreover, this pastor’s sermon is a form of power that “applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have recognized in him” (Foucault, 1986, p. 212). Further, the pastor’s statement declares a “truth” that can be discovered from scripture, an interpretation that forces adherence to specific behaviors; as such, “truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures

for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it" (Foucault, 1986, p. 133); in doing so, the pastor's statement becomes a regime of truth, one which Christian nationalism "accepts and makes function as true...the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault, 1986, p.133).

Specifically, this pastor, as all fundamentalist pastors, through Christian nationalism, has the status to determine what is true and to speak that truth to their congregations, regardless of seminary training. In this manner, the regime of truth utilizes an interpretation of scripture to indoctrinate the congregants with the pastor's own truth, which becomes a method to share the discourse throughout American culture. Moreover, the discourse informs the normalizing factors in society, which attempts to control society's understandings of sexuality.

Christian nationalism has emerged as a hegemonic force, proclaiming a "truth" about sexuality that is affecting the local school building. According to Foucault (1984), local teachers projected a "truth" about sexuality by proclaiming a sexual act was deviant, which is akin to the teacher in Fort Riley, Kansas who refused to call students by their desired pronouns (Motter, 2022). In doing so, she labeled the student and the desired pronoun as anti-normal, which reinforces the "truth" declared by fundamentalism and Christian nationalism. Likewise, a middle school teacher in Ohio refused to use a student's pronoun because she believed it violated her Christian beliefs (Willetts, 2022). Similarly, a Richmond, Virginia teacher refused to follow school policy by not using a student's desired pronouns, citing his religious beliefs (The Associate Press, 2022).

However, one must also conceptualize how pervasive Christian nationalism is and the impact it has on schools. Specifically, the interviews in my research study revealed that teachers are afraid to address issues surrounding LGBTQ+ identities in their own classrooms. The political regime is a stronger influence on their pedagogical choices than their own personal lived experiences, many of which included bullying and homophobic actions. For example, many refused to mention LGBTQ+ topics because of the fear the current political regime has imposed on education in their state, even though they were harassed for being gay during their own schooling experience. In the focus group interview, Steve shared his beliefs about his classroom practices, "although I have never allowed my sexuality to inform my classroom choices, I definitely would not do it in the political climate schools are in right now" (Jones, 2023, p. 33).

When asked if his administrators know about his sexuality, Eric

responded, “It gives me a weird level of anxiety...I wonder whether their preexisting biases of me and who I am will impact my job” (Jones, 2023, p. 33). In discussing whether his administration is aware of his sexuality, Matt stated, “We are in an important political climate. So, many things could potentially happen, and I want to hide behind my male Christian whiteness” (Jones, 2023, p. 33).

In the above discussion, I have attempted to establish Christian nationalism as a power regime, one striving to support white supremacy and striving to dehumanize LGBTQ+ individuals. There are other endeavors for this regime all premised upon a fundamentalist ideology (denying women bodily autonomy, among others), but the focus of this essay resides within the regime’s impact on LGBTQ+ identities and educator preparation programs and how those programs prepare candidates to address issues surrounding LGBTQ+ identities. Therefore, I will next discuss the regime’s impact on educator preparation and possible implications that educator preparation program may wish to consider.

Christian Nationalism’s Impact on Educator Preparation

As discussed, Christian nationalism has attacked critical race theory, women’s autonomy, white privilege, and LGBTQ+ identities, among others. In relation to LGBTQ+ individuals, I asked the following question in each individual interviews in my study, “Did your teacher preparation program prepare you to address challenges within the LGBTQ+ community in schools?” None of the participants received formalized training to create safe and affirming classrooms for this population. I should note, all of the participants previously attended colleges in states that had recently passed a divisive curriculum law.

I posit the lack of preparation will worsen if Christian nationalism gains more power to control the schooling process surrounding LGBTQ+ identities. To understand fully the possible dire influence of Christian nationalism on LGBTQ+ youth, it is necessary to conceptualize the current challenges that LGBTQ+ students face in schools; in doing so, I aim to present data of which some education preparation programs may not be aware.

Current LGBTQ+ Experiences in Schools

First, it is beneficial to examine the challenges that surround LGBTQ+ identities within the schooling process. According to GLSEN (2021), a national surveyor of school climates as they relate to LGBTQ+ identities, 81.8% of LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe in their schools,

32.2% missed at least one day from school because they were scared to attend, 11.3% missed four or more days in the past month, 76.1% were verbally harassed because of their identity, and 31.2% were physically harassed. Moreover, 58.0% heard homophobic remarks from their teachers or school staff, 72.0% heard negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or school staff. Other data (Jones, 2017) suggest that LGBTQ+ students who are harassed in schools believe college will be the same and choose not to attend. Further, the suicide rates for LGBTQ+ students far exceed those of their non-LGBTQ+ student counterparts.

Moreover, GLSEN (2020) reveals data from another national survey that depicts LGBTQ+ teachers and their attempts to create safe learning spaces, “LGTBQ teachers are more likely to engage in affirming and supportive teaching practices” (p. 1). In fact, 74.5% of LGBTQ teachers implemented at least one affirming practice. That said, only 43.9% of LGBTQ teachers displayed a visual sign of support, only 21.7% of LGBTQ teachers advocated for inclusive school and district policies, and 31.5% included LGBTQ+ topics in the curriculum. The GLSEN (2016) data is significant because it reveals that non-LGBTQ+ teachers are not as invested as LGBTQ+ teachers in creating safe environments. The survey reveals, only 10.3% of non-LGBTQ+ teachers displayed a visual sign of support, 7.8% advocated for inclusive school and district policies, and only 14% of non-LGBTQ+ teachers included LGBTQ+ topics in the curriculum. For all of the categories, non-LGBTQ+ educators were below their counterparts’ percentages for attempting to create a safe and affirming classroom spaces, which supports Taylor’s et al. (2015) postulations that LGBTQ+ preservice teachers are the main proponents of addressing intolerance within their classrooms because they are more aware of the hatred that their students are facing.

From a personal perspective, I left higher education in 2017 and returned to the secondary classroom in a southern state as a special education teacher in a co-taught English classroom to conduct an ethnographic study. As a returning “new” teacher, I witnessed the hatred directed to LGBTQ+ individuals, which appeared to me as not having decreased significantly over my 15-year absence. Specifically, I heard homophobic slurs aimed at students, faculty, and staff (Jones, 2019). I witnessed students physically harming LGBTQ+ students in the restrooms and in the hallways. The intolerance for these students had not decreased since my first year of teaching as a new graduate from my undergraduate program.

Educator preparation programs and their faculty should conceptualize the current school climate as it relates to LGBTQ+ identities.

The current political discourse, incited by Christian nationalism, is engendering more hatred toward LGBTQ+ identities. The attacks against drag queens reading children’s books to elementary students, the attacks on young adult literature with LGBTQ+ themes being available in schools, and the attacks on language choices through the “don’t say gay” laws are impacting school climates in schools where these political discussions have overtaken intellectualism and the humanity of the classroom. Thus, I posit educator preparation programs should consider how Christian nationalism is affecting the schools we serve or how it could possibly influence the schools we serve in the future.

In this capacity, I discuss my own experiences attempting to prepare future teachers to address the challenges that Christian nationalism forces upon P-12 schools, all of which are predicated on the process of unnormalizing education. In doing so, I aim to offer teacher preparation programs opportunities for reflection and consideration.

Unnormalizing Education

In order to frame my pedagogical practices, it necessary to briefly discuss unnormalizing education, queering educator preparation programs, and queer pedagogy. In doing so, I aim to provide a foundational component to my instructional strategies as they relate to Christian nationalism and creating affirming educational spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Foucault reminds us, “to challenge power is not a matter of seeking some ‘absolute truth’ (which is in any case a socially produced power), but ‘of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony.’” (Foucault, 1986, p. 75). In order to “detach the power of truth” from Christian nationalism, educator preparation programs should consider preparing candidates to unnormalize education. By unnormalizing education, I mean a process of breaking free from the defining aspects of socialized normative definitions surrounding gender and sexuality. In essence, unnormalizing involves a demystifying and deconstructing the attributes of heteronormativity and how social normative ideologies perpetuate intolerance. Further, unnormalizing education is a process that seeks to dismantle the binary constructions surrounding sexual identity that exists in society; thus, destroying the binaries that confine our cognitive constructions of sexuality and sexual identity (Jones, 2014). Unnormalizing education begins with understanding the very foundation of social normative ideologies and how those ideologies control entire communities and by extension the schools within those communities.

Thus, in order to create affirming educational environments for LGBTQ+ identities, the process of schooling must dismantle the normalizing process of defining gender and sexuality within society, specifically within a Christian nationalist's imposed binary. In this capacity, we must begin preparing our future educators to recognize how hegemony forces the constructions of binary oppositions to control how normalized definitions are created, thereby, allowing educators to create educational spaces free from the rigid definitional parameters of gender and sexual identity.

Educator preparation program must begin to conceptualize the role they play in the socialized normative processes of P-12 students and by extension the communities of those schools. When a kindergarten student enters a classroom, the educational space confirms or denies all of the previous years of normalized identity. The small child views, through his/her/their teacher and peers, all of the things he/she/they have learned and determines the veracity of those teachings. It is in the first moments of the schooling process that institutional power regimes consume the child. As the child ages, the normative processes become stronger. The child learns to develop language to describe the concept of otherness and difference. This language development becomes the catalyst for descriptive understandings of the binary oppositions and how he/she/they fulfill those categorized binaries (Jones, 2014). It becomes the moment when the child learns his/her/their own identity within those binaries. Later, the child enters middle school and high school where the foundation of normalized behavior strengthens. He/she/they have constructed stable and almost permanent belief systems about otherness, ones premised within binary oppositions that the institutional power regimes created.

The process of schooling is the cornerstone to the continued architecture of social normalization. If schools did not continue the process, the architecture would weaken and the cyclical nature of normalization would dismantle. In doing so, the very ideology of social normative belief systems would weaken. As educator preparation programs, we must begin contemplating a schooling process that creates safe and affirming school environments for all students, which can be achieved by unnormalizing education.

After discussing a brief definition of unnormalizing education, I will discuss two important aspects that should be included when attempting to prepare candidates to unnormalize education: queering educator preparation programs, and queer pedagogy. Moreover, I embed my own pedagogical experiences within the discussions to provide specific examples for educator preparation programs.

Queering Educator Preparation Programs

From a personal experience, I was the only faculty member at each of my institutions who specifically addressed LGBTQ+ identities and the challenges LGBTQ+ identities faced within the schooling process. From my experience, when I left those institutions, the direct LGBTQ+ pedagogy ceased. It is important to note, there is a difference in occasionally discussing these challenges in a multiculturalism course or diversity course and discussing these challenges in a specific and purposeful section of a course, as we do with race, class, gender, and abilities.

Moreover, it is important that educator preparation programs increase focus on LGBTQ+ challenges because of the lack of support for LGBTQ+ students in the broader society. If a student of color experiences discrimination, he/she/they can return home and most likely have familial support, which is less likely to happen in situations of sexuality discrimination. Thus, the harassed student must carry the experience of the discrimination without an outlet of familial support. As such, preparation programs should train educators to address challenges that create hostile school environments for LGBTQ+ students. I argue queering educator preparation programs offers a new avenue to ensure candidates are prepared to address these challenges.

Drawing on Foucault's (1984) discussions of power regimes and sexuality, I posit queering educator programs can assist candidates in recognizing how social normative ideologies dictate acceptable displays of gender. In order to conceptualize my explanations of queering educator preparation programs, I believe it is necessary to briefly discuss queer theory and its relation to the queering process.

Queer theory explores how power enables institutions to legitimize certain forms and expressions of sexuality and gender while labeling others as anti-normal or deviant. The theory problematizes the rigid categories of identity that the process of social normalization justifies. In this manner, queer theory seeks to unravel the rigid categories attempting to reveal a fluidity within identity.

Moreover, hegemony forces the dominance of rigid sexuality and gender identities on others for the purposes of controlling them by forcing a “good versus bad” binary construction, which is solidified through social normalization. According to Derrida (2001), binary oppositions are two opposing concepts that society, specifically Platonic philosophy, have placed against each other. Because of the need to define concepts as they relate to other concepts, such oppositions will always ex-

ist. Thus, there will always be the contrasting notions good versus evil, God versus nothing, true versus false, and so forth, because we define something by juxtaposing it to what it is not. Therefore, queer theory proposes that sexuality and gender represent not an either/or principle, but rather a fluidity of different meanings; thus there is no innate or real gender or sexuality, but they are fluid and are repetitions, of the norms forced upon individuals by society. As such, queer theory seeks to examine hegemony and illuminate how discourse governs social understandings of sexuality and gender. In doing so, queer theory offers a lens through which one can conceptualize how the dominant culture controls the development of sexual identity.

Embedded within queer theory is the act of queering. I define queering as an action, a verb, a way to combat the regime of “truth” that forces society to embrace a binary oppositional structure that places the regime’s beliefs on the positive side of the binary, which proclaims the other as the “untruth.” In doing so, queering educator preparation programs enables graduates to view “any and all acts, images, and ideas that ‘trouble’, violate, cross, mix, or otherwise confound established boundaries between male and female, normal and abnormal, self and other” (Leitch et al., 2001, p. 2487). In this capacity, queering educator preparation programs provides an avenue to deconstruct, to challenge, to examine how institutions control sexuality discourse in American society.

In order to queer educator preparation programs, we must construct curriculum that destroys the presumed superiority that exists in binary oppositions, and thereby establishing an equality in language. In doing so, it provides a way to define what it means to have a fluid definition of gender and sexuality.

I teach in the foundations of education program at my college. In all of my courses, I focus on marginalized identities. As such, my students become entrenched with the attributes of unnormalizing education and how this process can dismantle the socially constructed belief systems surrounding difference and “otherness.” Throughout my courses, students engage in reflective practices that involve unnormalizing their own classroom space and instructional practices. For example, I require students to design lesson plans that dismantle intolerant belief systems within their communities through curriculum choices and reflective assignments.

Moreover, I have purposefully chosen curriculum that queers my educational courses. In my foundation of education courses, students are required to trace disenfranchised identities throughout the history of education. For example, my students research and reflect on how

non-heterosexual identities were treated throughout the history of the schooling process in American culture. Through this assignment, students are able to trace the marginalization of identities and the impact of oppression on the educational, social, and cultural development of LGBTQ+ identities, as well as other disenfranchised identities.

Additionally, I teach a curriculum course that allows secondary students to grapple with theory and its influence on curriculum and instruction. During the first two weeks of the course, we read and discuss excerpts from Foucault’s *History of Sexuality and Discipline and Punish*. During the discussion, students apply Foucault and his beliefs of power to the schooling process. After one recent discussion, a student remarked, “I wonder how more accepting I would be right now if I had read children’s books like *Heather Has Two Mommies*.”

Throughout my career, I have purposefully constructed an instructional framework that focuses on unnormalizing education, one that involved queering my educational courses and one that embraces queer pedagogy.

Queer Pedagogy

I postulate educator preparation courses should prepare candidates to understand the significance of LGBTQ+ issues and how to reduce bigotry, self-hatred, and violence by increasing affirmation for LGBTQ+ identities in their classrooms and schools, which queer pedagogy is a viable conduit to complete this task. Before discussing queer pedagogy, it is important to differentiate between queering educator preparation programs and queer pedagogy. Queer pedagogy allows a teacher to acknowledge the impact of heterosexism on the field of pedagogy. In simple terms and for this discussion, queer pedagogy is primarily focused on the classroom, and queering educator preparation is a broader framework that discusses LGBTQ+ identity from a theoretical model that is connected to cultural and societal perspectives.

Queer pedagogy emerged in the late 20th century and attempts to conceptualize the lived experiences of queer people. In doing so, queer pedagogy seeks to dismantle heteronormativity and create a safe educational experience for LGBTQ+ identities. Specifically, queer pedagogy examines the queer experience and what it means to “be” queer in the schooling process.

In terms of this discussion, I suggest queer pedagogy infiltrate educator preparation programs because it prepares all educators (regardless of sexual identity) to examine and to attempt to experience “being queer” in schools. In this capacity, educator preparation programs will

prepare all candidates to conceptualize how heteronormativity has dehumanized LGBTQ+ identities within curricula and pedagogy.

For example, queer pedagogy can prepare candidates to conceptualize the schooling process from a heteronormative stance, and how such a process influences the students' lived experiences. A heteronormative stance views heterosexuality as the dominant form of sexuality within a culture. It posits that heterosexuality is the only "normal" form of sexuality, thus, it creates oppositions with other identities, and identifies non-heterosexual identities as deviant. Heteronormativity is perpetuated in classrooms where students only examine texts through a heterosexual lens rather than one that incorporates all types of sexual diversity.

Queer pedagogy also involves providing candidates with the necessary tools to examine and discuss LGBTQ+ topics within their disciplines. I believe it is advantageous to discuss specific examples of queer pedagogy. *And Tango Makes Three* is a children's book that depicts a beautiful story of two male penguins, Roy and Silo, who want a family. The zookeeper gives Roy and Silo an egg, which they help to hatch. The female chick is named Tango. If a teacher embraces the attributes of queer pedagogy, *And Tango Makes Three* (or a similar text) will become part of the teacher's curriculum. I should note the book is age appropriate for elementary classrooms to learn about diverse families. Queer pedagogy at the high school level may involve discussing the sexuality of a scientist who developed scientific process or theory. It could involve an English teacher discussing Shakespeare's sexuality before reading one of his plays or his sonnets. Queer pedagogy also encapsulates the aesthetics of the classroom. Another example of queer pedagogy is whether a LGBTQ+ teacher chooses to come out to his/her/their students. This is a very personal decision, but it is a decision that is connected to the experiences of queer identities in the classroom; in doing so, it becomes a pedagogical decision.

I should note, queer pedagogy unravels differently in every classroom, every discipline, every occurrence. As such, one class practice may transpire beautifully in first period, but it may fail tremendously in seventh period; however, the foundation of queer pedagogy requires a dedication to creating safe affirming educational spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals through instructional decisions that dismantle heteronormativity within in the classroom. Educator preparation programs can utilize queer pedagogy as a pedagogical practice that provides candidates a lens through which candidates are able to examine the hidden curriculum, the rules and regulations that govern classrooms and schools, the adoption of curriculum, and the other forces that create

intolerant and non-affirming educational spaces for LGBTQ+ identities.

In my courses, I prepare my students to discuss queer topics appropriately with their future students. For example, I prepare my pre-service English teachers to discuss the sexual identity of the authors the class is reading. Specifically, I model an introductory lesson discussing Shakespeare, which mentions his sexuality and how his sexuality may have influenced his writing. We have similar discussions (which the students lead) concerning James Baldwin, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes, among many others. I posit it is important to prepare future teachers to engage in these discussions because the discussions can be powerful moments for all high school students, especially LGBTQ+ high school students.

Further, in my foundation courses, I require students to engage in a reflective discussion examining three pedagogical strategies for creating a safe and affirming space for LGBTQ+ students, an assignment that is premised within the pre-service students' future P-12 classroom. As such, the three strategies must be grade appropriate. I should also note, students complete the same assignment for all marginalized identities.

Conclusion

As an academic who prepares future educators, my pedagogy and my research has always focused on creating an inclusive and affirming educational space for LGBTQ+ identities. I have intentionally discussed the power of unnormalizing education, engaged in queering my educator preparation program, and embraced queer pedagogy. As the data (GLSEN, 2021, 2016) reveal, LGBTQ+ identities face numerous challenges in schools, and I am afraid that Christian nationalism will become a catalyst that precipitates more oppression and hatred toward LGBTQ+ identities in schools.

Christian nationalism has become a religious and political power regime that is attempting to join governmental decisions with the principles of Christianity, by proclaiming that America is a Christian nation. In doing so, Christian nationalism has utilized fundamentalist viewpoints to perpetuate “truths” throughout American society; “truths” that dehumanize specific individuals and threaten their existence because of an interpretation of scripture.

Because of their attacks on LGBTQ+ identities, it is imperative that educator preparation programs examine how their programs

can disrupt Christian nationalism's influence on the schooling process. As the data suggest (GLSEN, 2021), schools are not safe and affirming spaces for all LGBTQ+ individuals, and I posit Christian nationalism will increase the hatred and intolerance toward LGBTQ+ identities within P-12 schools. Educator preparation programs should intervene.

In this manner, I contend unnormalizing education is a viable process that educator preparation programs should consider embracing. Unnormalizing education involves preparing P-12 teachers and school leaders to dismantle the socially normalized ideologies that continue to harm LGBTQ+ identities, ones that Christian nationalists perpetuate.

In an interview, Foucault (1996) stated

we are in this struggle, and the continuation of this situation can influence the behavior or non-behavior of the other. So, we are not trapped. We are always in this kind of situation. It means that we always have possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But, you can always change it...there is always the possibility of changing. (p. 386)

Foucault's words remind us that we have the possibility to reclaim a decency and a humanity within our educational environments. We have the power to elevate intellectualism over oppression. Educator preparation programs have the ability to prepare candidates who can provide resistance against this power regime because resistance that is "real and effective is formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised" (Foucault, 1980, p. 141), the local schools where our candidates improve the lives of all children. We must prepare our educators to be able to provide the resistance for change.

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